

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Going . . . Not Knowing

Genesis 12:1, 4–6; Hebrews 11:8–10



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Moving isn't easy, especially when we've lived in the same place for a long time. Besides all the packing and loading, we face saying goodbye to those we love and leaving the familiar. Moving is always challenging . . . and it can be downright frightening.

Even when we know where we're going, we feel anxious about moving. Imagine, though, the fear of moving and *not* knowing where we're going! This was Abraham's situation when God surprised him with the command: "Leave your native country . . . and go to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). Despite his fears, Abraham obeyed because, even though his *destination* lay beyond the horizon, his *God* was with him and promised to point the way.

God often leads in the form of faith-testing surprises. He surprised Noah with a plan to build an ark; Moses, with a command to liberate his people; and Joshua, with an astonishing scheme to bring down Jericho's walls. How Mary must have been surprised and afraid when God told her that she would bear the Christ child. Even so, she—as so many faithful people before her—willingly submitted. Faith always responds obediently to God's surprises.

How about you? Has God delivered to your doorstep an unexpected change? If not now, it's likely He will in the future. Let's take a closer look at God's surprise for Abraham and learn the way of obedience from his example.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Begin by reviewing the chart, "A Patriarch in Panorama—The Life of Abraham," in the previous study. Notice the flow of events in Abraham's life, and find where the Genesis 12:1–6 passage in this study fits. You may wish to print the chart and refer to it often as you progress through future studies.

As we turn to this passage, we'll use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study to observe, interpret, correlate, and apply the text. Chuck Swindoll's book, *Searching the Scriptures*, explains these methods in more detail, and you can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries online store.

Quotable

*God loves
surprises
because He
knows what
is best for us.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observing God's Commands and Abraham's Obedience

Genesis 12:1–3 records God's message to Abraham, which includes two parts: *commands* and *promises*. In this study, we'll look at the first part—God's commands; and in the next study, we'll focus on God's promises which comprise the framework of His covenant with Abraham.



Searching the Scriptures Tools

Observation is a critical beginning technique to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Read the passage carefully, noticing features such as contrasts, comparisons, repeated words, cause-and-effect, and emphasized words. Particularly notice imperatives (commands) and verbs (action words), which are like tree limbs. All the ideas in the paragraph, like branches and leaves, connect to these words.

Read the passage below using your cursor to highlight the imperatives, such as the word *leave*, and verbs, such as the word *departed*.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you.” . . . So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites. (Genesis 12:1, 4–6)

Let's build on the imperatives, *leave* and *go*. God commanded Abraham to leave his *native* country. The word implies that Abraham had lived there since birth. His roots sank deep into the soil of his culture and community. Put yourself in Abraham's place, and consider what it would be like for God to pull up *your* roots. List the things you take for granted that you would have to leave forever if you had to pick up and leave like Abraham did.



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Now explore the implications of Abraham *going* to a foreign land. What hardships and dangers await if God commanded you to move your family and business to an unfamiliar and unwelcoming country? Write down what thoughts and fears must have been going through Abraham's mind.

God told Abraham to go to “the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). How might this promise have calmed Abraham's fears?

Not everyone in Scripture responded to God's commands like Abraham. Moses *protested* at the burning bush (Exodus 3:11). Saul *hid* at his own coronation (1 Samuel 10:22). Jonah *ran* the opposite direction from Nineveh (Jonah 1:3)! Notice in the text the verbs that describe Abraham's actions: *departed*, *went*, *took*, *arrived*, and *set up*. What qualities do you see in the faith-filled obedience of seventy-five-year-old Abraham? Don't forget the faith of his family and servants who went with him!

Craft your observations into principles. For example, “When God tells us to go, He goes with us.” What other principles do you glean?



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Helpful Hint

A *principle* is a statement of truth emerging from the biblical text that is as true now as it was in Bible times. Principles bridge the past to the present, the ancient culture to modern times. Although God's specific commands to Abraham are not for us, the principles we learn about God and His leading are still true today.



Interpreting God's Commands and Abraham's Obedience

Interpretation answers the question, "What does this passage mean?" To clarify the meaning of a text, first view it through the eyes of the original audience. How did Moses intend his readers to understand this passage? Let's think through the answer together.

At the time Moses wrote Genesis, the Hebrew people had just exited Egypt and were on their way to inhabit the land God had promised Abraham. Old Testament scholar Allen P. Ross points out the significance of God's call of Abraham to these people:

Israel would learn by this that her very existence was God's work through a man who responded by faith and left for Canaan. It would be a message to convince Israel of the divine call they were facing, and their need of faith for their move from Egypt to Canaan.¹

The entire Hebrew nation was on a journey of faith! How might this story of Abraham's call and response have inspired them?

Abraham's faith inspired the Israelites as well as future generations of believers. Let's look at two passages in the New Testament that build on Abraham's obedience to God's commands.



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Correlating God's Commands and Abraham's Obedience

Read the opening lines of Stephen's speech to his accusers in Acts 7:1–4. Abraham was in Mesopotamia when God first told him to *leave* and *go*. According to Genesis 11:31–32, the family led by Abraham's father, Terah, made it as far as Haran and stopped. Why do you think they stopped in Haran?

After stopping in Haran, Abraham completed his journey to Canaan (Acts 7:4). Stephen's point to his accusers was that they should fully obey God just as Abraham did—but by rejecting Christ, they were stopping short.

Read Hebrews 11:8–10. What insights does this passage add to your understanding of Abraham's faith and complete obedience?



Application: Bringing Home the Lessons

Abraham's example of obedience knocks on our door with the reminder that we're never too old or too limited to obey when God calls and empowers. We're never "has-beens" when we have God! And we should never stop short in obeying Him.

To conclude his message, Chuck asks three probing questions:

- *Are you seeking God's will deliberately, genuinely, and passionately?* Do you need to reaffirm your desire to pursue God and His will?
- *Are you willing to go just as much as you desire to stay?* Are you open to change?
- *Are you making the decision simpler or more complicated?* Can you loosen your roots a little by finding ways to simplify your life?



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As you ponder these questions, write your reflections in the space below. Is God calling you to *leave* and *go*? To another place? A new lifestyle? A fresh ministry?

Once Abraham took off, he never looked back. God had an adventure awaiting him just beyond the horizon . . . and He has one for us too!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, sometimes I wrestle with Your surprises. Enable me to respond with faithful obedience when You call. Thank You for being patient with me along the way, for seeing me as a work in progress, and for guiding me with Your hand of grace wherever my journey of faith leads. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Old Testament ed., ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1985), 46–7.



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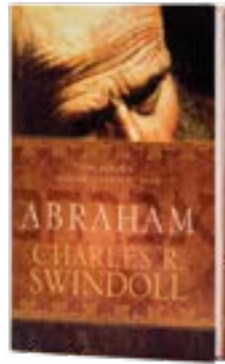
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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