

The Hall of Faith: Abraham

Hebrews 11:8-12

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, February 12, 2022

Before we begin our sermon on this morning, I just want to mention that in the life of a church just like it is with anything, there are highs and low points and their days of sunshine days of rain. And we've been in a high point lately as a life of a church, because we've had so many new visitors coming through our doors. We counted it up last year, and we had 321 visitors in 2022, which is pretty incredible. And one reason I've actually started to stand outside and shake everybody's hand is because I don't know who everybody is. And it's just one way to get to know you. And I want to mention that because I don't know where everybody's from; I don't know your background. I do know that some of you grew up in church; some of you probably did not. And it reminds me of a parable that Jesus told where a master hired servants to work in his field, and he hired them in the early in the morning, and he hired them in the afternoon and hired them in the evening. And at the end of the day, when it came time to pay them, he paid them all the same. And the ones who worked in the morning said, "What's going on? We worked all day and you gave us the same amount of money." And the master said, "It's my money. I can give it however much I want to, whoever I want to." And guys, I want to tell you, it's the same way with God's grace. If you come to Christ, early in the morning, if you come to Him in the afternoon, if you come to Him late in life, it doesn't matter. You just need to come to Him. And if you do that, you get grace. And you get mercy. And I just want to say that because we have so many new people and it's an encouragement to us; we just want you to know Jesus. And that's our intention here as a church.

Having said that, this morning, we are continuing a study on the book of Hebrews that we started a year ago. It's called the No Greater Saviour series because that's what the book of Hebrews is about. It tells you that there is no greater Saviour than the Lord Jesus Christ because He did something that no one else could do, and that is to make you right with God. That's something the Old Testament makes it clear that the law couldn't do and neither could the sacrifices. The commandments couldn't make you right with God; neither could the offerings. The priests couldn't do it; neither could the Levites, not completely anyway. Neither could the temple, or the tabernacle, or the altar, labor, lampstand, showbread, incense, Ark, all that stuff in the Old Covenant fell short of it ultimately, because the only one that can forgive your sins perfectly is Christ. And that's something we've been talking about for a year now in this letter. We started in chapter one; we've worked our way through chapter 10. And this morning, we are in chapter 11 of Hebrews, which is known as the Great Hall of Faith. Because this is where the writer applies all of those things to your life. And He does it by saying if you want all the things that Christ gives you, you have to have faith. You have to believe like the people in the Old Testament did, like Moses and David did, and Samuel and Rahab, and Gideon. They didn't put their faith in Christ because He hadn't come yet, but they did put it in God. And as such, they were a good example for you to follow.

And with that said, this morning, we come to the fourth man in the chapter, and that is Abraham, the father of the Jews. We just sung a song about him. But so far we've talked about Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, the man who came before the Jews, they were the ones who lived before the time of Israel as a nation. But this week, we're coming to Abraham who is considered to be the great Patriarch of Israel, the one who started the race. Most of you come from different races. Or if you're like me, you don't even know what race you came from. We call it Heinz 57. Just a little bit of everything. But the Jews came from one race, and they could trace their lineage back to one parent. And in order to introduce him to you, I want you to turn your Bibles to the book of Genesis because it tells us about this man, Abraham there in the book of Genesis. We will get to Hebrews 11 in a moment, but if you look in Genesis chapter 11, toward the end of the chapter, this is the first time this man's name has ever mentioned. And in Genesis 11:27, here's what we read. It says,

Now these are the records of the genealogy of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Sarai was barren; she had no child.

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. The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

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; 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; 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."

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.

And we'll stop the reading there. As you read that, I just want to remind you, this is the introduction to Abraham in the Bible. This is how it begins the story of this great man, and it's pretty short, and it doesn't say a whole lot about him. Genesis 11 tells you where he was born, that's around the Chaldeans. And it tells you who his father was, his father was a man named Terah. It tells you about his wife, his wife was Saria or Sarah, she's later called. And it tells you where his father died and the age he was when he died. And that's it. Other than that, you don't learn much about him. Because apparently Abraham is not the most important thing in the story; his faith was. Because the Lord told him to go, and he went. God told him to leave his father's house and he obeyed. That's the moral of the story.

