



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: By Faith We Live: Genesis 12-25 wk. 1

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There's a popular song that's sung by Leeann Womack. It's called, *I Hope You Dance*. In the song, the song writer uses the dance as kind of a metaphor for stepping out beyond the ordinary and the predictable and the safe and secure and really taking a risk to step out there and to experience more of what life has to offer. The song writer says...and *if you have a choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance*. I've heard this song a number of times and each time I've thought if you could just take that song and place it in a Christian context, it really does express many of the images of what it means to be a person of faith, to step out beyond what is ordinary and explainable and predictable. To experience this, this life of faith, this abundant life that God has promised us. And I would say that my prayer for you would be if you have a choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance. I hope you dance this dance of faith that takes life from the explainable in the ordinary to this abundant life that most people will never even begin to realize.

But what does that mean? What does it mean to live the life of faith? Maybe in its most simple form, it means to believe that God tells the truth and to act on that belief. Not enough just to assent to it mentally, but to believe that God tells the truth and then to act on it. To live your life according to those beliefs.

If you were to ask me this morning to identify for you my 10 core beliefs upon which my life is based, I would have to tell you I take them by faith. I can't prove them to you. I just believe that God tells the truth and then I live my life accordingly and I have to take that by faith. There is no way to access the abundant life without taking steps of faith. And for every step of faith there is risk. There is, there is risk, where there is no risk, there is no faith.

One of the great Old Testament examples of what it means to be a person of faith is Abraham. Abraham was faith hall of famer. He was a remarkable man of faith, whom God called out to follow by faith and established an entire nation of people to be dedicated to Him. Well, we're going to study the life of Abraham as we go from Genesis chapter 12 to Genesis chapter 25. and we're going to learn what made Abraham a great man of faith, and we're going to see him at his, at his best, and we're going to see him in those moments of doubt. And we're going to try to better understand what it means to be a person of faith and, and all that is involved in that.

So, if you have a Bible, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 12. We went through Genesis one through 11. As we studied through that, we saw that one of the predominant themes was this competition between what's in our hearts as people that drives us to want to be our own gods, to be the master of our own fate, to call our own shots, to run our own lives, to, to be our own God. And that is contrasted with the responsibility to acknowledge God is God and to surrender to Him and to let Him

be God and to live our lives accordingly. And so, there is this, this competition between, between man saying I am my own God and surrendering to God as God.

That's expressed a number of ways in the first 11 chapters, but we see it expressed finally in chapter 11 where the people gathered together in order to build this tower into the heavens as a monument to the fact that they are their own gods. That the tower into the heavens was a way of saying, we will make a name for ourselves. We will make ourselves great. We are our own gods. We will call our own shots and God turns around and judges these people for that sin. Immediately following that is the introduction to Abram and his family and this remarkable man of faith. It provides the contrast to the Tower of Babel. The alternative is to submit to God and be a person of faith.

One of the interesting contrasts is if you go through chapter 11 you notice that one of the key phrases would be, we will, we will, we will. When you believe that you are your own God, then that's, that's where it's at. We will build a tower. We will make our names great. We will run our own lives, but when you get to chapter 12 it shifts from, we will to God speaking and God says, I will. I will. I will. In chapter 11 the people said, we will make a name for ourselves. We will make ourselves great and chapter 12 God says to Abram, you trust me, by faith, I will make a name for you. I will make you great. Chapter 11 there was no way that could succeed. Chapter 12 we will see how Abram succeeded by faith and God fulfilled his promise.

We pick it up in chapter 11 starting in verse 27 as the main characters of the story are introduced. *"Now these are the records of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran and Haran became the father of Lot. And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. And Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, 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. And the days of Terah were 205 years; and Terah died in Haran."*

We are introduced to the family of Abram in chapter 11 and I think the reason we're introduced to the family in this way is because after God's judgment on the people, because of the Tower of Babel, he begins to go through this genealogy, which introduces then finally this hero of faith that would emerge out of this judgment. It's very similar to the story of Noah when God pronounces judgment. And then he goes through a genealogy, which finally leads to the family of Noah. And out of that family would come this great hero of the faith. So, we're introduced to the characters and then the story unfolds starting in chapter 12 verse one.

