

## Faith Walk 1-14-07

Genesis 12:4-9

*<sup>4</sup> So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. <sup>6</sup> Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup> From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.*

Last Sunday we looked at that great covenant that God made with Abram. We saw what a key passage it is to the entire Bible and human history. It was the lens through which the future Hebrews saw God involved in their world. It is a key passage for us to understand the heart of God today. I can't emphasize enough that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New. By the way, that word testament is the word that was chosen long ago for the word covenant. It would be much easier for us to understand the labels on our Bible if we used Old Covenant and New Covenant instead of Testament. The Old Covenant is not referring to this covenant in the first three verses of the chapter. It is referring to the covenant that God would make with Israel on Sinai. It was the covenant of laws. The covenant in the first part of this chapter is an overarching covenant that covers both the old and the new covenants.

Consider again the promises made. God said He would make Abram a blessing. There were no other Hebrews in the world so who was he going to bless? Abram was a blessing to those he came in contact with because he brought them the proclamation of YHWH. The blessing was for the world. It was reiterated in verse 3, "*In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.*" Abram didn't come in contact with the whole world. We see that fulfilled in his descendent, Jesus. The good news of Jesus has gone out into all the world with astounding effectiveness. It has transformed cultures and shaped nations. The Great Commission came out of Genesis 12:3.

Our culture loves to point to times when people committed atrocities in the name of Christ to say that religion is a bad thing and at the same time overlook the incalculable good that has come from proclaiming the Gospel. They intentionally ignore the fact that what Crusaders were doing was often in direct contradiction to Jesus' teaching to love one another. (John 15:17) Out of the other side of their mouth they say that good and evil don't exist. Wait, I'm confused. The Crusades were evil, but there is no such thing as evil. There are no absolutes, which is in itself an absolute. It is right for me to say you can't push your rights and wrongs on me. That would be wrong of you, to me anyway. Post modern philosophy makes my head spin.

**Commented [notes1]:** 17 This is my command: Love each other.  
John 15:17 (NIV)

Here is the clear teaching of Scripture. God wants to bless the world. He cares about each and every individual and has a plan for every single life, to bless it and make it of immeasurable value, if only we will embrace our Creator instead of going our own way. His warnings are for our good to bless us. (Psalm 40:5) Therefore the promise of the world being blessed through Abram flows right into John 3:16. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, (the seed of Abraham) that whosoever (any one in the world) believes in Him (commits their trust in Him) should not perish (what we would do to ourselves and the just wrath of God upon sin) but have everlasting life (be eternally in a blessed relationship with God). That is the conclusion of the promise to Abraham for all who will receive it. (John 1:12)

**Commented [notes2]:** 5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. Psalms 40:5 (NIV)

A question many have is if God loves us and has this on His heart, why did He bring the flood? Why did He command the Canaanites be wiped out? In both cases, they had become so vile, so self destructive, that death was the only way to stop the mounting effect of sin. We don't want to believe that people can become so sin sick, so irrevocably hardened, because if they can then it means we can too. What could be more disgusting than burning babies alive on a glowing brazen altar? How sick do you have to be to do that to your own child? It isn't just the Bible's justification, there is abundant archeological evidence to say that it was even worse than the Bible describes.

**Commented [notes3]:** 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- John 1:12 (NIV)

God reached into the heart of a single man, Abram, and called him out of the depravity of the world. That would result in the nation of Israel who would bring the Messiah and diligently keep the records that we call the Old Testament. God began with the end in mind, bringing many sons to righteousness. (Hebrews 2:10)

**Commented [notes4]:** In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Heb 2:10 (NIV)

I have asked myself if there couldn't have been a short cut, an easier way. Did God have to go through the system of the Law and the nation of Israel? Jesus asked too, in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:39) Wasn't there some other way than the cross? What about all the people before Christ that didn't have the full message of the new covenant? Why did God take so long to bring the Savior of the world? One thing to consider is that we look at time with an overlay of the present population. The earth was not nearly as populated in ages past. The great boom in population is a relatively recent thing, long after Jesus' gave His life for us.

**Commented [notes5]:** 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Matt 26:39 (NIV)

But why the old covenant, when it was destined for failure? We needed to know that it was not by works of righteousness that man could ever come to God. (Galatians 3:24) He gave them 1500 years to make the point crystal clear. Jewish exegetes were coming to the same conclusion. God had to intervene in a powerful way to save mankind and crush the head of the serpent. If we didn't have the period of the Law under the Old Covenant, we would still be trying to make a set of standards and rules. (Romans 3:20) We would be inclined to make a set of rules about Christianity. Enough Christian sects do that as it is. The failure of the Law is the clarion warning that our salvation is all by grace through faith and not works. (Ephesians 2:8,9) It just seems to be engrained in our nature to want to do it our self. We need to see that God created us to be completely dependent on Him.

