



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: A Vibrant Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 1

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Message Title: Faith and Doubt pt. 2

Release Date: Tuesday, 7/30/19

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.

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. That's the purpose of the statement. But Abram believed that.

Verse seven, *"The Lord appeared to Abram and said to your descendants, I will give this land."* You can't miss the fact that those two statements fall back to back. It's true that the Canaanites were dwelling in the land, but God in his sovereignty said, Abram, this land belongs to me. And it may be full of Canaanites, but it's mine to give and I'm giving it to you. That's what he said. And Abram believed that, and he established an altar and he had a sacrifice - his way of saying, God, I believe you. I trust you that the land may be occupied, but it's yours to give and you're giving it to me.

Verse seven, *"So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord and Abram journeyed on continuing toward the Negev, which would be the south country."*

What you have in these first nine verses is a remarkable journey of faith as God comes along to Abram and calls him out of that which is familiar, that which he is known to experience, a land of promise that he would have to take my faith. And he entered the land and is he's going from north to south. Basically, he's building altars. It says he pitched his tent; he built more altars. It's a way of saying Abram was

moving through claiming the land, believing that God would give it to him by faith. Really quiet a remarkable journey of faith.

We know that the land of promise in the Old Testament was a, is a metaphor. It was a picture of our life in Christ of this salvation, this land of promise that we inherit through Jesus Christ. Not a physical land, but, a spiritual land. So, we understand Abraham's journey to be a picture of, of our journey to the land of promise. It begins with all of us in Ur of the Chaldeans. It's a picture of this world and the things of this world, and we're immersed in this, in this pagan culture where we are our own gods and we call our own shots. And that's what we know and that's how we live. And then God comes along and he offers us this journey by faith to step out of that world that we know and understand and can explain to experience this land of promise by faith, a land far more, a life far more than anything that we could experience apart from God.

There's probably some of you, that's where you're at, for whatever reason you're living in Ur of the Chaldeans. You are living in this world, in the ways of this world and the values of this world, but God is speaking to your heart and he's encouraging you. Take, take the first step of faith that God offers you this, this incredible faith journey into a land of promise. If you believe Him, if you'll trust Him, you just need to be willing to take that first step of faith and begin pursuing what it means to have a relationship with God.

Some of you have already taken that step. As a matter of fact, you were intent on headed to Canaan entering this relationship with God, but you didn't get too far. You only got as far as Haran and the reason is because you, you were still pulling with you some of the things of this world. You're trying to live with one foot in the kingdom of God and one foot in the world and you just didn't get very far. And so, you settled in Haran and over the weeks or months it's kind of become just comfortable there. And the journey's kind of come to an end. Or maybe for you is because your marriage was falling apart, or you had some big financial problem or some disease. Maybe even just the holidays. And you kind of thought, you know, we need to start going back to church. You've taken this little journey, but your just kind of stuck and you still haven't really made it to the land of promise. And maybe for you what God is saying is, you know, it's time to get back at the journey. It's time to take some steps of faith again and continue to experience this, this land of promise that God has waiting for you.

When you place your trust in Jesus as Savior, you believe that he died on the cross for your sins. You enter the land of promise by faith. But if many of you are to be honest, when was the last time you took a significant step of faith? When was the last time you stepped out by at risk? To the extent that you found yourself on your knee's day after day after day because God was calling you to step out by faith and take a chance. For many of you, it's been a long time.

You've entered into the land, you've kind of settled in a corner of the land and you understand the land is full of Canaanites, and those Canaanites probably ought to be cleared out by faith, but you've, you've just kind of settled and you've kind of become comfortable and your life is just grown kind of stale there in the land of promise. And what God is saying is maybe it's time to start taking some big steps of faith again. Maybe it's time once again, to step out at risk and to conquer the land and to really take it by faith as God intended.