And just to say a little bit about this, if you remember the timeline for this, in Genesis six, the Lord punishes the earth in a flood, and destroys it in water. And then in Genesis seven through 11, He builds it back up again until you come to the Tower of Babel when the world comes together and tries to consolidate power, which the Lord doesn't like so He confuses their languages and disperses them, which is where Abraham comes into the picture. That's where he shows up at the end of chapter 11, because he descended from one of the men who were at that tower. And verse 28 says he came from the land of Ur, which is an ancient city located 600 miles to the east of Israel, in modern day Iraq. It's in a part of the world that's now known as the Persian Gulf. We don't know much about the city of Ur today, but we do know it was a cultural city in its time, a cultural centre. Because you find a lot of ruins there that show you that it had a very sophisticated form of government that was built around the worship of things like the sun and the moon and the stars. I don't know about you, but when I was a kid, we studied ziggurats. They were very fascinating, those kinds of pyramid shaped things with a staircase in the middle. That's where they come from, the land of Ur, which is important because it shows you the kind of man Abraham was. He was a city kid. He didn't come from the middle of nowhere, but he grew up in a very urban environment. A lot of times you read the story of Abraham in Genesis, and you get the wrong impression, because he looks like a country bumpkin in some ways, who spend most of his time outdoors in tents. But the passage shows you that he didn't grow up that way. He grew up in a very state of the art kind of place.

He was also married because verse 29 says his wife's name was Saria or Sarah. Genesis 20:12, says she was Abraham's half-sister. They both had the same father but different mothers, which would be considered a sin today, because that's incest, but not at the time. Because ever since the days of Adam and Eve, brothers and sisters and family members had to marry each other in order to repopulate the earth or populate it. And this was kind of a carryover of that here. Many years later, the Bible would condemn practices like that in the book of Leviticus and say that they're wrong and they're evil in God's eyes, but that's not the case here. At this time, there was freedom to do that. In verse 30 of chapter 11, if you look in their Bibles, it also says that Abraham was childless because Sarah was barren; she didn't have a son. Even though he was married and apparently had been so for some time, his wife did not give him an heir, which was a big deal, because it means that he had no one to carry on his name. When he died, all his wealth and treasures and possessions would just go on to a stranger, and he would be forgotten. I had someone from our care group the other day ask me the question, well, why was this such a big deal? Because in Genesis five it says some men like Adam and Seth didn't have children until they were well over 100 years old. So why would that bother Abraham so much? And to be honest, I don't know. Abraham lived to be 175. But I do know that it did bother him. It deeply troubled him along with Sarah.

You read the Genesis account and it came up over and over and over again, which is what makes the next part of the story so powerful, because in chapter 12, it says, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and I will make you a great nation.'" In other words, go forth, and I'll give you

a son. Leave the place where you're living, and I will give you so many children that they will become a great country of their own. That's why things were often done back then. Certain empires like Babylon and Rome often started when one family grew powerful enough to take over the world. And the Lord says, "This is what I will do with your offspring, I will make them big enough to set up their own government." Then it says, "I will make your name great as well." Because that's what Abraham is worried about. He's afraid everybody's going to forget him because he'll have no child or heir. And the Lord says that's not going to be the case either. Before this, nobody knew who Abraham was. He looked like everyone else, talked like everyone else, did what they did. After this, we're all going to know who Abraham was. Now people from every corner of the planet will tell his story. And one more part of this promise, He says, "I will bless you, and in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed." Which is a reference to the Messiah, because through Abraham's bloodline, the Saviour of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ would come because Jesus didn't come from anywhere; He came from the Jews. And salvation didn't come from any race; it came from the Israelites. And that's what this is referring to here.

I would just stop there for a moment. That's quite a promise. And that's quite a covenant to make with somebody. The Lord offered him everything he ever wanted, all these wonderful things, but it all started with the word "go." It all began when the Lord reached out to him and said, "Follow me." And that's what Abraham did, which brings you to the book of Hebrews. So if you want to turn there with me in your Bibles, this is where the author of the Hebrews picks up the story and refers to this in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:8. If you turn there, it says,

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.

Now, that's one of the statements you read in a passage like this, and you don't think anything about it. But you should because it means Abraham left his home, when he didn't know where God was taking him. He went out and obeyed the Lord and followed even when he didn't know where it would bring him in the end. Why? Because he had faith. He did it because he trusted in God, that's it. The Lord told him to go, so he went. I don't know about you, but when I go somewhere, I want to know where I'm going. And when I leave the house and travel to a city or something like that, I pull out my phone and put in the GPS; there's no GPS for this guy. God was his GPS. Verse nine says he did it as an alien in a foreign land, which means even when he got into the land, his faith didn't stop because throughout all his travels, he stuck out like a sore thumb; never belonged. Some say he traveled in the Promised Land for 100 years. But the idea is that he got through it because verse 10, says, he was looking for the city, which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. But the idea is that it all goes back to the issue of obedience. This is how Abraham's journey started. It started when he followed the voice of God.

