

Treading Faith's Pathway  
Romans 4:12

August 11, 2013

A. Introduction

1. **Our Text:** *and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.*

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2. Not by Sight <sup>I</sup>

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<sup>A</sup> Romans 3:20-23, 4:11

<sup>B</sup> Genesis 11:31-32, Acts 7:2-4, Hebrews 11:8

<sup>C</sup> Genesis 12:1-5, Acts 7:4-5, Hebrews 11:9-10

<sup>D</sup> Genesis 22:1-2, Hebrews 11:17-19

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<sup>E</sup> Genesis 16:4

<sup>F</sup> Genesis 20:7

<sup>G</sup> Isaiah 26:4, Genesis 15:1-6

<sup>H</sup> Genesis 16:16, 17:1, 21:1-2

<sup>I</sup> 1 Kings 19:9-14

A. Introduction

1. Our Text

- a. this morning is taken from that passage of Scripture we read
- b. it is Romans 4:12, "and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised."
- c. the alternate title of our message could well be, 'Walking in the Faithful Steps of Our Father Abraham'
- d. but before we follows Abraham along this path, let us take a moment to put our text into ...

2. Its Context

- a. Paul's letter to the Christian church in Rome
  - (A) was to an assembly of believers that, by and large, Paul had not met, nor had he had any part in their conversion
  - (B) so the letter which he writes to them is a very broad and sweeping teaching of the truths of salvation, how it is realized in a person's life, and the implication it has in how a person lives
- b. the first three chapters of Romans describe sin
  - (A) that it is the deliberate rebellion by man against God
  - (B) that all men are sinners, both by our nature, and by choice
  - (C) Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
  - (D) which evokes the question, 'How do we appease God for our sin?'
  - (E) or 'How can we escape His righteous judging us for our sin?'
- c. thus Paul shows our need of righteousness before a holy God
  - (A) which leaves us facing two alternatives
    - (1) we can depend upon our own efforts, our good works
    - (2) or, we trust in God's gracious promise
  - (B) human religions and ideas all choose the first despite
    - (1) our long experience of our own weakness and failings
    - (2) the unblemished record of God in His faithfulness

- (C) Paul argues that the first – man’s choice – just will not work, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; ...” (Romans 3:20)
- (D) rather, be one Jew or Gentile, the second – God’s way – is the one that will work, “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; ...” (Romans 3:21-22)
- d. then, in this fourth chapter, Paul uses Abraham as an example
  - (A) to show that first of all, Promise takes precedence over Law
    - (1) that is that salvation through faith in God’s gracious promise
    - (2) takes precedence over any attempt at salvation through works based upon the Law
    - (3) because the Promise predated the Law by 400 years
  - (B) and secondly, to show that the Promise applies both to Jew and Gentile apart from the requirements of the Law
    - (1) for the Promise was made before the covenant of circumcision
    - (2) while Abraham was yet, in effect, a Gentile
  - (C) so Abraham is both
    - (1) the ancestor according to the flesh of the Jewish nation
    - (2) and the spiritual ancestor of all Christian believers
    - (3) “... so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,” (Romans 4:11)
- e. we are able on this account to consider the topic of ‘Treading Faith’s Pathway’ by seeing what it means to be ‘Walking in the Faithful Steps of Our Father Abraham’

## B. Obedience Enables the Walk of Faith

1. The Setting Out for Canaan. . . . . Genesis 11, 12
  - a. In Genesis 11, the record of genealogies narrows down to one man, Terah and his three sons; one, Haran, dead; the other two taking wives in the land of Ur of the Chaldees, in the Mesopotamian valley, near the Persian Gulf, and then says, “Terah took Abram (a.k.a. Abraham) 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.” (Genesis 11:31-32)

(A) Haran is about 1000 kilometres up the Tigris-Euphrates river system, in what is now South-Eastern Turkey

(B) now that is quite a step of faith – but it was only part of the way

b. Stephen addressing the murderous mob said, “Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.’ Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. ...” (Acts 7:2-4)

(A) so this fills in the story that it was particularly to Abraham to whom God gave the command that he begin this pilgrimage

(B) obedience to this began Abrahams faith journey

c. “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.” (Hebrews 11:8)

2. The Unseen City.. . . . . Genesis 12

a. how long they spent in the Haran we do not know, but when Terah had died, “... 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 from Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.” (Genesis 12:1-5)

(A) so that after some delay, Abraham arrived in Canaan

(B) but his only possessions were those he carried with him

b. In that speech, Stephen continues, “... From there, after his father died, God had him move to this

country in which you are now living. But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him." (Acts 7:4-5)

(A) this was the land God was giving him to possess

(B) yet he did not possess a square foot – in fact, when Sarah later died, he had to bargain in typical eastern fashion to acquire the cave at Machpelah, a burying place, from the Hittites of the land

c. "By faith 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; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:9-10)

(A) the city – the place of possession and residence in Canaan –

(B) it could only be seen by the eyes of Abraham's faith

3. The 'Sacrifice' of Isaac. . . . . Genesis 22

a. you know this part of Abraham's history

(A) with it comes the his greatest test of obedience

(B) "Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.'" (Genesis 22:1-2)

b. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type." (Hebrews 11:17-19)

(A) now Isaac wasn't Abraham's only son: there was also Ishmael

(B) Isaac was the only begotten son: the Greek words literally mean the unique son or the one of a kind son

(C) Isaac was the son that mattered; the son of promise

(D) and with his death would disappear the promise

(E) but Abraham obeyed by the obedience of faith

- c. because of this evidence of faith, delivering Isaac, God established even more firmly the promise, by adding an oath on His Own Self

