

Pioneering Faith

‘Charlie Jones was a pious man who had been head usher at Central Church for 75 years. On his 105th birthday he stopped going to church. Alarmed by the old fellow’s absence after so many years of faithful service, Pastor Anderson went to see him. He found Charlie in excellent health, so the minister asked, “How come after all these years we don’t see you any more?” The old man looked around and lowered his voice, “I’ll tell you, Pastor,” he whispered, “when I got to be 90, I expected God to take me home any day. But then when I got to be 95, then 100, then 105. So I figured that God is very busy and must’ve forgotten about me—and I don’t want to remind Him”.’

Unfortunately for Charlie Jones, God’s memory is sharper than any tack. He never forgets anything, except what He purposes to forget. And He never forgets any one of us. For He has created each and every one of us, unique and different from every other human being. Thus, one of the cardinal, foundational truths of human existence is that every, single human being is made in God’s image, and therefore requires respect and equal treatment to every other human being. Whether we like it or not. A whole lot of people don’t like it, and truly want to assume for themselves God’s unique prerogatives. But we all have a tendency to view

ourselves in some way or other better or more important than someone else. The true fact is, we are different. None of us have the same upbringing, the same circumstances at birth, the same worldly opportunities in our family situations. We are each different “abled”. More intelligent in one subject or discipline. More talented in one area than someone else. Some are born with the worldly proverbial silver spoon in their mouths. But none of that, none of anything, makes one whit of difference in God’s eyes. And His are the only eyes that matter. For without even one of us, the wondrous, awesome, pulsing, radiant, glowing tapestry of everlasting life in heavenly realms is darkened in one tiny place—the place designated just for us to inhabit for ever and ever. Though millions upon untold millions of us have been murdered before our time, especially the babies denied even a single glimpse of this beautiful world our God has made, yet, God always has the last word. And He will make a way where there seemingly is no way, impossible for mankind, but always possible for God, to place each of us where we were always meant to be, in His grand piece of artwork which is eternal life.

In some ways, at some infrequent times, we may think like Charlie Jones. We may have prayed for something for years and years. And seemingly nothing’s happened. So we think, “What’s the use?” And we give up. That should never be. When we give up, what are we displaying? A lack of faith. A lack of perseverance. The complete opposite of Father Abraham. He’s not called

“the father of all who believe” for nothing! In a very real sense, he is the father of faith. For consider how his faith was tested, refined, and brought forth as a gleaming nugget of pure spiritual gold. Would any of us have lasted as he did? We’re first introduced to him in Genesis 11, as a son of his father, Terah. And this mention of Terah, in itself, is remarkable. We know the trustworthy axiom regarding this one and only truly Holy Book—if it’s there, there’s a reason. If it’s weird and in there, there’s a really important reason. Well, Genesis 11 basically recaps the Lord’s judgement on the people of earth for attempting to throw Him out in favor of the worship of all kinds of other false gods, fallen angels, and even other humans themselves! The Tower of Babel, mankind’s attempt to build a structure so tall that it reached heaven, showing that mankind had become divine, was ditched mid-construction when God suddenly “flipped switches” in everyone’s brains and they no longer spoke the one and the same language. Now they coalesced into groups and spread out on the earth, the very thing that God had commanded in the very beginning.

The focus narrows down to a single bloodline, Shem’s, and his descendants all the way down to Abram, later renamed Abraham. For with Abraham’s birth, and his son, Isaac, the ancestry of the future Savior of the World commenced. The records proceed typically until Terah, Abraham’s father. Abraham is the pivotal figure, but Terah gets a whole six verses devoted to him at the chapter’s end. Why? What difference does it make who

Abraham's father was anyway? Just recording his name, like all those before him, seems sufficient. Why did Holy Spirit require this whole section relating what Terah did and didn't do?

The first odd thing we see is that Terah decided to up and move his family from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan, nearly 2,000 "highway" miles away, since there were no direct routes that crossed the desert, since people wouldn't be able to survive the trip! This was to be a long, arduous journey. I doubt that there were any United Van Lines, or regular air service between Ur and Canaan! Moving an entire household was tremendously expensive. And not just people. All their belongings, all their livestock, everything would need to go. Fortunately, Terah was apparently a very wealthy man. Otherwise, the entire idea would have been out of the question.

So he had the means. Still, why go? Leaving behind a prosperous and comfortable life in Ur, to set out for distant Canaan, whatever for? There were far better and closer places to choose. What "moved" Terah to set out for Canaan? Well, we don't really know. But we are told that they all did move, but not all the way. It says that they made it to Haran, which was about two-thirds of the way, but they stopped there for a while. Terah ended up staying there, and dying there. It says that his younger son, Haran, died there earlier. That may be one reason why Terah stayed there. Indeed, it may even be why the city is named Haran in the first place. Perhaps it was just a little place until Ter-

ah and company arrived, and then, when son Haran died there, Terah named the place “Haran” in his deceased son’s honor. Which was not unheard of.

Whatever his reasons for setting out in the first place, Terah didn’t make it to Canaan. But his most important son, Abraham, did, departing after Terah died in Haran. While the Bible doesn’t say why Terah initially decided to move to Canaan, it does say specifically that God called Abraham to move there. Terah was a pagan, probably worshipping many gods, for he was an in-demand idol sculptor. Abraham grew up in that pagan family, but at some point, he’d heard about the one, true God, and worshipped Him. Familiar with God enough that Abraham recognized when God was telling him to go to Canaan. So now we know why he wanted to go there. With Terah, perhaps God moved on him to move there, so that they made it as far as Haran, knowing that it would much easier for Abraham to make it the rest of the way. So Abraham knew God well enough to obey God’s voice.

But again, why Canaan? What’s so special about Canaan? This land that we now call the Holy Land, in those days was largely rural wilderness, populated by fierce, barbaric tribes that would as soon kill you as look at you. Apparently, there is something uniquely special about this particular piece of geography on planet earth. In fact, it probably was the location of the Garden of Eden, before the portal gates to it were shut closed, by a flaming angel standing sentry. Later, it would be the site where Abraham

would be asked to sacrifice Isaac. Even later, it would become the site of Jerusalem, and the land and nation of Israel. Even today, it's the most disputed piece of real estate in the world. Jerusalem has been conquered and reconquered some 47 times! This land has the lowest ground on the planet, the Dead Sea, itself unique among bodies of water, but at over 1,400 feet below sea level, it is thought of as the very "navel" of the earth. We truly do not yet know how truly special this land is. That God has given this land as an everlasting possession to His Chosen People proves just how exceptional it is.

In Genesis 12, God called Abraham to go there. He obeyed and went. He was a pioneer of faith. For he had no idea what lay ahead. This God he was obeying was largely unknown. Yet Abraham trusted this God, stepped out in faith, and went. That, folks, is only Abraham's first act of faith. Many more would follow, not least of which was waiting for 25 years for the promised son, Isaac, to be miraculously born to Abraham's infertile, barren wife, Sarah. By the time Isaac was a boy, Abraham's faith had grown and matured so much that he was willing and ready to sacrifice him to the Lord. This was the supreme act of faith, and because of this and all his other acts of faith, not that he didn't have his lapses now and then, for he was human after all just like us, because of his great faith, his is the pioneering faith that makes him the father of faith, of which we, yes, even us, are his descendants! Now don't you think you've got a lot to live up to?