That's something you can relate to this morning, isn't it? This is where your journey begins as well. It begins when you choose to follow God even though you don't know where He's taking you. I mean, if you think about it, the Lord doesn't always answer your questions before you believe. He just tells you

to believe. And He doesn't show you what the future holds before you trust in Him. He just tells you to trust in Him. That's all. Which is hard, right? I mean, depending on your personality. Some people don't want to do that; they don't want to follow God until they know how it's going to turn out first. Where's He going to take me? Is the journey going to be easy or hard, bumpy or smooth? Will the Lord send me to live here or there or call me to be a missionary in Africa? Because I don't want to do that. That's too much. I'd rather stay where it's safe in Canada. The reality is we don't know. God doesn't tell you those things. He just tells you to go, so you go. Just like Abraham. It's the way salvation works. It doesn't happen when you tell God, "I want to know everything first." It happens when you say, "Lord, I will trust you, no matter what may come because You're worthy." You don't ask Him for the coordinates in the GPS. He's just your GPS.

Some of you have read the poem "Footprints" before. But if you haven't, in that poem, a man has a dream in which the Lord shows him the scenes of his life. And they show up as footprints on the sand because all throughout his life there's two sets of footprints there, his and God's on the journey, except for a few times when there's just one set of prints. And the man asked God, "Lord, why did you leave me there?" And the Lord said, "My child, I didn't leave you; that's when I carried you." But the lesson of the poem is that you don't get to experience God's provision like that, unless you trust them. You have to believe, no matter where the sands of life will take you, and that's what Abraham did, which is what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at four steps of Abraham's faith.

So if you're taking notes, this is our outline for today. In Hebrews 11, starting in verse eight, we're gonna look at four steps of Abraham's faith, and we're gonna get all these from the text.

The first one is that he went out, not knowing where he was going. So the first step to Abraham's faith is that he went out not knowing where he was going, which means he obeyed, even though he was clueless as to where the Lord was taking him. He would find out later on, but he didn't know initially. And if you read in verse eight, this is what it says, when it tells us that "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."

Now, as you can tell, when you come to verse eight, this is a few verses into the chapter. So it might be good to back up a little bit and go over what the author has been saying. Because earlier in verse one, it says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen." And the reason the author puts that there is because this is the theme of the chapter. And that is that faith is a conviction in things that are invisible, because that's what God is right? You can't see God, can't reach out and touch Him with your hands, but you know He's there because you have faith, is the idea. And then verse two says, "For by it, the men of old gained approval." And that means this is how the men from the Old Covenant were saved. They did it by faith, just like you. This book is written to the Jews or the Hebrew people from the Old Covenant. And so he says, "This is what your ancestors were saved by." Then in verse three, it says, "By faith we understand the worlds were prepared by the word of God"

because that's where faith begins. It starts when the world began at creation, that kind of thing. And then after saying all this, the author starts listing various people in here to show you how they trusted in God.

After mentioning Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, we come to this person, Abraham, whose name means father of a multitude. The name, Abram, actually means father, it was just a way of saying, dad, but Genesis 17:5 says later on, the Lord changed his name to Abraham, which means father of a host. Now, remember, he didn't have a child until he was 100 years old, and he went through all those years calling himself father. Kind of ironic, isn't it? You would think at some point in his life, he'd want to change his name. But he didn't, because he believed this promise. Right now, there's 15 million Jews living in the world today; they all trace their genealogy back to this guy, so he was a father.

And when you do a survey of his life, you find his quite a colourful character in the Bible, because his name is mentioned 300 times in order to tell you several things. For example, the Bible tells you that Abraham was the 10th generation of descendants to come after Noah. If you go back one step further than that, you find that Noah was the 10th generation of descendants to come from Adam, which means Abram could trace his lineage all the way back to Adam, the first man in creation. That's essential, because the book of Genesis tells you the story of creation, or the beginning of everything, and particularly the beginning of the Jews. And the author tells you this is how the Jews began. They started with Adam, went to Noah, and then came to Abraham. He's part of a long line of men God used to bring that to pass. Also, as I showed you, Genesis 11:28, says that he came from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, which was a pagan place at the time. It was a Gentile city, which means this is what Abraham was when God called him, he was a Gentile. He wasn't Jewish. There were no Jews. He's the first one. Because he wasn't saved by his race, as some of the Israelites might claim later on. He came from a group of people nobody really cared about. Abraham was just another Chaldean like his father and grandfather and great grandfather before him. And I might add that he lived that way for some time because Genesis 12 tells you he was 75 years old when the Lord called him, so at that stage of life he was saturated in Chaldean culture. So if you would have approached Abraham at this time, he would have thought like a Chaldean looked like a Chaldean and acted like one. He would have worn Chaldean clothes, followed Chaldean customs and probably worshipped their gods. There's a little debate about that, but he probably was a pagan idol worshiper.

