

Abraham's Call From Ur to Canaan

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In Hebrews, we learn that, "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" (11:8). All Christians have a vital interest in learning the rest of the story regarding the call of our father Abraham (Galatians 3:7). First, in keeping with the first and second commandments, God called Abraham out of an idolatrous society. We learn from Joshua that "even Terah, the father of Abraham . . . served other gods" (Joshua 24:2). God now calls His people from sexual idolatry, with its train of baby murder, family-ruining worship of the "Almighty Dollar" (Luke 16:13) et al.

Second, Abraham was under the authority of his father, Terah, and not immediately at liberty to begin his pilgrimage out of Ur. God's call did not abrogate his filial duty to "honor his father." Thus, Abraham remained in Ur in the house of his father, Terah, until his elder brother Haran died. Abraham doubtless encouraged his bereaved father to leave Ur. Then, "Terah took Abram, his son (whom God later named Abraham), and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, . . . and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan" (Genesis 11:31) and stopped short at Haran. Later, after the death of Terah in Haran, Abraham heeded God's renewed call and moved his whole house including Lot's family into Canaan (Acts 7:4; Genesis 12:1-5).

Abraham's "deliberate-speed" response to God's call was not the procrastination of the disciple of Christ who wanted first to bury his father. Jesus rebuked such delay directing him to "Let the dead bury their dead" (Luke 9:60). In fact, when Abraham later was asked to sacrifice Isaac, it is recorded that "Abraham rose up early in the morning, . . . and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering" (Genesis 22:3). Similarly, after receiving his commission at the burning bush, Moses first secured a release from his father-in-law before returning to Egypt in obedience to God's call (Exodus 4:18). David returned to tending sheep for his father, Jesse, after being anointed the next king of Israel. And, our Lord Jesus returned to Nazareth and remained in subjection to his parents even after he had expressed commitment to "be about my father's business" (Luke 2:49,51).

Finally, it is important to remember that Abraham was a patriarch. His pilgrimage into Canaan also involved thousands of loyal hardworking servants who cared for his livestock and other household business. In Canaan, Abraham was the "mighty prince" (Genesis 23:6) who mobilized three hundred eighteen warriors, "born in his own house" (Genesis 14:14), to rescue Lot and his house when they were captured. The work ethic of the Covenant Community, under our father Abraham, was such that God's people continued to prosper as recorded in Genesis (24:34-35; 26:12-13; 30:43; 47:27).

Our American forebears used a similar combination of business enterprise and spiritual pilgrimage to establish colonies in the New World. And, the patriarch's work ethic combined with their sense of destiny to foster a prosperous nation. Like our father Abraham, they lived in the midst of threatening (Indian) nations and by faith "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).