"Now the Lord said to Abram, go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great. And so, you shall be a blessing. And 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."

Ur of the Chaldeans was a, a modern, ancient city that had pretty much all of the, the luxuries and, and uh, everything that the ancient world had to offer. It seems as if Abram's family was quite wealthy, they would have been very comfortable there. The predominant deity was the moon god. And it's fair to assume that pretty much everyone there was, was involved in this pagan worship. The extent to which Abram's family was involved. we don't know, but it's worth noting that his father's name, Terah, is a

form of the Hebrew word for moon, which may give some hint that they were up to their eyebrows in this pagan worship.

For whatever reason, God selects Abram to call him out from among this city to leave the city, to leave his relatives, to leave everything he knows and understands to go to a country, to go to a place that God would tell him. You can imagine Abram saying, Lord, what is this place? Just trust me Abram, I'll tell you. But to leave it all in order to experience what Hebrews 11 says, Abram believed they were headed for a better country, a better city, to a new way of life that would be, that would be far more than what they could experience there in Ur of the Chaldeans. And he risked everything and stepped out by faith on this journey to a land that he had no idea what it was or where it was. God would show him.

When you think about it, what God was asking from Abram was really quite remarkable. God made a significant promise. Abram had a wife that was barren and past childbearing years, but God said, I'll make you a nation. God said, I will bless you. I'll make you great. I'll make your name great. And the last part of verse three where it says, *"and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* - if you read Galatians chapter three Paul identifies that phrase as meaning through you would come to seed of the woman from Genesis three that would be the Savior of the world. Abram was promised that through him would come the Savior of the world. A great promise. But Abram with remarkable faith chose to believe that God tells the truth and he risked everything and stepped out by faith on this journey to a land that he had no idea what it was or where it was. God would show him.

Verse four, *"So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran."* Abram in a remarkable choice left Ur of the Chaldeans and headed for Canaan. It's the act that placed him in the faith hall of fame. But he didn't obey completely. He was supposed to leave relatives, but he took Lot his nephew and his father Terah. And they didn't make it to Canaan, and they made it to Haran, which wasn't a real long journey. Haran was still a modern city. It would have been a place where the pagan moon god was still worshiped. So, everything about the city would have been very familiar to them. And what we're told is they got to Haran and they didn't spend the night. The text says they settled there. As a matter of fact, given what it says in verse five they may have settled there for some time.

We don't know exactly what transpired, but we could assume that when Abram's father came with him, they made the journey as far as Haran and his father said, son, are you sure that you know what you're doing? You know, this has been a pretty good journey. Maybe we should just call it good here and settle in here and not head on out to a land we don't even know what's out there. Well, whatever it was, they decided to settle there, and there they remained for a period of time until Abram's father died, and maybe that was the moment where Abram then felt free to continue his journey.

Verse five, *"And Abram took Sarai, his wife and Lot his nephew and all their possessions, which they had accumulated and the persons which they had acquired in Haran and they set out for the land of Canaan. Thus, they came to the land of Canaan and Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem to the Oak of Moreh."* We aren't really told much about the journey, but you need to know that's about 400 miles. This would have been a long, hard journey, but God faithfully got them there and they entered the land of Canaan. Then the writer gives them a couple of markers so the readers would understand basically where Abram came in geographically. The readers would have been very familiar with Shechem and with the Oak of Moreh, and they would have understood exactly where Abram was. But I think it's more than that. When Abram came into the land, these were places that God said, I will give your descendants, you have to believe me, you have to trust me. I will give them the land. By the

time the readers were reading this though, they understood Shechem and the Oak of Moreh to be places where significant things that happened in the life of their people because they did indeed own the land. So, it was a reminder that what God had promised had actually come to pass. And these were places they now possess and owned.

