

### 3 Looking To Or Lacking In Faith Genesis 12:1-20

Last week we left Abram and crew distracted for a number of years in Haran. We discussed briefly that some scholars suggest Terah, Abram's father, had also received the same call as Abram at the same time in their hometown of Ur of the Chaldeas located in the southwest region of the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia. It was his expedition to Canaan that took the small band to Haran where they subsequently stayed for an extended period of time apparently because Terah became distracted by all that Haran had to offer similar to his home land including moon worship, which we learned from **Joshua 24:2** that he practiced this form of religion. In time Terah died and the little band resumed their journey to Canaan.

Other scholars believe that Abram was the only recipient of this command by God, but that Terah, being the patriarch of the family, decided to go and lead the expedition to Canaan by way of Haran.

Either way, we have this group stalled in Haran for quite some time, possibly up to 35 years. Last week we applied what happened to our walk of faith with God by considering what might be distracting us from what He wants us to do. **Are we living in Haran or are we on the way to Canaan? Are we allowing distractions to keep us from doing what or going where God wants us?**

That brings us to **Genesis 12** where we see both Abram's faith and failure. Let's consider the following this morning:

Abram's pilgrimage of faith

Abram's problems without faith

Abram's pattern for our faith

#### I. ABRAM'S PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH – vs. 1-9

Now we learn from Stephen's sermon to the Sanhedrin in **Acts 7:2** that God spoke to Abram **"while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran."** Here we have what I believe to be a second call of God to Abram while in Haran

after Terah died to reiterate God's blessing on Abram. It was a reminder that God had tagged him for a special purpose and a special blessing. Abram may have temporarily forgotten the initial call, but God had not.

So, the first thing we see is that faith believes.

**If faith believes, what is that it believes?**

I think it believes what it hears.

#### A. Faith Believes – It Hears – vs. 1-3

Now, when we read the Bible, we learn many things about God.

He is holy.

He is just.

He is loving.

He is forgiving.

He is all knowing.

He is all powerful.

He is everywhere.

And so on.

But among the many things we learn from the Bible about God, one attribute is quite clear. God does not lie.

#### Numbers 23:19

The Message puts it this way: **"God is not man, one given to lies, and not a son of man changing his mind. Does he speak and not do what he says? Does he promise and not come through?"**

#### Titus 1:1-2

**Hebrews 10:23 – "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful."**

**I Corinthians 1:9 – "God is faithful."**

**I Corinthians 10:13 – "God is faithful."**

**I Thessalonians 5:24 – "Faithful is He that called you."**

**II Thessalonians 3:3 – "The Lord is faithful."**

**I John 1:9 – "He (God) is faithful."**

Let's put it in a positive light.

If God does not lie, then He tells the truth.

He tells the truth all the time.

What God says He will do, He does.  
What God promises, He will fulfill.

### So just where does a pilgrimage of faith begin?

We read in **Romans 10:17** that faith comes from hearing – hearing the Word of God.

We read in **Ephesians 2:8** that faith is a gift from God.

But there is something even more fundamental to that and it is found in **Hebrews 11:1, 6**. Turn there.

In **verse 1** there are 14 words (KJV) or 18 words (NIV) that provides us with a definition of faith. There is no other place in Scripture that defines faith. There are places that describe it, but not define it. It is in this definition that we come to understand how faith operates.

It is sure or guaranteed of what it hopes for.

It is certain or confident of what it does not see.

Thomas a Kempis once stated, “I had rather exercise faith than know the definition thereof.”

I have come to believe that the definition of faith is learned only in the exercise or experience of it. For example: we have heard faith sometimes defined as complete trust in another person or thing. **The designer of a chair can tell me all the technical specs that went into its construction describing in detail the type of material used and the various tests that were performed to ensure that it could withstand and hold up under extreme kinds of circumstances. All that mumbo jumbo may sound good and appealing but that isn't faith. Faith is when I actually commit all of my weight to sitting down. Faith to me is learned when I put it in practice.**

Now the thing about the faith we find in **Hebrews 11** is that it wholeheartedly believes in something that isn't even on the horizon, something we can't even see, but we believe it because of the Object or in this case the Person who said it.

Now flip to **chapter 12** and consider **verse 2**. “**Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.**”

A.W. Tozer in his book The Pursuit of God writes: “Faith is not a once done act, but a continuous gaze of the heart at the Triune God.”