### C. Faltering and Failing on the Walk of Faith

1. The Stop In Haran. . . . . Genesis 11
  - a. the walk of faith is not necessarily one of unfettered progress
  - b. after leaving Ur, after travelling 1000 kilometres, Terah settled down in that city, he and his family – to await his death
  - c. how long they were there, as I said, is left unrecorded
  - d. sermons have been preached finding fault with Abraham for stopping there, but there is nothing in Scripture to support blaming him
  - e. the fact of the matter is simply that there are events in life that will delay or hinder our taking the next step of faith
    - (A) I have known of missionaries who have had to take an extended leave of absence from the field to care for a dying parent
    - (B) sometimes we just haven't lived long enough, experienced enough or learned enough for that next step
  - f. but the situation over, the walk of faith continued
2. The Birth of Ishmael. . . . . Genesis 16
  - a. God promised Abraham a son (we shall return to that in a moment), but the fulfilment of God's promises seemed impossibly far away
  - b. then Abraham did something he shouldn't – he listened to his wife
  - c. now don't you guys go home and say that the pastor said that you shouldn't listen to your wives ... or you'll get both of us in trouble
  - d. it was what Sarah suggested – it was a faithless suggestion – it was that Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, should become the surrogate mother for Abraham's and Sarah's child
  - e. "... and she (Hagar) conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight." (Genesis 16:4)

f. so Ishmael was born, and that was a beginning of trouble – but the walk of faith continued despite this time of failing and falling

3. The Half-Lies about Sarah. . . . . Genesis 12, 20

a. we will not stop to read them now, but twice Abraham failed in the same way:

- (A) he was in a strange land, among untrustworthy people
- (B) and fearing his life that they would slay him in order to take away Sarah his wife who was beautiful even though over 65 years old
- (C) he told a half-truth, that she was his sister – for indeed, she was his half-sister, but also his wife
- (D) and each time he was found out – once by Pharaoh, once by king Abimelech – who both reproved Abraham for his deception and the danger in which it had placed them

b. in this way, Abraham’s faith and dependence on God faltered

- (A) but while the one exercising faith, Abraham, failed in that faith, the Object of that faith never failed, nor did God abandon him, but rather claimed Abraham as his own special one to Abimelech: “Now therefore, restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. ...” (Genesis 20:7)
- (B) failures on our part are only stopping-places, not the terminals, in our journey of faith, to be confessed, cleansed, corrected so that the walk of faith may proceed.

D. Trust Marks of the Walk of Faith

1. Accepting the Promise – Genesis 15

a. trust is the OT equivalent of the NT faith

- (A) “Trust in the Lord forever, For in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock.” (Isaiah 26:4)
- (B) any difference between them is more apparent than real – perhaps arising from our western thought patterns of making belief an intellectual activity rather than a response of our whole being
- (C) trust – a part of and an outcome of our faith – is the realization in our practice that all that we are and all that we have belong to God; therefore we commit our selves and our abilities and our possessions into His care and keeping, to use them as He wills
- (D) all that is included when we say ‘I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.’

- b. Abraham entrusted himself to God's goodness
  - (A) God has just promised this: "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." (Genesis 15:1)
  - (B) 'A reward? How will that benefit me?', Abraham responds with these words: "O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? ... Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." (Genesis 15:2-3) that was Abraham's problem
  - (C) So God made a very specific promise concerning a son: "... This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." (Genesis 15:4-5)
  - (D) Abraham accepted God's promise: "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)

2. Awaiting Isaac. . . . . Genesis 16-21

- a. you should not make too much out of the silence of Scripture
  - (A) but some of the ways in which it records history are suggestive
  - (B) Genesis 16 ends with these words, "Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him." (Genesis 16:16), and
  - (C) chapter 17 begins with these, "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.'" (Genesis 17:1)
  - (D) so there appears there a 13-year period which is ended by the appearance of the Lord in order to establish the covenant of circumcision and to renew the promise of a son of promise
- b. for the chapters following the promise given in chapter 15, they years roll on and there is no son
  - (A) Abraham was 75 when he left Haran; now he approaches 100
  - (B) and Sarah approaching 90
  - (C) but the wait was rewarded, "Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him." (Genesis 21:1-2)



## E. Conclusion

### 1. Waiting

- a. this morning we have only touched on some of the highlights of Abraham's walk of faith; and that for a reason
  - (A) not only is our time limited here
  - (B) but the Bible only gives some highlights
  - (C) as we have already noted, there are long periods of Abraham's life on which the Bible is completely silent
- b. and an important part of our walking by faith, is simply evidenced by our perseverance, our continuing along the pathway of faith
- c. even when there are few visible tokens to encourage, for it is

### 2. Not by Sight

- a. Elijah had been very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts, and had defeated the 450 prophets of Ba'al, and then fled from Jezebel
  - (A) God coming to encourage His prophet, sent him into a mountain
  - (B) there was an earthquake accompanied by a great wind
  - (C) the Lord was not in the earthquake
  - (D) then there was fire
  - (E) the Lord was not in the fire
  - (F) then the sound of a gentle whisper
  - (G) the Lord was in that still, small voice
- b. your walk of faith may be marked at times by tremendous events
  - (A) the time of repentance for sin and coming to Christ
  - (B) the times of great and momentous decisions
  - (C) perhaps the calling and entering into some way of service
  - (D) but the major part of your walking by faith will be the day to day continuing in the way that you have begun, following that still, small voice of God's word, prayer and meditation on these things

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