

## Go West Young Man

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I am going to be testing your geography this morning and to a lesser degree history as well. For the benefit of those who don't know, I was born almost 40 years ago in the city of Beersheba about 30 miles from the southeastern corner of the Mediterranean, in the Negev desert of southern Israel.

The first voyage in the bible comes to us in Genesis 12. <sup>1</sup>Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

<sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

The text continues <sup>9</sup>And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negev.

Abraham's birth place of Ur, near modern Batsra in southern Iraq is pretty much due east of his destination. God's call to Abraham then may be paraphrased as 'Go West Old Man'.

Last month in a presentation about Reason I closed with these words: *Being open to the possibility of unknown-unknowns is a kind of humbleness, when an unknown unknown comes along, many times it shakes the foundations, forces a revision, compels us to restock our assumptions, in other words the things we believed in. A good many of us never do this. I think it is fairly common to go through this process just before you reach maturity. To be prepared to re-examine our foundations several times in a lifetime takes a perspective on life or a mind-set that is youthful, but also very humble, and that I think the world can use a lot more of.*

The Abraham saga is presented in Genesis chapters 12 thru 25. For much of this he is centered in the southern margins of Canaan, on the margins of the Fertile Crescent, where some years it is possible to live off the land, but some years not. It follows from this precarious existence that you build yourself up just to fall back down again. Abraham's name literally means Great Father but in his saga he is humble. Though not young he is young at heart. He deals with Pharaoh obviously, but even with the local Canaanite or Philistine chieftains from an inferior position. His greatness is all potential. He has a great promise but he and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob exist on the margins. On the edge of the desert, a reoccurring theme is going down to Egypt which is, again, west of where they are. What makes the story interesting is the

contrast between Abraham's humble existence not even having a permanent dwelling place to call their own, and the promise given to them of a great future.

"Go West Young Man and Grow with the Country" is often attributed to Horace Greely but it may have been in circulation before him. Greely as a newspaper editor and publisher had the means to get the word out and in any case he did popularize it circa 1865. Like the cowboy riding into the sunset, this notion of American Manifest Destiny, like Abraham's promise of manifest destiny had clear real life results, our town is a testament to that spirit.

Another instance of myth meets history: there was a city named Tyre, perhaps named for a small rocky island off the coast of southern Lebanon, just about as far east as the Mediterranean Sea will go. The citizens of Tyre spoke a form of Hebrew, and worshiped the same gods the Israelites were so commonly rebuked for worshiping, throughout the bible. In other words they were closely connected to Israel and Judah.

When King Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem let's date this to just our side of 1000 BC, he imported cedars from the Mountain of Lebanon and Hiram, the king of Tyre was his supplier. The Lebanese flag has a big green cedar tree to commemorate that long-ago transaction.

Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel and Zachariah all address Tyre and its upcoming destruction but more than the destruction these attest to the rebirth of the city again and again. In these lengthy sections we encounter a rich city with daughter settlements and commercial power throughout the sea. For example Isaiah 23

<sup>7</sup>Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old, whose feet carried her to settle far away? <sup>8</sup>Who has planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth?

What came of Tyre? Tyre was attacked many times by Egypt but never, it seems very successfully. Shalmaneser of Assyria who ruled from 727-722 BC sacked the town. But the city was soon rebuilt, its focus point was now in New Tyre, the city on the rocky island about half a mile west of mainland. In 332 BC Alexander the Great quickly overtook Old Tyre and besieged New Tyre, building a causeway connecting the island with the mainland. In the meantime the Tyrians sent most of their women and children to Carthage while fighting with perhaps 40,000 men against Alexander. They kept Alexander busy for seven months, which is astonishing considering Alexander's entire career lasted only 13 years and took him from Macedonia to Egypt to Pakistan. So for seven months he was held up at Tyre before he conquered and destroyed the city. The historian Arrian writes that Alexander killed 8000 and sold 30,000 into slavery.

Here I will quote Ezekiel chapter 26, Which refers to an earlier destruction of the old city in about 572BC.

