

THREE REASONS TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE LORD

11 Now the whole earth had one language and one common speech. ²As men journeyed eastward, they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they settled there. ³And they said to each another, Come, let us make bricks, and bake them thoroughly. They used bricks instead of stone, and tar instead of mortar. ⁴Then they said, Come, let us build a city for ourselves with a tower whose top shall reach unto heaven; so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

⁵But Jehovah came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. ⁶And Jehovah said, Behold, they are one people and they all have the same language; and this is what they begin to do. In their present condition nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they may not understand one another. ⁸So Jehovah scattered them from there over the whole surface of the earth. And they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called Babel—because there Jehovah confused the language of the whole world and from there Jehovah scatter them over the surface of the whole earth.

¹⁰This is the account of Shem's genealogy. Two years after the flood, when Shem was a hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad. ¹¹Shem lived five hundred years after the birth of Arpachshad, and there were born to him sons and daughters. ... ²⁴After Nahor had lived twenty nine years, he became the father of Terah. ²⁵Nahor lived a hundred and nineteen years after the birth of Terah, and there were born to him other sons and daughters. ²⁶After Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

²⁷This is the account of Terah's genealogy. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran was the father of Lot. ²⁸Now Haran died during the lifetime of his father Terah in the same place where he had been born, namely, in Ur of the Chaldees. ²⁹Abram and Nahor each took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, she was the daughter of Haran, now Haran was the father of both Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰Now Sarai was barren; she had no children. ³¹Then Terah took his son Abram, and his grandson, Lot, (Lot was the son of Haran), and his daughter-in-law Sarai, (who was his son Abram's wife). Together they journeyed from Ur of the Chaldees intending to go into the land of Canaan; but they came to the city of Haran and settled there. ³²Terah lived two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

12 Then Jehovah said to Abram, Leave your country, and your people, and your father's household, and go to the land that I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and by you shall all the peoples of the earth be blessed.

⁴So Abram departed, just as Jehovah had told him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ⁵And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the servants that they had purchased in Haran. They departed intending to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

⁶Abram traveled through the land to the place of Shechem—to the oak of Moreh. Now at that time the Canaanite was occupying the land. ⁷And Jehovah appeared to

Abram, and said, To your descendants will I give this land. There Abram built an altar to Jehovah, who appeared to him. ⁸And he departed from there going to the mountain on the east side of Beth-el, and there he pitched his tent, with Beth-el to the west and Ai to the east. There he built an altar to Jehovah and called upon the name of Jehovah. ⁹Then Abram traveled again, still heading towards the South. (Gen. 11:1-12:9)

Introduction

During the railroad-building boom of the late 19th century, a wealthy capitalist name James J. Hill had a dream of colonizing the Pacific Northwest. He purchased a small railroad line centered in St. Paul, Minnesota, and began laying track across the Great Plains, through the Rockies, and all the way to the Pacific (*The National Experience*, pp.420-421.)

Now let us suppose that James J. Hill sponsored a special train for the purpose of transporting colonists to the Pacific Northwest. Many would-be colonists board the train in St. Paul for the long journey of some 2,700 miles to the Pacific. When the train makes a stop in the Red River Valley of North Dakota, some of the would-be colonists decide this is the end of the line for them; they are going to build their own colony right across Mr. Hill's tracks. But Mr. Hill is a determined man who will tolerate no mutiny; his locomotive picks up speed and smashes right through the newly constructed town, leaving it a scattered shambles. When the train reaches the Rockies it must stop for repairs. At this point some more of the would-be colonists forsake the venture; they are weary of the long, arduous journey and they just give up. Mr. Hill urges them to get back on board, but when they don't, his train presses on without them, and they are never heard from again. It is those colonists, and only those, who stay on board the train who make it all the way to the paradise of the Pacific Northwest. Mr. James J. Hill was a determined man; he accomplished the goal he set out to achieve; and those who stayed with him shared in his success.

There is a spiritual application to our parable surrounding that historic railroad builder, James Hill, an application that pertains to the passage presently before us: we need to be faithful to the God who fulfills His purposes. Because we have no legitimate reason to withstand Him, and abundant Scriptural reason to trust Him, let us see that we are faithful to the LORD. Genesis 11:1-12:9 provides us with three reasons for faithfulness to the LORD.

I. Be Faithful to the LORD, Because He Overthrows Those Who Oppose Him

In Genesis 9:1 there is recorded the LORD's commandment to Noah and his sons to *"be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth."* For emphasis, the same commandment is repeated in Genesis 9:7. Genesis 9:19 informs us that by these three sons of Noah *"the whole earth was populated."* This summary statement indicates that God's purpose was accomplished; despite the opposition men gave to the divine will.

