

PREACHING FROM THE BIBLE

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Journey Toward the Eternal Country

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On August 5, 2011, the Juno spacecraft was launched by NASA to explore Jupiter. Juno is capable of reaching speeds up to 165,000 mph [1], [2]. After a journey of almost five years, covering almost 1.8 billion miles in space, Juno entered Jupiter's orbit on July 4, 2016. (To watch real time video on the mission, you can download a free app from NASA [3].)

Juno is the fastest man-made object at this time compared to the man-made vehicles we normally travel in that have an average speed not over 65 mph. In fact, if you think about it, we are actually on a huge, fully equipped spaceship created by God called Earth, which moves at an average speed of 515,000 mph. In other words, within just one tick of a clock, we are traveling 143 miles per second. With that speed, we only need less than five seconds to go from Hanoi to Saigon, a distance of about 707 miles.

Each one of us, since the day we were formed in our mothers' wombs, are in cosmic journeys with high speeds and long routes, of which we have no choice.

The first journey, which repeats the most in our life, is the journey that lasts about every 24 hours following the self-rotating tracks of the earth. If we are living on the equator, the invisible line dividing the northern and southern hemispheres of the earth, then the speed of the journey is about 1,040 mph and the distance covered is about 24,901 miles. The speed and the distance gradually reduce as we move toward the North Pole or the South Pole. If we live up to 100 years, then this journey will repeat about 36,500 times.

The second journey lasts one year, about 365.256 days, and covers a distance of about 584,000 miles. This journey is the time and distance the earth moves around the sun in one cycle. The average speed is about 67,000 mph. We can only repeat this journey a little more than 120 times, depending on our longevity. The only person in the world who completed this journey 123 times is a Bolivian man. According to NBC News, his 123rd birthday was on July 16, 2013 [4].

The third journey, with an average speed of 515,000 mph, is the journey of our solar system around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy. No one among us will live long enough in our current body of flesh to complete this journey because it takes 230,000,000 years for our solar system to move around the center of our galaxy in one cycle.

The fourth journey, with an average speed of 250,000 mph, is the journey of the Milky Way

Galaxy traveling toward the Andromeda Galaxy. The distance between them is about four billion light years. A light year is a distance of 5,878,499,810,000 miles [5], [6], [7].

With these four cosmic journeys, we are basically on a spaceship called Earth, created by God, rapidly moving in space toward four different directions with four different average speeds simultaneously: 1,040 mph, 67,000 mph, 250,000 mph, and 515,000 mph. Additionally, we can consider our own movements in the locality of where we live on Earth: going up or down, forward or backward, moving right to left or left to right, etc., with varying speeds.

However, there is one more journey which happens only once that each person must attend: it is the journey into eternity. This journey is beyond the physical world we currently know which consists of time, space, and matter. For many people, the destination of their journey is the eternal lake of fire whether or not they believe it exists or do not want to go there. The lake of fire, or hell, is the eternal country destined for those who do not believe in God and obey Him. We can call this journey: the journey into damnation! For some of us, the destination of their journey is the eternal kingdom of God in the new heavens and new earth. We can call this alternative eternal journey: the journey into the true country! The eternal journey one will partake in completely depends on that person's earthly journey, which consists of the choices he makes while living in this body of flesh.

The journey into the true country is written in the Biblical book of Hebrew, chapter 11, verses 13-16:

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded by them and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they are seeking a fatherland.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a City.

“These all” in verse 13 were people who believed in God, obeyed and worshiped Him in the old times, and were faithful to Him unto death or unto being rapture out of the world by Him as mentioned in the previous verses. They are Abel, Enoch (the one who was raptured by God while he was still alive), Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. The Bible called them saints, meaning the ones who God separated and sanctified for Himself, who enjoyed His love, and who served Him.

God directly gave each of them His promises because during their times, the Scripture did not exist, yet. The saints accepted His promises in their hearts, saw the promises with the eyes of their faith, and they were persuaded by the promises and embraced them. The sight by the eyes of faith is the knowledge about the things one hopes for and trusts that he will receive

based on the promises of God:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
(Hebrews 11:1).

