

Robert Murray M'Cheyne:

In these words, dear brethren, we have an account of the conversion of Abraham. This is the record given us of the second birth of Abraham. My dear friends, it is the second birth that will be remembered in heaven, and not the first. You know it is common for men to keep their birthdays. Now, the second birthday is what we will remember in heaven - it is what we will tell the angels in glory: "Come, hear, all ye that fear God - I'll tell what he did for my soul" — Psalm 66:16.

Let us notice from these words: (1) Abraham's conversion; (2) Abraham's trial; (3) Abraham's promise.

Abraham's Conversion

"Now the Lord had said unto Abraham"; or as Stephen says, "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham."

Let us observe first, the great sovereignty of God in the conversion of this man. We are told by Stephen that he was in Mesopotamia at the time. It is a beautiful country - an immense plain lying between the Tigris and the Euphrates. We learn from the previous chapter that it was a place of great wickedness. It was the place where Nimrod, the great robber, dwelt — or, as he is called, "the great hunter". And it was the country where they built the tower of Babel. It was also the land, as we are told by Jeremiah, of graven images. It is believed by divines that it was the place where they first bowed down to graven images. Jeremiah 50:38, "For it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols".

Another remarkable fact connected with this land was, that the very family out of which Abraham was chosen worshipped graven images. Joshua 24:2: "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time (that is, on the other side of the Euphrates) even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor; and they served other gods." Such was the country, and such the family out of which God raised Abraham. You would have thought that God would not have come into such a place; and, O brethren! you would have thought, least of all, that he would have come to the house of Terah, who served other gods! Again, you wonder why he came to Abraham. You would have thought he would have come to Terah.

Why, then, did he take Abraham — a man seventy years old — spent in sin? — "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" — Matthew 11: 26. When he looked down upon that great plain, why did he come to the house of Terah, and say to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee"? Ah, brethren, God is a God of grace. None of you can say, "He came to me because I sought him." How often has God come into this place and gone into the most wicked family, and drawn out those that were deepest down in the pit, just to show how deep his hand could reach?

But notice who it was that converted him: "The Lord had said unto Abraham". Stephen tells it more fully: "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham." I have no doubt that it was the same glorious person that appeared to Jacob at the top of the ladder, and blessed him. I have no doubt that it was the same that met with Jacob when it said, "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day ... and he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh; and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" — Genesis 32:26. I have no doubt but that it was the same that appeared to Saul when on his way to Damascus. So, in like manner, it was the same God of glory that appeared unto Abraham, and said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee."

Brethren, all conversion comes from God. You might rather expect the icebergs of the Atlantic to melt without the sun than expect a sinner's heart to change without God. Brethren, it was not Abraham that sought him, but the God of glory that came to him and said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If Abraham hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me" — Revelation 3:20. It is not you that seek his face, but he that seeks you. Brethren, it is not a minister's coming to you that will save you. Who sat under a godlier minister than Judas? Yet he got no grace by it.

But, further, it is said "the God of glory appeared unto him". This is what Christ says: "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad" — John 8:56. I do not pretend to say how much was revealed to him. It is curious to remark how much Christ reveals himself to some. "The first time," said one, "that I remember of ever tasting of the sweetness and blessedness of the gospel was in reading these words: "Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." Never words of Scripture appeared to me like these words; they came into my soul with such power and tenderness, and I

longed to possess such a being as my God." Such was the experience of one of the most eminent saints that ever lived. It perhaps was such that Abraham got, and that made him leave his father's house. And, brethren, it is the same truth that will convert a soul now. You may be moved with fear, as Noah was, but you must be drawn by love. I believe that never a soul was converted without a sight of the God of glory.

I have just one observation more on this part of the subject, and that is the almighty power by which it was done. You will see this very evidently shown in Isaiah 41:2: "Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings?" etc. Notice also what is said in chapter 51:1, 2:

Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord; look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you; for I called him alone and blessed him, and increased him.

Now, in these two passages you will notice that God says it was he himself that called Abraham. And observe the words used are very remarkable — I found him like a rock, yet I melted the rock. God found him fallen down to graven images, and he called him to his foot. My dear friends, this is the way God does with every soul whom he converts. God finds you like a rock; yet of these stones he raises up children to Abraham. This is my only hope of those of you who are unconverted. I have no hope of the words of man; but I would trust in God my hope is in his Word. He that raised up the righteous man is able to call you, and make you willing in the day of his power.