Genesis 11:1-9 records an episode of such opposition to the divine will. At this time in history the whole of mankind still spoke the same language (vs. 7.) This made possible human cooperation in a concerted project, but one that was in defiance of God's purpose that man spread out and populate the whole earth. As the descendants of Noah's sons journey east they come upon a plain in the land of Shinar, upon reaching that point they decide to stop migrating, band together, and dwell in a city of their own making (vs. 2.)

Verses 3-4 reveal their plan and the thoughts of their hearts: *"let us make bricks,"* their intention is to build a structure that is durable and will be permanent. Then we hear them say, *"Let us build a city for ourselves with a tower whose top shall reach unto heaven."* The tower of the ancient city was a place of refuge from enemy assault (note Judges 9:50-51, printed below,)

Then Abimelech went to Thebez and besieged it and captured it. ⁵¹But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women fled into it—even all the inhabitants of the city. They locked themselves in and climbed up to the roof of the tower. (Judg. 9:50-51)

Their intention to build a tower to heaven may have been an effort to protect themselves from another great flood. They know they are in opposition to God's will, they view God as their enemy, and they seek to construct a "defense" against God! They form a humanistic alliance to pursue their own purpose and promote their own glory, in direct defiance of God, proclaiming their intention to *"make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the whole earth."*

Genesis 11:1-9 also records the LORD's response to this secular humanistic enterprise. The LORD discerns that this present building project is only the beginning of their ungodly endeavors, and their common language is what enables them to undertake this enterprise (vs. 6.) He now takes action to frustrate their human purpose and cause His divine purpose to be accomplished (vs. 7-8.) Contrast verse 4, *"Come, let us build a city for ourselves,"* with verse 7, *"Come, let us go down and confuse their language."* We may well take note of James 4:6, *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

Let us be faithful to the LORD, because He overthrows those who oppose Him. We must be careful to take to heart the testimony of Scripture:

There is no wisdom nor insight nor plan against Jehovah. (Prov. 21:30)

His wisdom is profound, his power is vast; who can defy him and succeed? (Job 9:4)

II. Be Faithful to the LORD, Because He Requires Steadfast Faithfulness

Genesis 11:10-26 records for us the genealogy of the covenant line. Starting with Shem it eventually leads to the Old Testament patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.) The patriarchs are the fathers of God's Old Testament people, Israel; to them and their descendants the LORD pledges the land of Canaan; they are the ones God will bring into and establish in the Promised Land.

The generations of Shem eventually bring us to the patriarchs and the record of their life with the LORD. But the generations of Shem also contain the story of the "almost-patriarch," a man named Terah.

In the light of Stephen's remarks recorded in Acts 7:2-4 (printed below,) it becomes evident that the LORD's call was made to Abram. When we couple Stephen's testimony with the account found in Genesis, it appears that Abram in turn communicated the divine calling to his father, Terah, who thereupon initially took the initiative in complying with it (note Gen. 11:31.)

Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. ³"Leave your country and your people," God said, "and go to the land I will show you." ⁴So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. (Acts 7:2-4)

Terah made a good start, but he did not persevere. Genesis 11:31b reports, "*they journeyed from Ur of the Chaldees intending to go into the land of Canaan; but they came to the city of Haran and settled there.*" Following the fertile river valley in a rainbow crescent from Ur, (which was situated on the Euphrates River not far from the northwestern tip of the Persian Gulf,) to Canaan (i.e.; modern day Israel,) you find that Haran is situated half way between those two points.

Why did Terah settle in Haran, rather than continue all the way to Canaan? He apparently succumbed to some form of the malady described in Mark 4:19 as "*the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches.*" The place where he chose to settle (Haran) is known to have been a flourishing city, situated along a substantial river on a major trade route. This seems to indicate that Terah thought he had found all he wanted in life, right there in Haran. He apparently succumbed to the deceitfulness of riches, thinking they could make him happy and secure and fulfilled. Furthermore, it is very possible that Terah never overcame his personal loss. He may have allowed the burden of the pre-mature death of his son (Gen. 11:28) to weigh him down and prevent him from persevering in following the LORD.