**Commented [notes6]:** 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Gal 3:24 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. Romans 3:20 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. Romans 3:20 (NIV)

That was a long introduction to our passage today, but I think it is important for us to see where this is all headed and why. <sup>4</sup> *So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.* Notice the word "had told". Verse one in the NIV is correct in translating the Hebrew "had said". God spoke to Abram in Ur. Here is how Stephen put it in the book of Acts. <sup>2</sup> *To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.* Acts 7:2 (NIV) You mean, Abram didn't completely obey? Yep! He didn't leave his father's house. He took his father and nephew Lot with him. He didn't leave the family wealth behind. He waited until he got his inheritance. About the only thing he did was to move from the southern Mesopotamia to northern Mesopotamia. Perhaps that was as far as God showed him, until his father died. It was at least half way to his destination.

If I understand God's call correctly, Abram should have left Ur with only his wife, no possessions, and certainly not with his father and nephew. Those of you who know what happened to Lot can see Lot was no better off and probably ended up worse off. (Genesis 19:36-38) Yet one can imagine Abram's justification in taking him along. Surely it would be better to be with his believing uncle than in pagan Ur? Not necessarily! Disobedience to the Lord affects not only our life but other lives as well, regardless of how good our intentions may be.

I think there is something important here for us. God was very specific with Abram. Abram obeyed in part. It seems that God did not show him further directions until the death of his father. He wouldn't leave his father and his father's wealth, so God waited until his father died. Sometimes God is very specific with us as well. We know what God asks of us, but we just can't quite get the idea that it is for our good, to bless us. We decide we will obey what is in our comfort zone, and we end up stuck in Haran until God takes from us the thing we would not let go of. Corrie ten Boom said, "I hate to ever close my hand with whatever God has entrusted me with because it hurts so hard when He begins to pry my hands loose."

If you are stuck in Haran today, remember what God first directed you to do. He won't lead you further until you obey the last instruction. Sometimes we wonder why God isn't directing us, and then the Holy Spirit reminds us we haven't followed through on His last direction. We are clinging tightly to some comfort or security that He has asked us to release. (John 15:10)

<sup>5</sup> *He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.* When Abram left Haran, he took with him the souls he had acquired. We would think at first that this meant slaves, but another equally valid way of putting it is "the souls they had won". This is more consistent exegetically and with early Jewish writings (Talmud – see Cassuto). Certainly some of them were servants, though not necessarily purchased slaves.

<sup>6</sup> *Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.* He is still moving forward in

**Commented [notes9]:** 36 So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father.  
37 The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today.  
38 The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.  
Gen 19:36-38 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.  
John 15:10 (NIV)

faith when he began moving through Canaan. At that time, great trees were places where false gods were often worshipped. It is still that way in parts of the East. This particular tree of Moreh was the site of a famous pagan sanctuary. (Judges 9:3,4) It was there that the baals of Canaan were proclaimed. It is in central Canaan. Remember that Canaan is the line that Noah cursed. (Genesis 9:25) Jesus would preach there when he ministered to the Samaritans at Jacob's well. (Genesis 33:19) (John 4:5,6)

<sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. God promised to give the descendents of Abram the land of Israel. There are no conditions attached. In the next chapter, God will declare that this is an eternal promise. (Genesis 13:15)

God chose this site, where false priests preached about gods of fertility, to appear to Abram as the covenant God, YHWH. An appearance of God is called a theophany. The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the manifestation of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15) Since God is a spirit that cannot be seen, I prefer to call these manifestations of God a Christophany. Up to this point Abram had gone completely by faith on the directions of an unseen God. In spite of being waylaid in Haran, that is a pretty impressive thing. Now that he had arrived in the land that was to belong to his descendents, God appeared. We don't know the form He took. It may have been a Shekinah like appearance or as a man. Whatever it was, Abram saw the manifestation of the invisible God and there was no doubt about the promise. He had to go by faith before God showed Him the substance of His faith. He had to step out and obey before he could see with his eyes his great reward, the Lord. (Genesis 15:1) But wait, Sarai is still barren and getting up in years. He must have wondered how God was going to give the land to his offspring.