For the rest of their life, the saints no longer desired things of the world, but sought things in Heaven (Colossians 3:1) which God promised them. They clearly understood that the things on Earth were only substances God gave them in order for them to achieve the things that are in heaven. In contrast, today, many children of God are given things on earth from God as a means for them to participate in the work of building the Church; however, they hold their earthly possessions as their own treasures and in high esteem which makes them forget about the road to the heavenly country.

In Biblical Greek, the noun “fatherland” in verse 14 refers to the country of one's fathers or the permanent place of one's home. This world is not the fatherland or country of God's saints regardless of the fact that they were born into this world and lived in this world. Their existence began in the world and they needed to live their life in the world, but at the same time they were on the journey into eternity to reach the place they called their fatherland, their true country. That place is Heaven where God is; it's a place they can call “our Father house”, the Jerusalem in heaven built by God (Hebrews 11:10) and prepared by Jesus for them (John 14:2). Jesus Christ Himself declared that they are not of the world:

“I have given them Thy Word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” (John 17:14-16).

If the saints considered the world their country like those who do not know God, then they would not have longed for another country. They would not miss the opportunities to build up their earthly assets just as those who do not know God. They would have given all they had for the sake of this life, put their minds, aspirations, and abilities for the things in this life in order to build their country on earth.

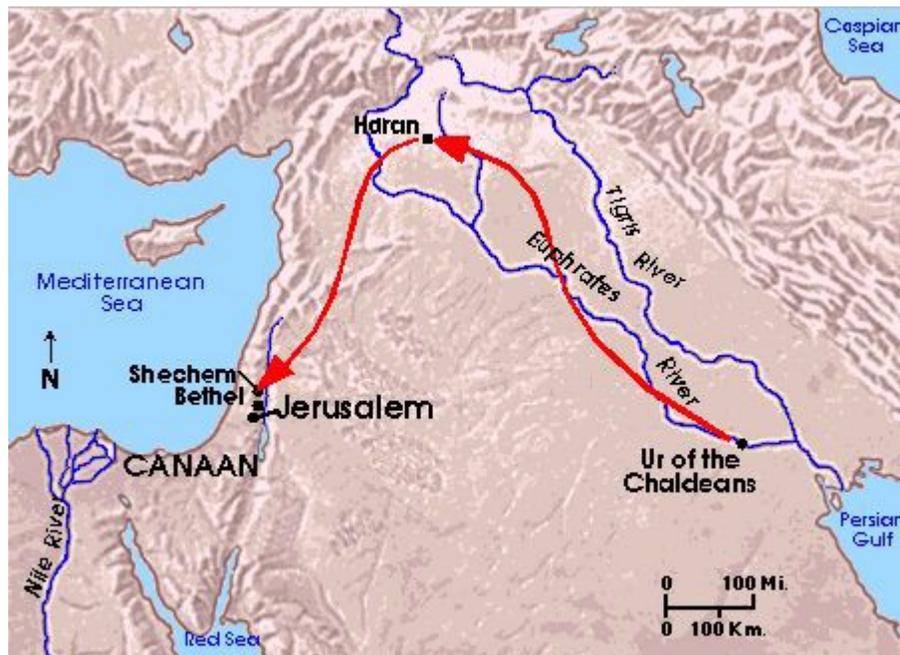
Since God's saints did not consider the world their country, they had a reason to be eager for another country and dedicate all of their life and energy toward the journey for that country. God blessed them with the essentials to live in this world and to have what they needed in order to pursue their journey toward the heavenly country. If God gave them more than enough and made them rich in materials, then they understood that He put those things in their hands as means to help others and to take care of the cost of carrying out ministries of the Church. The saints no longer dedicated their lives for their earthly country, but rather spent all their lives worshipping God and preparing for the true country; they did not seek the opportunity to return to the earthly country. They only longed for a better country built by God and prepared by the Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven. As a result of the saints' strong resolve toward their heavenly journey, God was not ashamed when they confessed that He is their God.

We, those who truly repent of our sins, fully believe in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ, wholeheartedly obey the commandments of God, live a holy life according to the Word of God, which is the Bible, are the saints of God, and have our shares in the heavenly country. Our life in this world is the journey toward that country. There are two metaphors about the journey towards the fatherland: Abraham is a metaphor for the journey of each of the saints; Israel is a metaphor for the journey of the Church. Both were called by God.