But then he makes an interesting statement at the end of verse six to what we would call an editorial comment. *"Now the Canaanite was then in the land."* That's all he says, it'd be easy just to read right past that. But what did he mean by that? We understand that the Canaanites would have been the descendants of Canaan who was the cursed son of Ham, the son of Noah, and these people were dwelling in the land. If God were to come to me and say, I want you to leave your home, your relatives, everything that you know and understand in order to go to this, this land that I've prepared for you. And I was to believe that by faith and to take, this long, difficult journey. When I entered the land, I'd like for there to be a big banner that says, welcome Bryan. And I'd like for there to be a land flowing with milk and honey. Everything prepared. Nobody there. Just waiting for *me*. And I'd like to have the covers pulled back and a mint on the pillow and I'd like the light to be on, and I'd like to just step in and take it. But that wasn't the case. That wasn't the case. With one comment, the writer is saying the land was occupied, it was occupied by the Canaanites, and Abram would have to understand that it would be by faith that they would have to clear the land. The faith journey was not over. It was just beginning.

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Arnie: Bryan, it's so exciting to be back in the book of Genesis. Now we just finished up in James where we learned that faith and works go hand in hand. How will we see that played out in Abraham's life?

Bryan: Well, Abraham's just a hall of famer, you know. Paul talks about Abraham in the New Testament that he believed - no works, Romans four. James talks about Abraham that it's a belief that produced works. Hebrews talks about Abraham so believed the promise of God it defined the path of his life. So, Abraham's a major player in the Old and New Testament and lots to learn from him.

Arnie: Okay, Bryan, help me understand this, so in one hand, it's so remarkable that Abraham left everything simply because God made a promise and he believed God. But on the other hand, isn't God literally talking to him? So, help me out here.

Bryan: Well, it is amazing. I find Abraham and Sarah to be remarkable in terms of their willingness to believe. So, I think that point, Abram didn't even know who God was. I think he probably worshiped the moon god. I think it's an amazing moment where he leaves everything behind and is headed to who knows where and he's just willing to with incredible faith, trust that God tells the truth. But the other part of that I think is really interesting, is this comes right after the Tower of Babel and the repetitive statement there is, I will be great, I will be great, I will be great. And the next thing that happens is God is coming to Abraham saying, I will make you great. Those are those two paths we talked about earlier in Genesis,

Cara: It shows the difference in time periods, because if we heard a voice like that now we'd be seeking medication and not a new place to live

Arnie: Or may have had medication.

Cara: Yeah. Um, so Abram left Ur but only got two Haran and got stuck there. Why do you think that is? And then what can we learn from that?

Bryan: Yeah. So, I mean, we're just guessing, but certainly the journey was hard. It wasn't easy. I'm going to guess there was family pressure. He was supposed to leave the relatives, but he took some of them with. And his father ends up dying there. So, I think Haran looked a lot like Ur. It's fairly modern city. They worshiped the moon god. I think you add all those things up and maybe just felt like this is good enough for now. But I think also realizing it was another 400 miles on foot to Canaan. So, we're talking about a significant journey. This isn't easy and maybe they just had to regather their courage and start again.

Cara: Right. So, Abram says yes to God's great promise, but it's not long before we read that the land that God promised to Abram is fully occupied. Um, that's not really the way we'd like that story to go.

Bryan: Yeah, I love that statement. We call it an editorial comment in the narrative. If I was Abram and God called me to the land of Canaan, I would want a parade. I would want a party. But you get there and the land's full of the Canaanites and there's this reminder, faith isn't one big step and everything else is easy. It's going to be one step after another of trusting God and God's going to have to clear the land and give it to Abraham. He's going to have to keep trusting.

Cara: Yeah. I would say as an introvert that really bothers me because I would want to get there and set up shop and not have to deal with a bunch of people.

Arnie: And that is kind of contrary to prosperity teaching because all you got to do is claim and then everything's easy or Jesus is your good luck piece.

Bryan: Yeah. I think, you know, one of the interesting things to think about, so we see this a lot in these narratives. So, you're talking about 400 miles and we know absolutely nothing. So, you forget all these big-time gaps. So, day after day, after day, needing food and needing water, being hot, being tired, who knows what they face? Uh, we just forget that and think it was just that easy. You know, certainly God could have kind of magically transferred Abram to the land of Canaan, but we'd assume there's a lot he had to, he had to learn. He had to grow. He had to grow in his faith and to learn how to trust God. That's a long, hard road.