<sup>7</sup> For thus says the Lord GOD: I will bring against Tyre from the north King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, king of kings, together with horses, chariots, cavalry, and a great and powerful army.

<sup>8</sup> Your daughter-towns in the country he shall put to the sword. He shall set up a siege wall against you, cast up a ramp against you, and raise a roof of shields against you.

<sup>9</sup> He shall direct the shock of his battering rams against your wall and break down your towers with his axes.

<sup>10</sup> His horses shall be so many that their dust shall cover you. At the noise of cavalry, wheels, and chariots your very walls shall shake, when he enters your gates like those entering a breached city.

<sup>11</sup> With the hoofs of his horses he shall trample all your streets. He shall put your people to the sword, and your strong pillars shall fall to the ground.

<sup>12</sup> They will plunder your riches and loot your merchandise; they shall break down your walls and destroy your fine houses. Your stones and timber and soil they shall cast into the water.

<sup>13</sup> I will silence the music of your songs; the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more.

<sup>14</sup> I will make you a bare rock; you shall be a place for spreading nets. You shall never again be rebuilt, for I the LORD has spoken, says the Lord GOD.

Only that the city was again rebuilt, after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar and again by Alexander. In 126BC it regained its independence as a city state within the Greco -Roman world.

Somewhat uniquely, among destruction and doom and gloom of nations other than Israel, Isaiah foresees the renewal of Tyre: 23 <sup>15</sup>From that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, the lifetime of one king... <sup>17</sup>At the end of seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her trade... <sup>18</sup>Her merchandise and her wages will be dedicated to the LORD; her profits will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who live in the presence of the LORD.

Why predict the rebirth of a city which is undeserving? If you are skeptical of prophecy, as I am, this is called hedging ones bets.

Remember Hiram? that king from the time of Solomon, well Hiram's 10<sup>th</sup> grand daughter was Dido who fled from her brother Pygmalion the King of Tyra and founded a new city. In her case

it was 'Look West Young Maiden' This new city was named in Hebrew Qarta (city) Hadash (new) or new town, it was Latinized to Cartago and from there to the English Carthage.

These new folk of the new town, we could call them Newtonians had a vigor that the old Tyre had lost. Located in the center of the Mediterranean, the Carthaginians fought three wars with the Romans. Like it's Mother city, the destruction of Carthage was also prophesied but not by Hebrew orators but, according to legend, by Cato the Elder, the Roman Senator who ended every speech on any topic with "Furthermore I am of the opinion that Carthage must be destroyed". This line has become a cliché. You can use it whenever you think an exclamation mark will not suffice.

Before the Romans made good on their threat, the sons of Carthage took a further step westward, to Spain, on the western edge of the Mediterranean, a place formerly known as Mastia. But we can't be calling towns just anything, Hasdrubal, the leader of this colony re-founded the city and named it, Carthage, same as the older town, the one in the middle of the Mediterranean. When the Romans finally had their way with Hannibal, in 146 BC, they destroyed Carthage (in modern Tunisia). Legend has it that the city was sown with salt, to assure that it would never rise again. However in this cycle of destruction and rebirth, Carthage was rebuilt by Julius Cesar and was the empire's second largest city for hundreds of years.

What then of the Spanish Carthage? The Roman general Cipio Africanus conquered it in 209BC and renamed it Carthago Nova, New-New-Town to distinguish it from the Old Carthage, it was the capitol of the Roman Province of Carthagenesis, and we know this city today as Cartagena. In 1533 Spanish conquistadors from Cartagena founded the city of Cartagena de Indies on the northern shores of modern day Colombia, bringing this western movement of new towns to its fruition.

An old Celtic proverb boldly places death right at the center of life. 'Death is the middle of a long life' they say. Ancient people did things like that; they put death at the center instead of casting it out of sight and leaving such an important subject until the last possible moment. Of course, they lived close to nature and couldn't help but see how the forest grew from fallen trees and how death seemed to replenish life from fallen members. Only the unwise and the overly fearful think that death is the blind enemy of life.

It is common for people to look at things in a linear way. There is a beginning and an end and a line that goes between them. Sometimes reality is circular, after the destruction there is renewal.