Abraham's Trial

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee." The trial of Abraham was twofold: First, he was tried in what he was to leave; Second, in that he did not know where he was to go.

(1) In what he was to leave. "Get thee out of thy country." One's country is dear to him. The Greenlander loves his icy region, and the Arab loves his sterile sand, and we love our own brown hills. But God said to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country." And every man loves his kindred. We do not like to bid those we love farewell. "Will strangers care for them? Will strangers be kind to them?" are thoughts that occur to our mind. Yet this was God's command to Abraham — "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred." But the worst was yet to come — "Out of thy father's house". We love our father's house. Our father's house is dear to us. I do not envy the man that does not love his father's house. Yet God said, "Get thee out of thy father's house."

(2) But there was a second trial. He did not know where he was to go. "Unto a land that I will show thee." What kind of a land is it, Lord? — "I will show thee." Will the people be kind? — "I will show thee." Was it north, east, south or west? — He did not know. "He went out not knowing whither he went." "Get thee unto a land that I will show thee." Who can tell the deep anxiety that appeared in Abraham's countenance and tossed in his bosom, as he walked before his father's house that night he got the command to go? Ah! brethren, this is what every converted soul has to undergo: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." I will tell you what you will have to leave, if you will follow Christ.

First, you must leave the esteem of your friends. I do not say you should leave your father's house bodily. God forbid! But you must leave their esteem. Perhaps they loved you as a friend, as a wife, as a husband; but the more they loved you they will now hate you the more. The mother hates the viper that stung her child; so will they hate you. Do not be surprised at this. "If any man will not leave father and mother and all, for my sake and the gospel, he cannot be my disciple" — Luke 14:26; Mark 10:29. Brethren, do not think I am telling you stories. If the God of glory appears to you, you will find it true.

Another thing is, you will have to leave the company of the ungodly. I do not say, if you are in an ungodly family you are to leave it. No, but you are not to mix with ungodly families.

Another thing you will have to leave is your idols. Abraham did this. You must break your idols in pieces. "Come out from among them" — 2 Corinthians 6:17. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house."

And, O brethren! you must leave them for an unseen Saviour and an unseen heaven. Remember you must walk with an unseen Saviour. Some of you will say, What will be given me? He will give you joy and peace. Remember also, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him" — I John 3:2.

Abraham's Promise

"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 the families of the earth be blessed" verses 2-3. We have here six blessings following one another.

(1) "I will make thee a great nation." God was taking him out of a great nation; but he said, "I will make of thee a great nation." So he says to all that he calls, "I will make you one of a righteous nation" - "I will make of thee a great nation."

(2) "I will bless thee." God did not tell him where he was going, what enemies he would meet with, what trials he would encounter, yet he said, "I will bless thee." This is what God says to you — If you are willing to leave all for Christ, "I will bless thee". Perhaps your friends will curse thee, but "I will bless thee".

(3) "I will make thy name great." When he went from his father's house, he went where his name was not known; and, perhaps, they mocked him when he went away; but God called him "my friend" - Isaiah 41:8. So perhaps it will be with you; yet God will make thy name great.

(4) "And thou shalt be a blessing." Abraham had been a curse by his example — he had worshipped graven images; but God said he would be a blessing. So he says to you, brethren, No doubt you have been a curse — no doubt you have led many to hell by your wicked example; yet I will make thee a blessing — a blessing to your children, a blessing to your wife, a blessing to your neighbours, a blessing to the world; the world will miss you when you die.

(5) "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." Abraham was to meet friends and enemies. There were some in another land that would be kind to the stranger, and there were some that would cast him out. "Well," says God, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." God is with thee, Abraham; God is thy wall of fire. Ah, brethren! it is sweet to have God's blessing.

(6) "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This last promise was fulfilled when out of Abraham's loins Christ was born. It cannot be performed to us in the same way; but yet it can in one way. If you are Christ's then, wherever you are, you will be a blessing.

O brethren! if you would follow Christ, count the cost. The Lord enable you to count the cost. Amen.

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