Over the years, I've found that many times it was easier to enter the land by faith than it is to dwell in the land by faith. That's exactly what happened to Abram. Verse 10, *"Now there was a famine in the land. So, Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe in the land."* Notice the

emphasis in verse 10 on land. God called Abram to leave Ur of the Chaldeans in order to inherit a land that was, was God's promise to him. Abram took this very difficult journey of faith and he made it. He entered the land, God promised him the land. He was taking the lands and setting up altars and pitching his tent and the land was his for the taking. But suddenly there is a famine in the land, and this creates a crisis of faith for Abram. What is he going to do? Is he going to believe that God's going to take care of him now that he's in this land?

Verse 11, "And it came about when he came near to Egypt that he said to Sarai, his wife, see now I know that you are a beautiful woman and it will come about when the Egyptians see, see you, that they will say, this is his wife and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you and that I may live on account of you. And it came about when Abram came into Egypt. The Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful, and Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. Therefore, he treated Abram well for her sake and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels, but the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, what is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister so that I took her for my wife? Now then here is your wife take her and go and pharaoh commanded his men concerning him and they escorted him away with his wife and all that belonged to him."

When you read through Genesis chapter 12 whenever you're going through a Hebrew narrative, it's real important to look at the dialogue. If you were to take a highlighter and to highlight the dialogue, you'd find in this passage there are three voices. There's first the voice of the Lord, and it's worth noting that God had not spoken to anyone, or at least it's not recorded that he spoke to anyone since Noah. Chapter 12 verse one he speaks to Abram and that is the voice of faith. It's a voice that called Abram to live by faith.

The second voice in the text is the voice of Abram and it's worth noting that the first time in all the Bible, anything comes out of Abram's mouth that's recorded in the text, they are words of doubt. It's a crisis of faith. The second voice is the voice of Abram and it's the voice of doubt, and Abram says there's a famine in the land, what will do, and he reverts to his old ways.

Whenever you come across Egypt in the Old Testament, more times than not, it is symbolic. A picture of the world system, the ways of the world, very much like Ur of the Chaldeans. And what Abram, Abram did is he reverted to his old patterns. He reverted to his old way. So, he took control of his own life. I'm going to find my own solution. And in really a remarkable choice, at a crisis of faith, he chooses to leave the land of promise and he heads the Egypt. Have you ever noticed that when you're in a crisis of faith and you make a poor choice, it's often followed by a series of poor choices? It's exactly what's happening here.

Abram is headed out of the land of promise to Egypt. They get in Egypt and he starts looking around and he says, you know, these Egyptians are going to look at my wife and they're going to think she's so beautiful, they're going to kill me so they can get to her. So, he says, honey, here's the deal. I'm really afraid these Egyptians are going to kill me to get to you. So, do me a favor. Say you're my sister. And when they come looking for you, you just go with them and you really become whatever they want you to become because that's probably in the best interest of me.

Not only did Abrams sell out his God, he sold out his wife. Can you imagine what was going through Sarai's head as she realized that she was basically going to go to whoever from Egypt came and got her and whatever life she would have, it was clearly unknown. But that's exactly what happened. The Egyptians did see her, and she was beautiful, and they took her, and I can only imagine Abram, in the midst of all of that, his wife is gone. He's out of the land. He's in a foreign country and he must have processed what had taken place. He had left everything. He had left everything behind in this remarkable journey of faith in order to inherit this land. He had made it to the land. He was in the land; God was promising him, and he was claiming the land. It was all there. He had it right there in his hands. And now because of a crisis of faith and a series of bad choices, everything was gone.

How could he ever have the promised seed through a wife that he no longer had? As far as he knew, he never again would even have access to her. Everything was gone. The land was gone. His wife was gone, the promises were gone. He had given it all away.

And then you have the third voice, and that is the voice of the Pharaoh. God used the pagan Pharaoh to look Abram in the eye and say, what were you doing? Why did you do this? Which in some ways almost represents the voice of God. Abram, what were you thinking? Why would you do this? And because of God's intervention, Abram received back his wife and Pharaoh said, Abram, go home.

It's interesting to notice that there would never be another time when Abram would go to Egypt, lesson learned. Abram would learn to stay in the land and to trust God by faith. But he did learn the hard way. As a matter of fact, apart from God's intervention, it was all over.