So what the author says next in Hebrews 11 is powerful, because he starts off in verse eight by saying, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out." Now, if you notice, that's a quick turnaround from what all I just told you about. It's a pretty quick change to go from a Chaldean way of life to this because God spoke and he obeyed. God called and Abraham answered as a Gentile and as a Chaldean which sounds like it's Abraham's conversion, right? I know some scholars kind of disagree with that, because they believe Abraham might have been saved before this encounter. But I really couldn't find that in Scripture. As far as I can tell, this is the first time he ever showed any interest in the Lord because this is when he was born again. Because the verse says that he was called, which is another way of saying he was summoned. The Lord reached down into his cold, dead heart and gave

him a new one and brought him out from darkness into light. It's how salvation works. Some have wondered, "Well, why did God do this for Abraham?" Well, the answer is why does God do that for anybody? Why did He do it for you? Why did He call me? The answer is because He's God, and that's what He wanted to do. Why does He call people from Canada, the United States or South Africa or Haiti, or Mexico, or the Philippines, or the Chaldeans? It's His sovereign will, which had an impact on him because verse eight says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed."

Now let's stop there for a moment and think about what that means. What does it mean to obey? It means to do what you're told. What does it mean to obey God? It means to do what you're told right away without questions, because He's God and you're man. That's what this Abraham did. In fact, anytime the Lord tells Abraham to do something in the Bible, just about any time, he acts like this, the Lord tells him to leave his father's house, he obeys. The Lord tells him to circumcise his household, he obeys. The Lord tells him to offer up Isaac on the altar, he obeys, or he starts to do that until the Lord stops him. Because that was his heart.

Then verse eight says, "when he was called, he obeyed by going out." And the word going, it's in a tense in Greek, which shows that this was a one-time thing for Abraham. Because once he left his father's house, he shut the door and never looked back. Some have wondered, "Okay, well, why did the Lord ask him to leave his father's house?" Well, the name Terah sounds like the Chaldean word for moon, and some believe it could be that he was a worshipper of the moon god in Ur. If that was the case, this was God's way of telling Abraham, you got to get out of that way of life. You have to make a complete break from your former past.

And the passage says this, "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." and that's the kicker of the passage here. That's where it all comes to a head. And that is that God told Abraham to do this without showing him where He was leading him. He didn't know. Which puts it in perspective, because it's one thing to obey; it's another thing to obey like this. And it's one thing to go and follow; but it's another thing to go and follow when you're oblivious to the final destination. But Abraham did that anyway, because he had faith. Later on, the Lord would tell him where he was going to go because when he arrived in the land of Canaan, Genesis 12:7 says that the Lord told him, "To your descendants, I will give this land." In other words, this is where I want you to stay and set up your life. But the point is that He didn't tell him that initially, which is where his trust came into play.

Just to show you what his journeys would have looked like, Genesis 11, says after growing up in the land of Ur, Abraham moved to Haran which was about 300 miles north of Israel. It was kind of halfway between Ur and Palestine. Which doesn't sound like a big deal, but it was back then, because this was the age before modern travel. So in order to go somewhere, you had to do it by foot or by caravan. And particularly by caravan. It wasn't safe to travel on the roads. So the way it works is you would put yourself along with a large group of people on camels, which would start off disorderly because they

were thrown together, but they would become more united as a group as they went. And you would travel at night during the summer season because you're going through the desert. And you would travel at day during the winter months at the rate of 20 miles per day, if you can believe that. The pace was very, very arduous. And I might add the majority of the time if you're in Israel, you're going uphill or downhill, kind of like British Columbia; it's a very mountainous region. So it would have been very difficult place to wander, and the terrain was so bad. And that's where God told Abraham to go. Which reminds me of the saying that if you're going to follow God, you have to kill the word "how." Most of the time, God doesn't tell you how. He didn't tell you how He's gonna make a family out of you. He doesn't tell you how He's going to give you this land. He doesn't tell you how He's gonna make a great nation out of you and how He's gonna bless all the peoples of the earth and how this and how that. He just tells you that He will. And that's it. Sometimes He just says go and you go.

In fact, I told you before in this series, I've often wondered what it would be like to be some of these men's friend at this time and talk to them about what was going on in their mind. Because you would want to know, "Well, who are you talking to just now Abraham?"

And he'd say, "God."

"God? What did He say?"

"He said, Go?"

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"Why?"

"I don't know, to make a great nation out of me."

"For how long?"

"I don't know."

"What direction?"

"Don't know."

"Who's gonna join you?"

"Don't know."

"Will the journey be hard?"

"I don't know."

"What Abraham, what do you know?"

"I know God. I know the one who's calling me, and I know He's faithful. And I know He's good, and that's all that I need to know."

I've had some conversations with people from our church in the recent months, who have said a similar thing because they're laid up in the hospital. And I've asked them, "Well, how is this going to turn out for you?"

And they say, "I don't know."

"Well, how long do you have to be here?"

"I don't know."

“What did the doctors say about your prognosis?”

“I don't know. I'm waiting on that.”

“Well, what do you know?”

“I know the Lord. I own His character. I know He's working all things for my good, He'll never leave me nor forsake me. He who started a good work in me will finish it.”

