

Why Did God Choose Abraham?

Hebrews 11

BQ103113

The following is an excerpt from
The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Hebrews 11.

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. (11:8)

It was not Abraham's plan to leave Ur and then Haran, and eventually settle in the land of Canaan. In fact, when he left Ur he had no idea where he was going. He was called by God, and only God knew what was in store for him.

In the Greek, **he was called** is a present participle, and the translation could be, "when he was being called." In other words, as soon as he understood what God was saying, he started packing. It was instant obedience. It may have taken several days, or even weeks or months, to make final preparation for the trip, but in his mind he was already on the way. From then on, everything he did revolved around obeying God's call.

Abraham was a sinful heathen who grew up in an unbelieving and idolatrous society. We do not know exactly how or when God first made Himself known to Abraham, but he was raised in a home that was pagan (Josh. 24:2). His native city of Ur was in Chaldea, in the general region called Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It was a fertile land and was culturally advanced. It was near where the Garden of Eden was located (cf. Gen. 2:14) and was some 140 miles from where the great city of Babylon would one day be built.

Isaiah refers to Abraham as "the rock from which you were hewn" and "the quarry from which your were dug" (Isa. 51:1–2), reminding his fellow Jews that God sovereignly condescended to call Abraham out of paganism and idolatry in order to bless him and the world through him. He may have had higher moral standards than his friends and neighbors, but this was not the reason God chose him. God chose him because He wanted to choose him. And when God spoke to him, he listened; when God promised, he trusted; when God commanded, he obeyed.

When any person comes to Jesus Christ, God demands of him a pilgrimage from his old pattern of living into a new kind of life, just as Abraham's faith separated him from paganism and unbelief and started him toward a new land and a new kind of life. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Salvation brings separation from the world. The Lord works in the heart the total willingness to leave behind everything that is not pleasing to Him. He cannot lead us into new ways of living until He leads us out

of the old. We should respond, “I don’t know what You are going to do with me, Lord, but I’m going to drop all those old things. I don’t know what You’re going to substitute for them, but I’m going to let them go.”

That is the attitude of the faith pilgrim. The life of faith begins with the willingness to leave one’s Ur, one’s own place of sin and unbelief—to leave the system of the world. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 1:4).

Giving up the old life is one of the greatest obstacles to coming to Christ, and is also one of the greatest obstacles to faithful living once we are in Christ. From the perspective of the old life and the old nature the new life in Christ can appear dull and unexciting. When we think this way we fail to understand that, once we become a Christian, we are given a new set of values, interests, and desires—which we cannot experience in advance. We cannot “see” the blessings and satisfaction of life in Christ before we trust Him as Lord and Savior. We believe and then we experience. We must first be willing to “go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come” (Heb. 13:13). Often the reproach is all we are able to see at first. We look forward to the “city which is to come” by faith.

The force that makes us want to hold on to the old life is sometimes called *worldliness*. Worldliness may be an act, but primarily it is an attitude. It is wanting to do things that are sinful or selfish or worthless, whether we actually do them or not. It is wanting men’s praise whether we ever receive it or not. It is outwardly holding to high standards of conduct, but inwardly longing to live like the rest of the world. The worst sort of worldliness is religious worldliness, because it pretends to be godly. It holds to God’s standards outwardly (usually adding a few of its own), but it is motivated by selfish, worldly desires. It is pretentious and hypocritical. This was the Pharisees’ great sin, as Jesus so often pointed out.

Worldliness is not so much what we do as what we want to do. It is not determined so much by what our actions are as by where our heart is. Some people do not commit certain sins only because they are afraid of the consequences, others because of what people will think, others from a sense of self-righteous satisfaction in resisting—all the while having a strong desire for these sins. It is the desire for sin that is the root of worldliness, and from which the believer is to be separated. “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15; cf. James 4:4). The root meaning of holiness is separation, being set apart for God.

One of the surest marks of the demise of worldliness is a change in desires, in loves. As we grow in Christ and in love for Him, our love for the things of the world diminishes. They will simply lose their attraction. We will not *want* to do them like we used to. The pilgrimage of faith begins by separating ourselves from the world, and as we concentrate on Jesus and fellowship with Him, soon we do not care about the things we once loved so much. When we slip and engage in them, we hate what we do in the weakness of the flesh (cf. Rom. 7:14–25).

Paradoxical as it may seem at first, the highest mark of spiritual maturity is being able to do what we want to do. “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (Heb. 11:24–26). Moses did not forsake Egypt because he had to or

because he felt obligated to, but because he wanted to. Egypt had lost its attraction. It could not compare with what Christ offered. In this regard the spiritually mature Christian is like the worldly person—he does what he wants to do. The great difference is that the mature Christian wants what God wants.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).