Faith is a gaze not a glance. In other words, faith continues to look at God because the moment we take our eyes of faith off Him we will fail. We will see that in Abram's life in a moment. We also see it in Peter who stepped out of his boat in the middle of a storm and began to walk on the water, but as soon as he took his eyes of Christ he began to sink.

Now, let's go back to **Hebrews 11:6**. We learn there that without faith we can't please God. We must come to Him in faith believing first that He exists and in our believing He rewards our faith.

In Abram's pilgrimage of faith, he had to believe that God existed, and in that belief believe what God expressed. If we consider the first verses of **Genesis 12** with **Hebrews 11:1, 6** Abram was convinced that God existed and was convinced of what God said. Hearing not only understands, it acts

Abram believed in God and believed what God said. Notice what God asked him to do and what God promised He would give all of which Abram believed because it was God who said it. There are 4 things God asked him to do and 7 promises.

Here's something about faith, often doing what God asks isn't easy. That's why it's called faith.

He was to leave his country.

He was to leave his countrymen.

He was to leave his kinfolk.

He was to go to a place God would show him.

Notice again what that entailed. Give up everything you love and know. Leave it all behind. God never told Abram what would be involved in this pilgrimage of faith. Otherwise it isn't really faith. If Abram had known all the trials that would come along the way, that one day he would have to make a choice between loving God or loving his son of promise by sacrificing him, he might have told God to find someone else.

God was asking Abram to trust him every step of the way. It's no different for us. He wants us to trust Him explicitly.

I think that's the principle conveyed in **Psalm 23:4**.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Yea, though I walk through the trials of life.

Yea, though I walk through the uncertainties of life.

Yea, though I walk through the temptations of life.

**Finish it:** I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR THOU ART WITH ME.

Fear and faith cannot coexist.

*Where there is faith there is no fear.*

*Where there is fear there is no faith.*

God said, "Abram, leave everything you have come to know, and I will show you the way, trust Me."

The faith God asks of us in trusting Him to the place He is leading us is no different than the faith He was asking of Abram. It is unmistakably expressed in **Proverbs 3:5-6** "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not in your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."

**That word all is a challenge isn't it? We'll let Him direct some of our steps but all? When God knows the way and His way is best why do we hold back some areas in trusting Him?** The word all means everything and in every way. It's a life long process this thing we call faith. We will learn from Abram that we get in the way of our own faith, that we are our own worst enemy.

**So, what did God promise Abram in this pilgrimage of faith?** I mentioned there are seven promises.

Notice the "I wills". Even though they were set in the context of things yet future, it is stated as if they were given right then.

1. God would make Abram a great nation. Back in **11:30** we discovered that Sarai was barren. God asked Abram to leave his nation to become a great nation and trust Him that He could take his barren wife and give him an heir to make this happen.

2. God would bless Abram. And He did.

3. God would make his name great. Later he was called a prince and Sarah was called the mother of kings. The Babel builders wanted to make a name for themselves, but here God says He would make a name for Abram that would be great.

4. God would make Abram a blessing to others. He was a blessing to Lot when Abram had to rescue him. He was a blessing to Melchizedek when he paid tithes to him.

5. God would bless those who blessed him. This is more than just being an ally to Israel. It is a recognition that through Israel through whom the redeemer was born we have eternal life.

6. God would curse those who cursed him. The word curse here means to disdain, to hate. Through the centuries we have seen God's judgment on nations who have opposed Israel. But more than that, it also has to do with those who have rejected the promised blessing of the coming Messiah. They are cursed because they do not believe in God. They are cursed because they have despised the way of eternal life.

7. God would bless all peoples/nations through him. This promise was fulfilled in the Jesus who through faith are saved, people from every nation.

Faith is a journey of trusting God the whole way.

John Calvin writes from the perspective of God speaking: "I command you to go forth with closed eyes, and forbid you to inquire where I am about to lead you, until, having renounced your country, you shall have given yourself wholly to Me."

He was promised an heir that was delayed. He was promised a land he did not get to possess. He was promised to be a blessing to all nations which would not come until about 2,000 years later.

Here is the thing about a walk or pilgrimage of faith: what God promises are all in His timing and according to His ways.

A pilgrimage of faith believes in God and believes God. Faith hears God.

In **verses 4-9** we see how faith behaves – it heeds.

## B. Faith Behaves – It heeds – vs. 4-9

In **verse 1** God said “leave”. In **verse 4** Abram left. In short, faith acts. God said. Abram did.

In **verses 4-5** we see that faith behaves by walking.