And friends, that's the attitude of someone who has faith. Because when you're going through a time like that, God doesn't want you to think about your trials all the time, and your circumstances and the difficulties, He just wants you to think about Him. He'll take care of all this stuff. That's what it means to trust Him.

Which brings you to another step to Abraham's faith. And that is that Abraham lived as an alien in the land of promise. So a second step to Abraham's faith here is that he lived as an alien in the land of promise, which means that he lived as an outsider the whole time he was there. He never kind of fit in. If you notice verse nine, it starts off the same way verse eight did, and that is with the phrase “by faith” in order to say that Abraham's faith didn't stop when he set foot in the land; it continued on because it says,

By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise.

And a key word in this passage is the word “alien.” It's a Greek term that refers to someone who's a visitor or stranger somewhere. Because even though he lives in the same area as other people do, they stick out. Some Bible translations render this as sojourner, because that's what Abraham was when he was in Israel. He didn't look like everyone else who dwelt amongst the land. He was a sojourner there. I often look at this, and I think of the word immigrant. I mean, many of you know what it's like to immigrate to Canada, you did the same thing as I did and when you immigrate somewhere, it takes a while to kind of figure things out, doesn't it? You don't know why they talk this way, or dress this way, or where the fried chicken is. Maybe that's a southern thing; you know it's there, but you don't know where. That's what Abraham went through.

Verse nine says he dwelt in tents while he was there, which is not normal, pretty hard. Didn't live in a house. He just set up life in a pavilion of sorts, so that everywhere he went, he would put up his camp, spend the night, and then leave the next day. And then put up camp, spend the night and leave the next day, and just do it over and over and over again. It also says he experienced this along with, if you look in your bibles there, Isaac and Jacob. It says, “he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise.” And that shows you how long Abraham lived this way, for several generations, or his family did it for several generations, because Isaac and Jacob are the names of his son and grandson, in order to show you that they lived in tents too. In fact, if you study Israel's history, you find that Abraham's family journeyed to the promised land like this for several hundred years. Abraham lived to be 175 years old until he died. Isaac lived to be 180 years old. Jacob lived for 130 years before he went to Egypt, at which point Exodus says that his

descendants remained there for 430 years, while they became slaves, after which time they left to wander again for 40 years in the wilderness before finally settling in the land. And when you put all that time together, it took centuries after the promise was made, it's a long time, isn't it? In fact, the name Hebrew means wanderer because that's what the Jews were known for. It was a nickname given to them as a group of people who just kept roaming the earth. But it all started with this one man, Abraham. He was the first wanderer.

Some of you have been to this part of the world, but if you have, you'll know it's very common to see the Bedouin nomads living out in the desert. And they do this all the time. They show up one day in their tents and canopies and all this kind of stuff, and then the next day, they're gone. And then you turn around the day after that, they come back, and they let their sheep and goats graze on the pasture. And then the next moment, they vanish, like a puff of smoke again. You can't keep up with those people; they're constantly on the move. Their life is one of perpetual motion. And that's a good example of what Abraham did. He was like a rolling stone, in some ways.

And just to say some more about this, I mean, the land of Israel is currently about 8,000 square miles, making it roughly the size of the state of New Jersey in the United States. It's not that big. By comparison, the nation of Canada is about 4 million square miles. So Canada's quite a bit larger than that. But the one thing that makes Israel so special is its location, because it's a land bridge between three continents, Europe, Africa and Asia. So that everyone who wanted to cross from one place to another in that part of the world often had to go there, or very close to there, which made it very crowded. It was prime real estate. In fact, in Abraham's day, the Bible tells us that it was inhabited by the Kenites, Kenizzite, and Kadmonite peoples. It was occupied by the Hittite, Perizzite, Amorite, Canaanite, Girgashite, Jebusite and Rephaim, which is a pretty diverse group. It's quite a number of races living within a small strip of land, and most of them are evil by the way. They were depraved. That's where the part of the world where Sodom and Gomorrah was from. And that's the part of the world when Israel invaded the land, the Lord told them to destroy all of them. They were violent as well. These people committed all kinds of atrocities. If you remember the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, you'll recall three men come into the town, and what did everybody want to do to them? They wanted to violate them. That was normal behavior here. And the idea is that this is where Abraham traveled for most of his life: in a violent, wicked, crowded place. And yet he persevered because he put his faith in God.