The summary statement of Terah's history contains one phrase that is missing from the eight generations that preceded him: "*Terah died in Haran.*" By way of example, contrast the summary statement of Shem's life (Gen. 11:10-11, printed

below) with that of Terah, given in Genesis 11:32: *“Terah lived two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.”*

*... when Shem was a hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad.
11Shem lived five hundred years after the birth of Arpachshad, and there were born to him sons and daughters. (Gen. 11:10-11)*

Because this addition, namely, the statement concerning Terah’s death, is a striking deviation from the other eight generations (listed in Genesis 11:12-23) in the covenant line, it is significant. It seems to indicate that in the case of Terah the spiritual life died.

Let us be faithful to the LORD, because He requires steadfast faithfulness:

... we desire that each one of you may exhibit the same diligence ... right to the end—¹²that you not become negligent; but rather, that you be imitators of those who through faith and steadfastness inherit what has been promised. (Heb.6:11-12)

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the appointed time we shall reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Gal. 6:9)

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev. 2:10)

According to John 1:12-13, a genuine work of the Holy Spirit includes the grace of perseverance:

*But to all who **did receive him** [an initial act of faith, as is indicated by the aorist form of the Greek verb, λαμβάνω], **to those who are believing on his name** [a continuing faith and commitment, as is indicated by the present participle of the Greek verb, πιστεύω, to bring out the force of the tense, we may translate it: “those who are believing”], **to them he gave the right to become children of God—¹³they were born, not by natural descent, nor by human will, nor by a husband’s desire, but by God. (Jn. 1:12-13)***

According to Philippians 2:12-13, the LORD’s faithfulness becomes the means and incentive for our faithfulness: *“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who is working in you ... for the sake of his good purpose.”*

III. Be Faithful to the LORD, Because He will Eventually Reward Such Faithfulness

Genesis 12:1 states that the LORD re-issued His call to Abram, (a call that initially was extended to him while he was still living in Ur of the Chaldeans); and in so doing, the LORD makes very clear the cost involved: *“leave your country, your people, your father’s household.”* He also make clear to Abram the need for

complete trust and confidence in Him: *“go to the land that I will show you.”* It was only later, at the conclusion of the journey, that Abram discovered that the destination to which he was called was the land of Canaan (cp. Hebrews 11:8, printed below,)

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a land he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Heb.11:8)

When Genesis 11:31 and Genesis 12:5 inform us that Terah and Abram were headed for the land of Canaan we, as the readers, are being supplied with an editorial comment—we are given information that Terah and Abram did not possess at the time of their initial calling.

Together with the call, the LORD made to Abram a great promise: *“I will make you into a great nation, ... and make your name great”* (Gen. 12:2-3.) Contrast Genesis 11:4, *“let us make a name for ourselves,”* with Genesis 12:2, *“I will make your name great.”* The LORD promises to bless Abram with all that the builders of Babel hoped to gain, and with far more.

Abram responded to the LORD’s call to follow Him—the call to be His disciple (Gen.12:4-5.) Abram departed out of Haran with *“all the possessions they had accumulated.”* Abram was doing what the LORD had instructed him to do (as recorded in verse 1): *“leave your country, your people, your father’s household.”* Not only did Abram (like Terah before him) respond to God’s initial call, but (unlike Terah) Abram persevered to the end. Of Terah it is said: *“Then Terah took his son Abram, and his grandson, Lot, ... Together they journeyed from Ur of the Chaldees intending to go into the land of Canaan; but they came to the city of Haran and settled there”* (Gen. 11:31.) But of Abram it is said: *“And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, ... They departed intending to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came”* (Gen. 12:5.)

Even when Abram entered the land of Canaan there was need for continued perseverance in the faith. Genesis 12:6 tells us that at that time in history *“the Canaanite was occupying the land.”* So it was that *“Abram pitched his tent”*—a type of impermanent, temporary dwelling—but he also *“built an altar to Jehovah”*—a testimony of faith in the promise that God would indeed give him the land (vs. 8.)

Abram received the sustaining grace of Christ, as Genesis 12:7 indicates when it reports, *“Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said, “To your descendants will I give this land.”* Eventually, in company with the whole host of the redeemed, he will receive the fullness of the divine promise, note Hebrews 11:16, printed below,

All these people were still living by faith when they died. ...¹⁶they were looking for a better country—a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:13,16)

Let us be faithful to the LORD, because the LORD will eventually, but surely, reward such faithfulness.

Conclusion

This is the message of Genesis 11:1-12:9, we need to be faithful to the God who fulfills His purposes. Because we have no legitimate reason not to be faithful, and abundant biblical reason to be faithful, by His grace let us be faithful to the LORD our covenant God.