I don't know where you're at in your spiritual journey. For some of you, you're probably in Ur of the Chaldeans. You're just thinking about taking this spiritual journey. You just need to think about taking the first step. What you need to know, it is always going to be a step of faith. That's the only way to access the land. For some of you, you started the journey and you've been stuck in Haran and maybe God is speaking to your heart and saying, you know, it's time to get with it. It's time to get out of Haran and back on the journey to the land of promise.

For many of you, you have dwelled in the land for a period of time. And at first maybe you were by faith taking the land and setting up altars and conquering the Canaanites. But that's been a long time ago, and for a long time you've just kind of settled for your little piece of ground and you're safe and you're comfortable. And it's been a long time since you've been out there at risk by faith. And maybe what God is saying to you is, you know, it's time to step out by faith, take some risk and take the land.

But my greatest concern would be for those of you who have in a crisis of faith, you've wandered out of the land. Some of you feel like you're in Egypt. At one time you had this relationship with God, and you were so excited, and it seemed like everything was coming together. And then for whatever reason, you reverted to old patterns and old ways and you took charge of your own life and you've just made a mess. And you feel like you're like you're dwelling in Egypt and it feels in some ways like the promise is gone and you wonder if it's possible that you could ever make it back home again.

God got Abram back home and he became a giant of faith and God will do the same for you if you're willing by faith, by faith to go back home. I think if you listen quietly in your heart you hear the voice of God softly and tenderly. Jesus is calling, come home by faith it is time to come home.

Cara: Bryan, this is a great teaching today. You mentioned that many times it's easier to enter the land by faith than it is to dwell in the land by faith. In other words, we can say yes to God's challenge and take that first step, but often what lies beyond that can be pretty challenging. Is that usually the case?

Bryan: Yeah, I find it usually to be the case. Uh, I heard somebody once say it's not the sharpest but the longest trials that are the hardest to bear. And I think that's true. If it's not the in a moment thing, it's the stuff that lingers day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, and basically that's dwelling in the land. So, you kind of get your game face on for the big battle, but then to actually live in it day in, day out, uh, I think that's where the challenge comes. So, for me personally, I've had two open heart surgeries and those are pretty traumatic in the moment. But eight, 10 weeks later you're back going full speed. Whereas my dad's illness was every day, week after week, month after month, year after year. That's a totally different thing. And it's much more difficult.

Cara: I've been in situations health wise where it just seemed to linger and linger and linger and then had these days it's not so bad. So, in those times I feel like I'm not as close to God. So, I guess my question is for anyone who feels like their faith is taking a nap on the couch right now, why do we need to wake up from that?

Bryan: Yeah, so that's a great question. I would say because life is short, every day is a gift and you are missing the adventure.

Arnie: So what do we need to get back in the game and return to the land of promise?

Bryan: You know, an illustration I might use is all my life I've heard about the Grand Canyon, I've seen pictures of the Grand Canyon and it didn't move me, it didn't stir me. I'm kind of like whatever. And then last summer we went, and I cannot tell you how mesmerized I was by the Grand Canyon. It is spectacular! So, reading about it, talking about it versus the adventure of doing it, those are two completely different things. So, understanding God's called us to an adventure. Life is short. Life is found in the adventure. Seeing God at work, revealing God to others by taking great steps of faith. I think that's where we find the life we're looking for.

Bryan: So, one of the real practical ways I sometimes word it to people is think about your life right now. And if tomorrow morning God oversleeps and he's not there for you, what difference would that make? You know, are you actually living out by faith where you need God every day? Or could he sleep in a few days and you wouldn't even notice because it's easy to settle and just kind of crank it out ourselves.

Bryan: I think about the promise God made to Abram and there he is in Egypt. His wife has gone, he's right on the edge of, of everything being lost. But I also think it was a life changing moment where he learned some things he needed to learn and headed back to the land. So, what exactly does he need to do? We'll find that out tomorrow.

Cara: Nice.

Arnie: Can't wait.