I don't have to tell you why this is so helpful for us. Because how many of you feel like you're traveling in a violent, wicked, crowded place right now? I mean, how many of you think the Lord is taking you through a godless culture? Because you go to work and it's godless; and you talk to your neighbours, and they're godless; and you turn on the TV and it's godless; and you go on social media, and it's even worse; because there's sin everywhere, to the point that you feel like an alien and you feel like an immigrant and you don't you don't belong. Can I tell you why that is? It's because you don't belong. You are an alien. You have one set of priorities as a Christian, and the world has something else. I know

a lot of people don't believe that. They think the culture is better than that, but it's not. If you don't believe me, go home today and turn on the television and watch it and tell me if there's any sin there that they didn't do in Sodom and Gomorrah. And that's what makes your faith so important. It's your faith in God that gives you the tools to not lose heart in the midst of this crooked world. I've told you before faith is like a telescope because it takes things that are far away, and it makes them feel close. Because heaven is far away from you now, isn't it? And glory is far away, and your final redemption is far away. And the return of Christ is far away, and the resurrection and the glorification and transformation of your body, and the final judgment, where God will put a stop to all this mess. But the only thing that makes you remember that, is your hope in Him. You lose that, you lose everything.

The story is told at the time a little girl was walking through a cemetery at night. And someone asked her, "Are you afraid?" And she said, "No, I'm not because my home is on the other side." See that's the mindset of a biblical wanderer. I don't give up in this world because my home is on the other side. I'm not there yet. I don't have to be comfortable here. I don't belong here. Which brings us to another step of this man's faith. And that is that he looked for the city which has foundations.

A third step of Abraham's faith here is that he looked for the city which has foundations, which is another way of saying he was looking for heaven. And that's what motivated him as he went through life. He didn't have much to look forward to in this world because he was on the go so much. So he put his hope in the next world. If you look in verse nine, this is what it tells you when it says, "For he was looking for the city, which has foundations."

And when the author uses the word "for" here, that's what's known as a preposition of purpose, because it tells you the purpose or reason why Abraham kept going all the time he lived in that land. And that is because he was looking for a better place. A hundred years is a long time to wander somewhere, isn't it? That sounds awful. But he did it, because he wasn't thinking about these things, ultimately, and all the sand and dirt and rocks and heat. He was thinking about God.

This phrase, "city with foundations," it's one of those expressions in the book of Hebrews that has a dual meaning. On the one hand, it paints a picture of a city that's established and secure, unlike the tents that Abraham lived in. Because the tents that he was in, they were here today, gone tomorrow; put them up, tear them down, that type of thing. But a city wasn't like that; it was it was built on a hill, on a rock and it wasn't going to move. But on the other hand, this is talking about more than that, because the author calls this *the* city. Not a city, but the city. a specific one. And it has foundations, plural, many foundations showing that it's built to last. Whose architect and builder is God, and that means God is the founder of the town; He's the creator of it. And there's no place in Israel that was given that description, per se, so this is a reference to heaven. It's talking about the place you go to when you die if you're in the Lord.

Now, it's an interesting thing to say here in Hebrews because, as far as we know, in the book of Genesis, Abraham didn't say too much about this subject, I couldn't find where he did. So this is one of those places where the author of Hebrews under the inspiration of the Spirit takes you into the mind of the great patriarch, in order to say this was on his heart. Because Abraham knew God was there. He might not have known much about heaven at this point in biblical history, but he was aware of the fact that heaven is where Yahweh lived, so that's where he wanted to be. When it says in verse 10, he was looking for the city, that shows you how desperate he was for it, because it means he kept looking and looking and looking the whole time he was there and searching and searching and searching. And the way it's worded also shows you that he was passionate about this. Even though he lived in the land for a century, he never lost his zeal for it, it was always on his mind. In fact, when you study the life of Abraham, you discover that he was really unique in this in this department, because he really lived for one thing, and one thing only, and that was heaven. He didn't have too many worldly pursuits. And what I mean is he never bought anything the whole time he was in Israel, except for one little object. And that was in Genesis 23:17. It says he purchased the cave of Ephron to bury Sarai in. That was one hundred years in the land, buys one thing, one piece of property, which was a strange thing to do, because he did have money. Abraham had a lot of wealth, so he could have purchased whatever he wanted, but he didn't because he didn't care about those things; they didn't matter to him.

He also stayed married to the same woman for most of his life. That was very unusual at this time. At this time in history, if you had a wife and she could not give you a child, you would simply set her aside and go find another one, and another one, and another one. It was a polygamous culture. But Abraham didn't act that way. He did have the one unfortunate instance with Hagar, and we'll talk about that next week because he was not perfect in that area. But he was very, very unusual for the culture.

He was also a peaceful man. He stayed away from the violence that was all around him because remember, he lived right in the midst of Sodom and Gomorrah. And do you remember when the Lord said He would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, what did Abraham do? He interceded for these people. He asked the Lord, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there's 50 righteous people there? What if there's 40?" Abraham knew there weren't 50 righteous people in Sodom and Gomorra. "What if there's 40? What if there's 30?" Why did he do that? Because he had mercy, but the point is that it all demonstrates the kind of attitude Abraham had in his life. He was a heavenly minded man. When it came to his possessions, he was heavenly minded. When it came to his wife, he was heavenly minded. When it came to his neighbours, he was the same way, which is something to think about. Because let me ask you, how many of you would say that you're truly a heavenly minded man today? Not too many of us. How many of you who would say that your mind is focused on God and nothing else? If we're honest about it, this is hard, because we're so caught up in the things of this world and working and striving to make money so we can buy bigger and better stuff. Christians shouldn't be that way.

