

THE MAN WHO STARTED BUT NEVER ARRIVED

"And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." Genesis 11:31.

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 father's aimed at." It is entirely possible to think that Abraham hit the mark which Terah aimed at.

The Bible does not tell us much about Terah. It does imply several things about him. Alexander Whyte spoke of 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 had 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.

I. He Is A Type Of All Men 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.

There are artists who just miss success. This is true of many in all the other professions or callings. Terah is a type who just missed success.

II. He Is A Type Of All Men 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. He Is A Type Of All Men Who Put Off Until Tomorrow What Should Be Done Today.

It is deeply significant that Terah's name means delay. Bible names are always significant. If a man's name did not fit his character in Bible times his name was changed. Simon's name was changed to Peter; Saul's name was changed to Paul; Abram's name was changed to Abraham; Jacob's name was changed to Israel. 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 come down in history as the man who delayed.

There is no more fatal flaw in character than procrastination. We find many Bible types of the same 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 favorite word of the average Mexican is mañana, which means "tomorrow". The habit of putting off until tomorrow what should be done today is a characteristic of the Mexican. It is also a guarantee of certain failure.

Felix was deeply convicted of sin and came face to face with Paul's offer of salvation through Christ. Instead of accepting this offer, he said, "When I have convenient season, I will call for thee." Many souls have remained lost and gone the downward way in the same manner. More people have gone to hell because of procrastination than for any other reason.