He built his first altar there and worshipped the God who appeared to him. He wasn't worshipping something he imagined. He wasn't worshipping something others preached. He was worshipping the God He had come to know and trust personally, and now had seen. (John 4:23) His faith was now made sight right there at heart of Canaan paganism.

An encounter with Christ has happened to a number of people in the old and new covenant. Remember the story of the Apostle Paul. (Acts 9:5) It happens today as well. Sadhu Sundar Singh was a young Sikh boy in India. He went to a Christian school but he could not find peace in the Bible or in the Hindu scriptures. At age 15 he read every philosophical book he could find. His search ended in frustration, contemplating suicide. He even persecuted Christians because he did not believe they had the truth. He threw stones at a local preacher. Three days after publicly burning a Bible, he was so full of despair the he decided to throw himself in front of the morning train, if God would not reveal to him the way to find peace. That night the Lord Jesus appeared to him in his room asking why he was persecuting Him. He fell on his face and worshipped, experiencing the peace he had so desperately searched for. He gave his life as a wandering preacher of the gospel to India, Tibet, Nepal, and Ceylon. Living utterly by faith he wandered the trails of those nations seeking out souls that would listen to the message of salvation through Jesus. Abram and Sundar

**Commented [notes11]:** 3 When the brothers repeated all this to the citizens of Shechem, they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother."  
4 They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, and Abimelech used it to hire reckless adventurers, who became his followers.  
Judges 9:3-4 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 25 he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."  
Gen 9:25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 19 For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent.  
Gen 33:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.  
6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.  
John 4:5-6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.  
Gen 13:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.  
Col 1:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."  
Gen 15:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.  
John 4:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.  
Acts 9:5 (NIV)

saw the Lord. Many have had to have a revelation to convince them in their hour of need, but remember, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." (John 20:29) That is faith.

<sup>8</sup> From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. Abram wasn't quiet about God's revelation to him. He called on the name of the Lord. As we saw with the Sethites, this also meant to proclaim YHWH's name and His attributes. He took his faith to the streets. (Romans 10:9,10) Did he have the ancient stories of Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, and Noah? I believe so. He was preaching in Canaan at the site of the great tree of Moreh. His preaching bore no converts that we know of, but He was faithful to preach the truth. He built an altar and worshipped right there. He was staking out the territory for the God who promised him the land.

The description of his route through the land takes him from the North to the South of Israel. He walked through the whole land living in tents. The only structures he left were altars as he staked out the land for God from Shechem to Bethel to Hebron to Mount Moriah. Quite a contrast to the area he left with its high towers. We would do well to stake out the areas of our life with worship. Do you worship at home, or only on Sunday at church? What about at work? We can even stake out our times of leisure and dedicate them to the glory of God with worship. (John 4:23)

This was the beginning of a great faith journey. There will be compromises worse than the ones we already saw, but his faith will grow. There will be tests greater than any we have ever faced, and Abram would come through with incredible trust in God. You can tell he is committed because he is proclaiming it to others. The writer of Hebrews tells us, <sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. Hebrews 11:8-9 (NIV)

I have a question for you. Are you comfortable with this world? When Sundar Singh visited Europe he was shocked at the materialism. I imagine he would be if he visited my home as well. Abram, Sundar, and many of you have found the joy and peace of putting everything in the Master's hands. Like Abraham, you won't be perfected in this life, but you can know the joy and peace of being in the center of God's will, of loving Him first and foremost. By the grace of God you can keep moving forward and see your faith increase. (2 Corinthians 3:18) And in a very real way, your faith becomes sight too. (John 11:40)

Just as in the day in which God spoke to Abram or appeared to Singh, God reaches out to you and invites you to a life of faith. Just as the world was so decadent that God needed a witness of righteousness then, God needs us now. He challenges us to hold forth the word of life. (Philippians 2:15,16) He asks us to believe without seeing, knowing that one day our faith will be made sight. And as we walk in that faith, like Abram, we proclaim Jesus to a world that is focused on its many fertility gods. We

**Commented [notes20]:** 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."  
John 20:29 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.  
Romans 10:9-10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.  
John 4:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.  
2 Cor 3:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"  
John 11:40 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.  
Phil 2:15-16 (NIV)

walk by faith and not by sight. We hold lightly the things of this world because we know we are like strangers in a foreign country. And as we go we stake out the land with altars of worship in spirit and truth. <sup>9</sup> *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.* 2 Chronicles 16:9 (NIV) Has He found such a heart in you?