### 1. Faith behaves by walking – vs. 4-5

Faith is never stagnant, in never stands still. Faith is either growing or it isn't. It is either rising or retreating. Faith never stays the same. It can't if we are fixing our eyes on Jesus the perfecter of our faith. Our response to life circumstances will either cause our faith to grow or retreat. We are the ones who choose to trust God more or less.

I wish my faith was always growing. I wish I could show you through my life what constant, steady growth in faith looks like. I wish I could show you through my life what an unwavering, unflinching, unfailing faith looks like, but I can't. It is not a steady upward climb. There are failures when I took my eyes off the Lord keep.

Abram's walk began well. He was now headed to Canaan. He didn't know where God was leading, but all he had to do was trust. Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus.

When we walk with the Lord there is a genuine peace and contentment that settles us because, as I have said before, we may not know the way, but we know the One who leads the way and He will never lead us down a wrong path.

Joshua learned to walk by faith.

**Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”**

Faith took Joshua beyond conventional military wisdom to trust God in defeating Jericho by doing what God said - march around the city for 7 days.

God told Isaiah to walk in faith and not be afraid because He was with him (**Isaiah 41:10**).

God tells us that a walk of faith is not one filled with anxiety, but instead trusts Him through thankful prayer so that He can settle our hearts and minds with His peace (**Philippians 4:6-7**).

Faith walks in obedience because it follows, it trusts God with the whole heart.

Wherever there is a walk of faith we see that faith behaves by worshipping.

### 2. Faith behaves by worshipping – vs. 6-9

On two different occasions here we read that Abram built an altar to God. More than just a geographical location, the great tree of Moreh is significant. It was that people gathered to get a word from the seer who listened to the leaves tell him what the gods were saying.

Abram's worship was different. He built an altar to the true and living God. He chose this spot to declare to those idolaters that he worshipped a different God. In a way it was like Joshua declaring that he and his house would serve the Lord.

Our faith should lead us to worship declaring to everyone else around that we serve God.

Kent Hughes offers five important aspects about true faith.

1. True faith believes the bare Word of God.
2. True faith steps out on God's Word.
3. True faith follows wherever God directs.
4. True faith builds altars and worships God wherever it goes.
5. True faith proclaims the name of the Lord.

Faith walks and faith worships. That is the behavior of faith because it has come to believe the One who is leading the way. Such is Abram's pursuit of faith.

But how quickly the lessons we learn walking in faith can fade from memory. Instead of walking by faith, an event can come along that causes us to fear. Instead of walking by faith we walk by sight. In the example of Abram we see his problems without faith.

## II. ABRAM'S PROBLEMS WITHOUT FAITH

– vs. 10-20

In these verses we see two things:

Abram's lack of faith became self-serving

Abram's lack of faith brought shame

While sojourning in Canaan, an event occurs that tests the metal of his faith. There is a famine. In Haran he prospered and acquired more herds and servants. Maybe he began to wonder how he could care for his family and herds. Word came that there was plenty of provisions down in Egypt. It isn't in the text, but it is assumed that he did not ask God if he should go. God told Abram to go to a land He would show him. That had never changed and neither had God's promises. Charles Spurgeon writes that our victory depends on our obedience to God with all our heart. Abram shows us a lack of faith that is self-serving. He forgot God's promises and relied on his own intuition and understanding. He reasoned that he alone could provide. God might be trusted in other things but not this.

**How many of us have done the same thing?** When things are going well it's easy to trust God, but when a crisis hits, we resort to our own understanding instead of trusting God with our whole heart. Logic begins to dictate our actions rather than faith. Maybe one morning he woke up and exited his tent and noticed that the Smiths next door had packed up camp and were walking south. The next morning it was the Johnsons. One morning maybe the Andersons were passing by his door and Johann told Abram he should leave town too, if he knew what was good for him. Every day he saw more and more families leaving town and he thought to himself: wow, things must really be bad, I better get out of Dodge too.

So Abram packed up and moved to Egypt. As they got closer he began to notice that the locals were eying his wife. Our text tells us that the Egyptians found her to be beautiful and they reported it to Pharaoh. She was a head turner. Now keep in mind that she is 65 years old. One of the Dead Sea scrolls known as the Genesis Apocryphon praises her beauty. She was stunning. Our text tells us that

Pharaoh was also smitten with her beauty and took her to become his wife.

