

Series: God & Abraham #1101

Title: *The Hebrews Are a Pilgrimage People*

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Welcome to our study – well not so much a study as an expedition, a trip with God and Abraham. Soon we will pick up our Bibles and read of this man Abraham, originally Abram, and the God who was his God. We read of them back in the Genesis, this great Book of beginnings. And there we will travel with them, pack our bags and go. That's what happens when we read of the Hebrews. We find that these beloved people always seem to be traveling, always on the move, never stagnant, and often exiled.

Pause and think about them. The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Genesis 11 we read that, **“³¹ Terah took Abram his son...and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran and settled there.** There is a traveling family; on the move, together with one another, following (as it turns out) *God* at the head of their caravan.

Just this one pilgrimage takes them from Ur all the way up the coast of Mesopotamia to Haran and from there the left turn into the land of Canaan then through Canaan (places like Shechem and Bethel and Ai) and through the Negev all the way down to Egypt! That was hundreds of miles. What a trek. The biblical record has them moving through this vast territory so quickly that, until we get the maps out, we may not realize just how far this family has gone. And we will, obviously, come back to this chapter in Abraham's life.

And then there is Isaac, Abraham's son. You will likely remember something about him, and when you do will you recall that he was on the move when famine struck and Isaac picked up and went to Gerar? That's where the Philistines lived and their king Abimelech ruled, down along the southwest coast of Canaan. The Lord appeared to Isaac and told him not to go as far as Egypt. And God said, **“Sojourn in this land.”** Sojourn, that *great* word certainly speaks of staying somewhere temporarily. The promise from God to Isaac continued. God said, **“I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and your descendants I will give all these lands.”**

But then there was the matter of Isaac's success on the land as he became very rich and wealthy. That led to a dispute over wells (wells that he dug in the ground and from which he got water). Eventually Isaac gets moving again this time to Beersheba.

The Patriarchs were always on the move. The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and of course Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham! Jacob, who as he was being born grabbed the heel of his brother Esau, and then (later) stole his brother's birth right as well. That meant that he could not say where he was and so he took off for Haran at Paddan-aram. That's a trip of more than 400 miles. And on the way he came to a certain place, later identified as Bethel, where Jacob made a pillow out of stones and laid down to sleep, and in his dream there was the ladder with the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And God spoke to Jacob.

I will read a little of the text now in Genesis chapter 28, verses 20 and 21, **“²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹ and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God.'** Listening carefully to that we hear the vocabulary of a man on a journey. Jacob's life is action packed. It is edge of your seat reading. There is never a dull moment. He's a man on the go and we go right along with him. That's the way it is when we read of the Hebrews.

Well, God was with Jacob and one thing leads to another and to another place and eventually there is the conflict that arises between Jacob and Laban and sure enough, when Jacob saw that the attitude of Laban was not as friendly as before again the voice of God reached Jacob. The Lord said, **“Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”** Jacob was on a round-trip. And so he sets

off, and then Laban pursued him, and then (with trepidation) Jacob meets Esau, and Jacob settled in Shechem and then moved again, this time to Bethel. Jacob on the move, with God.

And then we continue to read in Genesis of that next generation, principally of Jacob's son Joseph (who was also well travelled, at first by force). And we find that Jacob has had to move down into Egypt where he eventually dies before his body is brought back to Canaan and buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham (his grandfather) had bought as the family plot. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are buried there together.

It is not strange that in Deuteronomy chapter 26 and verse 5 Jacob is referred to as (quote), **"...a wandering Aramean."** A wandering Aramean. The Hebrew people are indeed a people who have historically wandered. And speaking of wandering, surely you will recall what happened to them in the wilderness for a period of forty years? We turn the page from Genesis to Exodus and we read of...the Exodus out of Egypt. The Israelites are on the move.

And this continues all throughout the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. We travel along as witnesses during the forced migrations of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities and exiles, for example. There are deportations and scatterings and there is a hard life under the rulers in those distant and pagan lands. And even then we read about the dynamic relationship between God and His people. God in motion, God in action. There is even the Books of the Chronicles, a chronicling of the Hebrew people's activities and events.

We come then to the New Testament and the Gospels and still our Jewish friends are always active and moving. Think immediately of our Lord, the Jew, Jesus Christ. Do you remember that He was born in Bethlehem to Mary His mother and to Joseph His earthly (His human) father. And no sooner is Jesus born then the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, **"Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."** ¹⁴ **So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.** ¹⁵ **He remained there until the death of Herod."**

There goes the baby Jesus, fleeing in the care of His parents, also all the way down to Egypt, just like the forefathers had done. And in the life and ministry of Jesus, back in Israel, there is constant movement. Jesus does not let the grass grow under His feet. So much walking, and hiking, a great traversing of the whole land – north and south, east and west. The disciples, all of them Jews, get in on the action following Jesus Christ wherever He leads them. Again, the Hebrew people always moving. Never staying put in one place for very long.

Let's take just one example. In Mark's Gospel, chapter 8 and verse 22 Jesus and the disciples came to Bethsaida. Mark 8.22 begins, **"And they came to Bethsaida..."** There, Jesus heals a blind man in a remarkable way. And *then*, still in Mark chapter 8 at verse 27 we read this, ²⁷ **Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi..."** So between Mark 8, verse 22 and Mark 8, verse 27 Jesus and the disciples have moved from Bethsaida at the northeast end of the Sea of Galilee to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, which are (listen to this) *25 miles* from Bethsaida. Caesarea Philippi is 25 miles north of Bethsaida. And the Lord and His followers walked it!

Caesarea Philippi is all the way up near Mount Hermon by the ancient Israelite town of Dan, all of which you can see if you will look at a map in your Bible (usually the maps are at the back of the Bible).

My point is these Jews were always on the move and they walked vast distances. Most of us get winded and upset if we have to walk somewhere when our car breaks down. But for Jesus walking many miles was a daily occurrence. In fact, as you read the Gospels next time, have a map out beside the Bible and as you read follow along on the map. The distances are great.

And when we get past the Gospels and we continue in the New Testament and we come to the next Book of the Bible, called *The Acts* of the Apostles. Notice the name of this Book: *Acts*. This will be a New Testament church, largely made up of Jewish Christians, and they too will *act*; they will be in motion!

My point is that when we join in with Abraham on his adventures with God, we must get involved. We should get swept up in this great, moving, and epic story. We should allow for Abraham's experiences with God to inform our own experiences with the Lord God. Because here too we meet the God who is not stagnant. He is not standoffish. Oh no, He is actively involved in the lives of His people. He is engaging, indeed even comes right down and meets with Abraham and talks with him. So, I end where I began, this is not so much a study as an expedition, a trip with God and Abraham.

So, come along, and join us tomorrow as we continue to discover who God Is!

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