As many of you know, my family and I are in the process of moving right now to another house in Chilliwack, and this is really hitting home for me. Because anytime you move, you start putting stuff in boxes, and you ask yourself the question, "Where did I get so much stuff?" There's so many things I don't need right now, we just threw away an old plastic Christmas decoration that we would always put up over the holidays. And as we did that, I remember thinking that took a lot of work every Christmas to put that up. I really liked it. Hours and hours. Now, where's it going? In the trash, right? That's where those things go. Makes you wonder, could I have done without it? Yes. Will they do me any good eternity? No. So why do I keep it around? You need to get rid of those things.

I read some shocking statistics on this lately, which said that the average home in America has 300,000 items in it. And the average size of the American home has nearly tripled over the last 50 years, and it's still not big enough to put our stuff in. Which is why one out of every Americans rent off site storage for that purpose. Three percent of the world's children live in America, but they own 40% of the toys consumed globally. The average American woman owns 30 outfits, one for every day of the month, in 1930, the number was nine outfits. And we can pick on America all we want, but friends, I gotta tell you Canada's not much better in this area. I mean, just think about how much money people spend on homes around here. And do you know what's going to happen to that home one day? It's going to end up in the trash. Someone's going to tear it down and build another one. And you know what's gonna happen to that house 50-60 years later? They're going to tear that one down too. That's the way of all the earth. And if the story of Abraham tells you anything is that you can't get caught up in that because it's just a vapor. It's just like grains of sand in your hand falling down, so you don't want to spend all your precious moments on things like that. I just emptied out my office, and I looked in my office, and it's just bare walls. I spent six years working down there. It's just bare walls. And it reminds you that's what happens in life. Focus on the Lord instead of these kinds of things. Which brings you to one more step of Abraham's faith here.

Just to review these other ones, the first one is that he went out not knowing where he was going. And secondly, Abraham lived as an alien in the land of promise. Thirdly, he looked for the city which has foundations. And at that point, if you look in your Bibles, you can tell the author makes a switch from talking about Abraham to talking about his wife, Sarah; we're gonna get into Sarah next time. She's one of the only women in the chapter which makes her so special. But he moves from the father of the Jews to talking about their mother to show the impact faith had on her because in the mind of the Jews, Abraham and Sarah represented the same thing. And that was the first family in Israel. It's where they all came from. So their lives are intertwined. But I thought it'd be important to spend a whole sermon on her next week, so we'll put that off until then. But let's talk about Abraham one more time, because in verse 12, it picks up the discussion about him. And it gives us one more step to his faith. And that is that Abraham started a family, even though he was as good as dead.

A fourth step to his faith is that he started a family, even though he was as good as dead. Which means that once he entered the promised land, God did eventually give him a son; but He waited until he was

very old, to show that it came by faith and not by works. And if you read verses 11 through 12, it says this. It says,

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead as that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

Now, as you read this last part, you're seeing this back and forth between Abraham and Sarah. Because he talks about Abraham starting in verse eight, and then he mentioned Sarah in verse 11, and then he's back to Abraham in verse 12. In order to show you that this is where the Israelite race started; it began with these two people. This is their mom and dad. It would have struck a chord with the original audience because they were Jewish, and they put a lot of stock into being Jewish. And the author says you need to remember one thing, there wouldn't be a Jewish race if it wasn't for faith. You didn't come about because Abraham and Sarah were special people. They weren't special people. They were old when they had children. Because they're not the ones who get the credit for this. This is all about the glory of God. Because it says, "Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead as that, as many descendants AS THE STARS." And what that means is that Abraham was as good as dead physically when he had Isaac. Genesis 21:5 says he was 100 years old, which is past the age of having kids. It was the same way with Sarah, because verse 11, says she herself was past the ability to conceive beyond the proper time of life. And that's a delicate way of saying that her body had gotten to the point when having kids was impossible anymore. But the idea is that it happened anyway because of the Lord's will. When it says they would have as many descendants as the stars, that means they would have more than they could count. And that phrase in your Bibles is italicized in some of your texts, because it's a quotation from Genesis 22, where the Lord tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and he prepares to do it until the Lord stops him. And then it says this, the Lord says,

"By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and not withheld your son, your only son, indeed, I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens."

