

## THE MAN WHO STARTED BUT NEVER ARRIVED

Genesis 11:10-32

After the flood, when men began to multiply and increase in the earth, it was not very long before they began to turn aside from the living God. When scattered over the earth after the confusion of tongues at Babel, they very rapidly traveled along the downgrade till they worshiped strange gods. The nations wandered each a different way, but all the downward road. Yet, grace had not ended its reign. God had determined to reveal Himself and to establish the worship of Himself in the world. He would select a family to be His peculiar servants, manifest Himself to the father of that family and make a covenant with him. He would reveal to him the great things which He intended to do in the fulness of time, and He would command him to hand down the revelation to his children from generation to generation. This family should grow into a nation, and to that nation should be committed the oracles of God. Out of that nation should come prophets, priests and heroes, who should believe in God and maintain the true faith against all comers, even until the Son of God Himself should come to manifest the glory of God in a pre-eminent degree.

Verses 10-26, which consist of a genealogy, form the fifth section of the book of Genesis. With regard to this genealogy, the family represented in it was God's instrument for fulfilling His promise of redemption to the race. In this family the purpose of God was being carried out in spite of the threatening events of Babel and of any other opposition of Satan. The members of this family, who were carrying out the redemptive purpose of God, were, in some cases at least, unconscious of it. Some were believers who followed the will of God step by step while others were heathen. People cannot know the extent of their influence nor in what way God will make use of it.

In verse 27 begins the sixth section of Genesis, which deals with the life of Abraham. This section continues through Genesis 25:11. The closing six verses of chapter 11 form an introduction to this section and deal with Terah's family.

Haran begat Lot. Lot plays a large part in the story that follows. It seems that the descendants of Shem took great pains to preserve their racial purity, which was in line with the purpose of God. He had called on His people to be separate from the world.

Sarai, who was barren, illustrates the wonderful work of the Spirit of God in giving life to a dead soul and raising it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness.

Terah was not the first man whose title to fame rests on a famous son, nor is he the last. Terah is best known as the father of Abraham. There is an old saying to the effect that "Sons hit the mark their fathers aimed at." It is entirely possible to think that Abram hit the mark at which Terah aimed.

God's Word does not tell us very much about Terah. It does imply several things about him. Alexander Whyte referred to him as "the humble-hearted, the useful-hearted, the brave-hearted and the believing-hearted" old father.

There are two striking and deeply significant statements in the text. The first is, "They went forth . . . to go into the land of Canaan." The second is, "They came unto Haran and dwelt there." He took Abram and the rest of his family and started to go into Canaan, but he stopped and lingered in Haran. Perhaps their equipment had become worn and needed to be repaired. Perhaps there was sickness in the family or among the servants. Perhaps the pasture lands of Haran were very fertile and unusually attractive.

In the absence of definite information as to the motives which induced it, this sudden stoppage of their journey at Haran is usually ascribed to one of three things:

1. The irresolution of Terah.

Some think that he, having become weary by the fatigues and perils of the way, and having found a comfortable location for himself and the flocks, preferred to bring his wandering to a close, as many a noble enterprise has been wrecked through weak-kneed vacillation, and many a Christian pilgrimage has been shortened by faint-hearted indecision.

2. The unbelief of Terah.

Some believe that Terah, in the first flush of excitement produced by Abram's call, had started on the outward journey with strong faith and great zeal, but, as enthusiasm subsided and faith declined, was easily persuaded to halt at Haran--an emblem of other pilgrims who began their heavenly journey well but paused in mid career through the cooling of their ardor and the declining of their piety.

3. The infirmity of Terah.

Some ascribe his halting to the fact that he was an old man and unable further to prosecute his journey to the promised land, thus making the delay at Haran a beautiful act of filial piety on the part of Abram and an imperious necessity on the part of Terah.

Whatever the cause it is a fact that Terah stopped in Haran and never went any farther.

Without exercising our imaginations too much, we may see in Terah a certain type of character and a certain weakness of disposition that we should earnestly seek to avoid.

Terah is a type of all men:

I. Who Just Miss Success.

Are you impressed with the number of men who just come short of being real victors in life? There are preachers who just miss success. It is said of one that, "He just missed being a great preacher." What was lacking one could hardly say, for everything seemed so excellent. He had a good voice, a wonderful command of English and a fine personality, but he just could not put it across. The combined result was that he just came short of being a great preacher.

There are doctors who just miss success. It was said of one that, "He just missed being a great surgeon." He was a wonderfully gifted man, perhaps the brightest man in his line in all his community, but he lacked something--a little initiative, faithfulness, concentration on his work, keeping up with the progress in his profession.

This is true of many in all the other professions or callings.

II. Who Leave A Job Half Done.

There are plenty of people like that today. A man starts to build a house. He is enthusiastic about it. He is greatly interested in it, but he turns to something else and leaves the job half done and unfinished.

Many will start any number of things. Such a person goes into new projects with enthusiasm, but his interest cools and he is distracted by other things. He is not a success, because he rarely finishes a job. One goes to college, but he does not finish. He drifts around from one thing to another. He is a lovable person, but his habit of beginning jobs and never finishing them keeps him from being a success. Like Terah, he leaves his work half done.

III. Who Put Off Until Tomorrow What Should Be Done Today.

It is very significant that Terah's name means delay. Bible names are always significant. In Bible times a man's name was changed if it did not fit his character. Abram's name was changed to Abraham; Jacob's name was changed to Israel; Simon's name was changed to Peter; Saul's name was changed to Paul. In each case the change of name indicated a change of character.

Terah may have started life with another name, and because he developed the trait of procrastination his friends began to call him by the nickname, Terah, which means delay. He has always been known as the man who delayed.

There is no more fatal flaw in character than procrastination. There are numerous Bible characters who had this trait. Pharaoh went to Moses and earnestly besought him to ask God to remove one of the plagues which was cursing his land. Moses said, "When shall I pray to the Lord?" Pharaoh said, "Tomorrow." The habit of putting off until tomorrow what should be done today is a guarantee of certain failure.