

LOOKING FOR A CITY

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Genesis 12:1-5 says, “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.” In Genesis 15:7, God said to Abram again, “I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.” This situation serves as one of our greatest examples of faith and obedience to God.

Abraham’s family in Ur

To be able to properly understand and appreciate the faith that Abraham had, we need to consider the background of this commandment that God gave to him. Why did God command Abram to leave his family and the only home he had ever known? Concerning Abraham’s family in Ur, God said, “*Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac*” (Josh 24:2-3; see also Neh 9:7; Acts 7:2-4; Heb 11:8-10,14-16). God took Abraham away from his native country and his physical family because they did not serve Him.

Seeking a country

At the age of 75, when Abraham was told to leave Ur (Gen 12:1-5), he “*obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went*” (Heb 11:8). Abraham obeyed, because he did not identify himself with this world. Rather, “*he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb 11:10). Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob “*all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared for them a city*” (Heb

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(continued)

11:13-16). Christians are commanded to follow this example, though *not* by physically leaving the world (John 17:11,15,18; 1 Cor 5:9-10). It would be contrary to God's purposes for Christians to be physically removed from the world (Matt 5:13-16; 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; 1 Tim 4:12). But, though we are *in* the world, we must not be *of* the world (John 17:14-16). We must not love this world or the things of this world, or else the love of the Father will not be in us (Matt 6:19-34; Luke 12:13-34; 1 Tim 6:5-12,17-19; 1 John 2:15-17). Friendship with the world is enmity with God and whoever is a friend of this world is God's enemy (Jas 4:4). Jesus prayed that God would not remove his disciples from the world, but that He would keep them from the evil that is in the world (John 17:15; see also Gal 1:4). God says, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing*" (2 Cor 6:17). "*Them*" refers to the unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-16), which is the world (1 John 5:19).

Working God's righteousness

Coming out from the world and being separate from it means that our manner of life should be completely different from the world (John 15:18-21; Jas 1:27; 1 Pet 4:3-4). That includes what we think (2 Cor 10:5), say (1 John 4:5), and do (Col 3:17). This means that we must refrain from every evil thing (John 17:15; Heb 12:1). Not being of the world also means that we must put off some things that are not necessarily sinful in and of themselves. For example, we have been commanded by God to put off all anger (Eph 4:31) even though it is not a sin by definition (Eph 4:26). The reason for this is "the anger of man works not the righteousness of God" (Jas 1:20). Therefore, even though anger is not a sin, it does not accomplish God's righteousness. This teaches us that to come out from the world, we should not only put away all sinful things but also all things that do not work God's righteousness even if they are not sinful. As the sacrificial animals were "burned without the camp" (Heb 13:11), Jesus also, "that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb 13:12). Hebrews 13:13-14 urges us, "*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.*" We must not be conformed to this world (Rom 12:1), be spotted by it (Jas 1:27), or corrupted by it (2 Pet 1:4). Like Abraham, we need to be seeking for our eternal home. Like Abraham and Jesus, we need to regard our family as "these which hear the word of God, and do it" (Luke 8:21; see also Matt 12:48-50; Mark 3:33-35; 1 Tim 3:15; 5:1-2). In Christ, we are all one (Gal 3:27-28; Col 3:10-11). We should prefer one another (Rom 12:10; Gal 6:10; 1 Pet 2:17), because this world truly is not our home. Our citizenship is in heaven (Php 3:20).