Abraham and the Saints

God called Abraham to leave Haran for Canaan. Before that, Terah, Abraham's father, took his family from Ur of the Chaldeans, which was the old Babylonian Empire, currently in Iraq), to go into the land of Canaan. Ur is speculated to be the land just outside of the Garden of Eden, where men lived after God evicted them from the garden because of their sin. Haran, currently in Turkey, is the land located northeast of Canaan.

According to Genesis 11:31, Terah and his family moved from Ur and headed for Canaan, but only reached Haran before he stayed and died there. After Terah's death, God called Abraham, saying, *"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.'" (Genesis 12:1).*



Source: http://www.bible-archaeology.info/images/haran_map.jpg

In regards to Terah, we can say that he served as a metaphor for people who look up to God with a pure heart. Since Terah desired a better country, he led his family out of Ur to go to the rich land of Canaan. Ur symbolized a sinful life which lacked the truth while Canaan

symbolized a true country that flowed with the milk and honey of truth. Looking at the illustrated map above, we see that Terah strayed from his original goal. Instead of going to Canaan located in the west, Terah was sidetracked. Instead, he went to Haran in the North West, and he decided to stay there because he was content with the land's wealth. Haran symbolized the religions, beliefs, and philosophies of man. The inhabitants consisted of people lulled with false peace from their superstition, deeds of merit, or from the practice of their religion's ceremony rituals. Keep in mind, one can only be at peace *temporarily* when a fortune teller gives out a good reading, or when they do good works, or when they attend religious ceremonies, chant mantras, worship and create idols and statues, wear amulets, sprinkle "holy water", etc.

In the world, there are always people like Terah who want to find the truth, but then lose their way due to their immersion in man's systems of religion, beliefs, or philosophy. This diversion from their true path gives these people false peace and false salvation. Terah and his family were spiritually lost in Haran as they immersed themselves in the spiritual drugs of that land.

One of Satan's biggest deceptions is a theory targeted at Asian countries called Western Paradise. According to this theory, among ten trillion (10,000,000,000,000) Buddha realms, there exists a world of perfection called the Peaceful and Happy Country. This world is said to be created by a Buddha named Amitābha, and it is located to the west of this world. According to Buddhism, a Buddha realm called "three worlds" has $1,000 \times 1,000 \times 1,000 =$ one billion physical and spiritual worlds which are full of entities such as gods, Buddhas, demons, humans, and other creatures. According to Buddhism, the Western Paradise does not have evil or death, and is full of fragrance, heavenly flowers, heavenly music, and all kinds of jewels. Everyone who wants to enter the Western Paradise just needs to wholeheartedly recite the following mantra ten times when he or she is about to die: "Namo Amitābha Buddha!" In order to have enough strength to recite the mantra ten times on their death bed, one must practice and recite it daily.

"Namo" is an interjection in Sanskrit, an ancient language of India, which means "to pay homage." The word "Buddha" is also a Sanskrit word which means "enlightened" or refers to someone who is aware and recognizes all things. In this context, awareness and recognition means to be awoken from the lust for the things in this world which are impermanent illusions and to know how to self-correct to obtain salvation from all suffering. Self-correction is to do good works to pay for your sins and to make yourself a better person. The word "Amitābha" is another Sanskrit word which means "the infinite light and immeasurable life" or glory and life without limits. According to Buddhist teachings, Buddha Amitābha was a man from an ancient time who practiced self-correction as he lived countless lives (he was reincarnated so many times, it is impossible to count the number of lives he lived) until he became a Buddha (one enlightened). Then, he created the Western Paradise to give others a short cut to achieve salvation from suffering and reincarnation. Through this short-cut, people would not have to undergo countless attempts of self-correction through their reincarnated lives. Once one enters the Western Paradise, one needs to continue self-correction in order to achieve the nirvana state. Nirvana is a noun from Sanskrit which means "extinguished." According to Buddhism, this implies the extinction all desire, hatred, and ignorance of a person; that person no longer needs to be reincarnate in any other world or to continue to experience death. Thus, one is completely saved from suffering.

The mantra: "Namo Amitābha Buddha" means "homage to the boundless light and infinite life!" If we remember that Satan, the archangel who sinned against God, is also called Lucifer

(Isaiah 14:12) which means “the light bearer,” then we know who is the boundless light and infinite life mentioned in the mantra.