Now, that's a figurative expression, because scientists have determined that there's something like 200 billion trillion stars in the sky, which is a two with 23 zeros behind it, while there's currently 50 million Jews; so that's not a literal statement there. It's more of a poetic phrase, to say that your family would grow and grow to the point that they would spread all over the face of the earth. You can go to any country in the world today, and you will find a descendant of Abraham. You go to Canada, there's Jews here. In the United States, there's Jews there. You go to Africa, there's Jews there. Go to Asia, there's Jews there. In fact, when you read the rest of the Old Testament, you find Abraham had one child of the promise, one child outside of the promise. But one child in the promise that was Isaac; Isaac had two kids. Do you remember their names? Jacob, and Esau, right? And Jacob would have 12 sons, remember

their names? Some of you would; some of you could say them. They would become the 12 tribes of Israel. Now follow this closely because as those 12 sons grew up, they would have children and so many children that Genesis 46:27 says when they went into Egypt, there would be 70 of them. So in a few generations, it goes from 12 to 70. And then they stayed in Egypt for a while and Numbers 1 says in Egypt, they would become 2 million people. Just get your mind around this for a minute, they go from 12 to 70, to 2 million in just a few hundred years. That's a miracle, isn't it? That is a population explosion that cannot be explained by the by the work of man. One Old Testament scholar named Leon Morris said this about it. He said, "Nowhere else in history has anything like this rate of growth ever transpired. Even if we think of terms of 430 years, it's still supernatural. Because if the Jews continued to grow at this rate, they would be 2 billion people by the time of David. They would be 2 trillion people, by the time of the exile in the Babylon, and they would be two quadrillion people by the time of the Lord Jesus Christ." Isn't that amazing? In fact, they were so big in Egypt, that the Egyptians, who were one of the most powerful nations in the world, had to make them slaves and tell them to start killing their male babies so they would stop growing. But the point the author's making here is that it all happened because of God. In other words, the Jews weren't started by Abraham's works. They were started by the Lord's. And they didn't get this by human effort; it happened because of the promises. Because the Lord said He would do it and He did it. That's it. Happened purely by His mercy so that when Abraham was called, it was done by mercy. And when he lived as an alien, it happened by mercy. And when he looked for the city which has foundations, it was done by mercy. And when he had a child, it was the same way.

That's how you're saved, isn't it? When the Lord calls you, it's done by mercy. And when the Lord saves you, it's done by mercy. And when He raises you up from the dead so that you might look to Him and be forgiven. It's done by mercy. See, when he justifies you, it's mercy. When He takes your sin and places it on the cross, it's done by mercy. And when He takes Christ's righteousness and imputes it into your account, it's the same way. It's all done by grace. You're not anything special any more than Abraham was. It's not about you, it's about Him. Romans 9:15 is a good reminder here because it says, "God will have mercy on whom He has mercy." Again, people say, "Why did He choose Abraham?" It's because He chose Abraham. He's God. He can do what He wants with the Chaldeans and the Gentiles and the pagans. And He can do what He wants with Canadians and Americans and whoever. What did Abraham do to deserve this? Nothing. The story is about the Lord and His power.

Next week, we are going to talk about Sarah and look at her life, the wife of Abraham. Her story is so interesting because there's only two ladies in the Hall of Faith. And they're very different people: Sarah and Rahab. Sarah was a housewife. Rahab was a harlot. Sarah was the mother of the Jews. Rahab lived in Jericho. Couldn't get any farther apart, but they had one thing in common, and that is that they both trusted God and the Lord saved them. And we'll talk about that next time. So please come join us for that.

For now, in my studies this week, I was reminded of the story of the time when Martin Luther read the account of Abraham sacrificing Isaac to his wife for the first time. And after reading it, this is the first time she ever heard it, she said, "That's not true. There's no way God would do that, or ask someone to do that." To which Martin Luther replied, "But dear, He did. He killed His own Son for us. And what's more than that, He gave us the benefits of that death to all who would call out to Him in faith, like Abraham did." Have you called out to Him this morning? As we come to the Lord's table, this is a good reminder to do that. Let me pray that we all would. Let's go to Him in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for the powerful faith of this man, Abraham. He didn't just have faith, he had hope. He had patience. He had trust. He had the right perspective on life, which is something we all need to do today. Lord, there's not anybody here who doesn't look at the culture and feel like we don't fit in like this man did. And we're just wandering and roaming the earth, but we're not roaming it in no direction; we are pointing toward heaven as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Would we remember that and take strength Father.

And as we come to the Lord's table, this is where our faith ultimately points us, and that is to the cross. Where our sins were paid for, where the death was sufficient for all the wrongs that we have done, and where Your mercy was shown in such abundance.

Lord, thank You for the story of Israel. Thank You for the amazing power with which You worked in this humble people. Lord, we pray that You would work through us as well, just like You did with them. The church is Your people for this age. We are here to be the light of Christ in this world. We want to do that Lord, but we cannot do it without your kindness in our lives and Your power. Would You show us some of that this morning? For those who have been discouraged this week, would You remind them of Abraham so they would follow his example, be encouraged, and be built up in the faith? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.