Abram had a problem. He's concerned for his physical well-being. In that culture and during that time it was nothing for a ruler to take whomever he wanted for his harem and kill anyone who stood in his way. Abram plotted and, with Sarai's consent, decided to say that she was his sister, which was true as she was his half-sister. If they found out they were married, he could be killed, and she could be taken and there would go the promise of God. If he said she was a servant, he could be killed, and she could be taken and abused. To buy some time, he said she was his sister. According to a custom of the day an unmarried woman was under the guardianship of her father, and in the absence of the father, the brother became guardian. This would mean that any potential suitor had to go through him to marry her. For a time this ploy seemed to work. Abram was showered with lots of gifts in exchange for the hand of Sarai in marriage.

Had Pharaoh gotten his way she would have become his wife and the story would have ended differently because she would have been wrapped and stuffed in a sarcophagus at death. But there are times when God must step in when we have gotten ourselves in a bind having ignored His will by taking things in our own hands and He has to intervene. This is such a time. God sent a plague on Pharaoh and his household. It isn't stated here but when everyone was infected except for Sarai, she may have been confronted and spilled the proverbial beans on the real relationship between she and Abram. Maybe her confession was like Jonah, indicating that she served the living God. So the jig was up and Abram and company were expelled from the land. Why he didn't kill Abram and company is unclear other than perhaps if their God could inflict them with diseases He may very well be able to inflict them with other greater atrocities so he gave them the boot.

Here's the sad truth. Instead of being a blessing to the nation as God had promised, Abram's failure to trust God resulted in him being shamed.

Let me say that just because someone prospers does not necessarily mean they are being blessed by God.

In **Psalm 106** we find a passage that reminds us of the rebellion of Israel after leaving Egypt in the exodus. They forgot how God had delivered them and how He had provided for them in the wilderness and they began to complain about all the things they didn't have. **Verse 13** says they **"soon forgot what He had done and did not wait for His (God's) counsel."** Then we read in **verse 16** **"So He (God) gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them."**

Scripture tells us that we reap what we sow. Trying to take matters into his own hands instead of trusting, obeying, and following God, Abram reaped the consequences of his lack of faith that resulted in failure. But even in that there is hope. If we allow it, failure is the petri dish by which the seed of faith can grow. Yes, Abram would have other tests of faith. They say insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results. Later on he tried the same thing with the same results. But we will also see leaps of faith that demonstrate complete and absolute trust in God.

#### **Romans 4:18-21**

**Hebrews 11:8-10** tells us that Abraham was looking beyond the promise of a temporary place that his descendants would inherit to a place that would be permanent and built by God. Faith takes us beyond the here and now to a place and time that is yet future in full assurance and confidence that what God has promised will take place because our gaze is on Him. A walk of faith is not to be a glance at God, but a steadfast gaze. Such a gaze is sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. That is a faith that pleases God because it believes what God has said without wavering, convinced that the One who promised is faithful.

Let me close with some additional thoughts about Abram's pattern for our faith.

### **III. ABRAM'S PATTERN FOR OUR FAITH**

#### **A. Faith Produces Maturity – James 1:2-4**

We want faith to be Little Caesar's pizza – hot and ready. Pop into a store and they have one ready for you to pick up. Faith takes a long time to grow. As the passage says it takes perseverance. It takes time and effort. We want faith to be something like produce we pick up at the market, it's there on the shelf ready to purchase. Faith is like the farmer or gardener who knows that the produce comes after the labor of preparing the soil, planting, weeding, waiting, more weeding, more waiting. In time the produce is ready for picking, it's mature. But the thing about faith is that we'll never wake up one morning and say we've made it because there will always be one more test to hone our faith. Be encouraged that each test produces maturity.

#### **B. Faith Proclaims Boldly – Romans 1:16**

When Abram entered Canaan, he built an altar at the same place where pagan worship was taking place publicly declaring his intentions to only follow God.

*An English gentleman decided he would step out in faith and be bolder for Christ. He spent a lot of time traveling by train and in train stations. On the side of his suitcase he painted the words "fool for Christ." He would set the suitcase down in front of him and after a crowd had gathered he would turn the suitcase around displaying a question: "whose fool are you?" and then he would preach the gospel. Faith proclaims boldly.*

#### **C. Faith Proceeds Humbly – Micah 6:8**

Abram's failure here did not sideline him from God's purposes. Shame has a way of humbling us. God picked him up, dusted him off, and moved him back to where he should have been. God uses failure to help us learn to trust Him more. Faith never assumes that we can take control from God. Humility tempers our faith so that we only trust Him and not ourselves. If you have failed a time or two in this faith thing, don't despair. Humbly go to God and let Him direct your steps. He knows where He is leading you so follow Him. He is always faithful and so can be trusted.

*Are you looking to or lacking in faith?*