According to statistics in 2010, the world has about 535 million followers of Buddhism. Here are the number of followers according to each country: China has more than 244 million, Thailand has more than 64 million, Japan has nearly 46 million, Burmese has more than 38 million, Sri Lanka and Vietnam has over 14 million each, Cambodia has more than 13 million, South Korea has more than 11 million, India has more than 9 million, Malaysia has more than 5 million, and more than 27 million are scattered in other countries [8]. Buddhism is obviously a great spiritual Haran of the Asian population.

All *religions* in the name of God's church today, such as the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, Protestant Churches, etc. also belong to the spiritual Haran! Instead of keeping the commandments of God, these churches bend, corrupt, and reject them!

Regarding Abraham, we can say that he served as a metaphor for people who are part of the systems of religion, beliefs, or philosophy of their ancestors, but are being called by God to abandon them all and to come to His truth. God only told Abraham that He would show him the land that He wanted him to go to, and Abraham believed Him. Abraham brought his whole family to embark on the journey of which the Bible said in Hebrews 11:8, "he went out, not knowing whither he went." According to the promise of God, Abraham only knew that he would go to a better place and that his descendants would become a great and famous nation to enjoy God's blessings; they would be a blessing to other nations (Genesis 12:1-2). The phrase "he went out, not knowing whither he went" implies that Abraham trusted God. He did not need to sit back and set the schedule for his trip or need to decide where to go from where he stayed, when to go, or when to rest. He only followed the guidance of God.

When God led Abraham to Canaan, the land He promised to give to him and his descendants, Abraham lived there as a sojourner. He considered it a temporary country and he was waiting for a better one. The Bible said:

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Hebrews 11:9-10).

Like Abraham, when we respond to God who calls us to come to His truth, we need to leave the entire systems of religion, beliefs, and philosophy which our fathers considered their spiritual country. "Thy country" is the system of religion, beliefs, and philosophy. "Thy kindred" is the people who live in the same system; they are the followers and the believers. "Thy father's house" is the spiritual inheritance of the family which the fathers built on those systems. There are people whose families, for many generations, have members who are priests, pastors, deacons, venerable buddhists, or monks, for example. Those of us in the current generation may have master's degrees or doctorates in theology, Buddhism, or philosophy, just to name a few. Those of us who identify with these kinds of people and wish to know God must abandon all of these things because these positions, objects, and ideas can stand in the way of the truth. In other words, we must abandon the worldly sentiments that distract us from truly seeking God.

Even if we come to the truth of God's Word, the spiritual Canaan, and the new life in the salvation of Jesus Christ, we should do not consider these destinations as the final

destination of the spiritual journey because our true country is Jerusalem in heaven. In the spiritual Canaan, we must be careful to keep a holy life that is faithful to the commandments of God until we reach the happy, eternal country in heaven. Do not be like Lot who reached Canaan with Abraham, but longed for the prosperity of the world and ended up yoked together with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Keep in mind that it is not necessary to consider every single detail of Abraham's life as part of the metaphor for what is in store for the lives of the saints. Rather, it is critical to understand some of the major events of his life through which we can draw spiritual lessons from. One of the most important events in the life of Abraham is when he obeyed the commandment of God and was willing to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering to Him. Abraham's son was a wonderful gift from God since having a male heir was one of his greatest desires in his old age. Suddenly, God commanded Abraham to offer his beloved son as a burnt offering. When you read Genesis 22, just put yourself in the shoes of Abraham, and you will feel that your hearts are incredibly touched by the submission of Abraham to God. He listened to the command of God with no questions and no arguments. He quietly did as God commanded him. When we read Hebrews 11: 17-19, we are assured that Abraham acted by faith:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called,' accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from whence he also received him, in a figurative sense.”

On our journey toward the heavenly country, there will certainly come a time when God asks us to give Him what we love the most, sometimes what we love even more than our own life. Will we be loving and obedient enough to God as Abraham was? Will we have absolute faith in God as Abraham did? The sad fact in the Church today is that there are too many people who enjoy a little money, a good job, a little fame, someone they love, a certain pleasure, etc. more than loving God. They are ready to violate the commandments of God in order to have what they want, much less to sacrifice something they love more than their own lives for God's sake.

Israel and the Church

The Church is the unity of the saints of God. Although each of the saints is separately called to enter the eternal kingdom of God, they will come together as one in the kingdom. While the journey of Abraham is the journey of an individual to lead his family to the promised land, the journey of the people of Israel is the journey of a nation known as the holy people of God (Deuteronomy 7: 6). We can say that the journey of the people of Israel from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan is a metaphor for the journey of the Church toward the heavenly country.

The people of Israel going out of Egypt is a metaphor for the Church going out of the slavery of sin, out of the worldly life.

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam are metaphors for those who are appointed by God to shepherd His people.

Canaan, the promised country of the people of Israel where the temple of God would exist in their midst and where they will live happily in the love of God, is a metaphor for the eternal

kingdom of the holy city of Jerusalem in heaven, which will descend from heaven on the new earth and where God will be with men forever.



Illustration of Israel's journey from Rameses of Egypt to Jericho of Canaan
Source: <http://www.keyway.ca/gif/wildjour.gif>

Pharaoh pursuing Israel is a metaphor for the world's persecution of the Church for daring to separate itself from the world. The miracle of the Red Sea is a metaphor for the truth that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18).

Israel murmuring and blaming the leaders when there was a lack of food and drinking water and when they were craving meat is the metaphor for lacking faith in the providence of God for all physical needs in life.

God providing the Ten Commandments and the laws to the people of Israel is a metaphor for His commandments and laws that will be inscribed in each of the new hearts of God's people in the Church (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36: 26-27; Hebrews 8:10).

The Tabernacle is a metaphor for the body of the saints, as individuals and as the Church,

becoming the temple of God.

The priesthood of the Levites is a metaphor for the priesthood of the saints in the Church.

The creation of a golden calf statue is a metaphor for the many people in the Church who want to worship God according to their own ways based on pagan customs, especially the inclusion of Christmas and Easter ceremonies.

The hardened hearts among the people of Israel and their rebellion against Moses is a metaphor for the hardened hearts and rebellion among the majority of God's children in the Church. Many people in the Church, when faced with the difficulties of life, want to return to their old, sinful lifestyles to satisfy the lust of the flesh or to avoid persecution from the world. Many people in the Church fear hardship, suffering, and are afraid of the enemies of the Church; they do not want to continue their journey, so they cannot enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14).

There are people who join the Church because of their pride and envy just like Korah and his followers. They all will be destroyed by God (Numbers 16).

The fiery serpents are metaphors for the Devil's efforts to tempt the Church to sin collectively. The bronze serpent is a metaphor for God's mercy. Thankfully, God is always merciful and extends His forgiveness even after punishment.

Israel falling into Balaam's scheme and committing fornication with the Moabites are metaphors for God's children in the Church who are easily tricked by the Devil into committing physical and spiritual fornication with those who do not believe in God.

When we take the time to read and ponder over the Scripture, we will draw a lot of valuable lessons to apply to real life for our journey toward the heavenly country.

Each person in the Church may take part in the journey toward the eternal country at different times. While some of us will reach the end of the journey sooner than others, we will all be together in our new, glorified body to enter the eternal country on the day that Christ returns and brings the Church into heaven. That day is not very far from now, because the nation of Israel was re-established in Canaan more than 68 years ago. That event marked the time for the Church to repent and to be ready for the coming of Christ. The end is very near and it may happen during our generation (Matthew 24:32-34). Before the end of the world, which will last for seven years, the Lord Jesus Christ will come for the Church. It is possible that today is the day!

May the love, grace, and fellowship of God be with every one of us and that we may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

01/14/2017

Notes

[1] <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/infographics/infographic.view.php?id=11106>

[2] https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/juno/main/index.html

[3] <http://eyes.jpl.nasa.gov/eyes-on-juno.html>

[4] <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/other/123-year-old-bolivian-man-oldest-living-person-ever->

[documented-f6C10934840](#)

[5] <http://www.space.com/19915-milky-way-galaxy.html>

[6] <http://www.space.com/15949-milkyway-galaxy-crash-andromeda-hubble.html>

[7] <http://earthsky.org/space/what-is-a-light-year>

[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_by_country