

Faith in Action / Faith Overcoming Fear

Title: The Faith of Abraham Overcoming (through Separation)

Texts: Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19; Genesis 11:27-22:19

Objectives:

- Examine how faith is obedient to the call of God.
- Explore the mindset of *dwelling in tents* as an alien on earth.
- Evaluate God's faithfulness in the testing of **our** faith.

"In all the Bible there is no man, except Jesus Christ, who should attract and hold our attention more than Abraham" (Donald Grey Barnhouse). Abraham is certainly one of the greatest characters in the Old Testament and mentioned 74 times in the New Testament; more than any other Old Testament character minus Moses who is mentioned 80 times. The Jews, of course, have their rightful claim to the physical DNA of this one man, but we {Christians} also have, by faith, a spiritual DNA connection to Abraham, *who is the father of us all* {**Romans 4:16**}. This spiritual DNA is more important and more potent than any physical DNA! And yet, Abraham is not without his warts and worries, his faithful steps and, *at times*, faulty missteps. In the end, however, Abraham's faith in his faithful friend (James 2:23) who happens to be the God of glory, Jehovah-Jireh, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth — along with at least 15 other names Abraham knows God by— shows us the way to walk so we too can live by a faith that overcomes fear, anxiety, doubts, and disappointments.

One thread throughout the *toledoth (generations) of Terah* [Genesis 11:27-25:11] is the concept of Abram's/Abraham's continued willingness of separation. Each Hebrews "by faith" scripture {**Hebrews 11:8, 9, 17**} highlights the Old Testament narrative of Abraham's separation from family, worldliness, culture, systems, beliefs, values, worship of the moon god Sin and other false gods, his rightful inheritance of land, and even the promised long-awaited son Isaac. What's fascinating is that the very call to separate from values and items one may hold dear, can create anxiety and fear. Yet, it may be God calling for the separation! And it is our faith in God which will help us overcome the fear and anxieties we may be going through. Abraham, thus, is a perfect character for our study of building a faith that overcomes the world! {**1 John 5:4**}

EXAMINE HOW FAITH IS OBEDIENT TO THE CALL OF GOD

Hebrews 11:8; Genesis 11:27-12:7; Acts 7:2-4

The above texts indicate that God appeared to Abram while living in Mesopotamia, land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And, God called him to leave his "personal domains" (see lesson 2) and go out, not knowing exactly where he was to go. Abram thus begins his journey of faith in a God he did not yet fully know, but had enough belief to

leave Mesopotamia with the promise of God in his ear. *Why then did he initially end up in Haran?* Archeologists state that Haran (600 miles NW of Ur and 400 miles NE of Canaan) is the second most prominent site of worship to the moon god Sin; while Ur was the most dominant. Abram's father Terah, as well as Abram himself, served Sin and other false gods for a good portion of their lives {**Joshua 24:2, 14**}. Until—until Jehovah called Abram and excavated him from this wretched pit, in order to bless him, multiply him, and comfort him {**Isaiah 51:1-3**}.

Abram gives us an example to follow. As believers in Christ, we too have been called. We have been called out of a miry wasteful place and into the promises of God's light. Paul commands us *to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called* {**Ephesians 4:1**}, and to *lay aside the old self* {**4:22**}, and *put on the new* {**4:24**}. In order to do this, just as Abram had to separate himself—our separations may be just as daunting. See **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**.

With the call from the God of glory to Abram, the Bible does not indicate if Abram was fearful, anxious, worried, or excited, happy, expectant. What the Bible does highlight is Abram's obedience to the call regardless how he felt. Anxiety (which is a response to the unknown) comes when personal domains are threatened. More than likely, Abram experienced some consternation, but soon learned that God provides through one's obedience to His word.

- ❖ What has God called you to separate from? Has this caused you fear or anxiety?
- ❖ How have you responded to the call of God in your faith walk? Were you fully, partially, or not obedient to His call?
- ❖ How does obedience help overcome the fears/anxieties regarding your faith journey?

EXPLORE THE MINDSET OF DWELLING IN TENTS AS AN ALIEN ON EARTH

Hebrews 11:9-10; Genesis 12:8-21:34; Romans 4:12

For the third time in the Bible, **Genesis 12:8** uses the word tent (ohel) and here, connects it to Abram's dwelling. The tent was a temporary shelter made of cloth and became Abraham's abode as he lived as a foreigner from place to place in a land promised to him with covenant by God Almighty. The Hebrew author also picks up and highlights this *dwelling in tents* from this nomadic traveler of ancient days—but why? What is the purpose of “tent dwelling”? It seems this inspired writer is making the case that Abram's mindset was not on the ‘here and now’ or material world, but on a promised covenantal inheritance that his future descendants would possess. *What makes this (from man's perspective) somewhat improbable is that Abram at this point did not have a son through his wife Sarai—yet these descendants were the ones to whom the*

inheritance was granted. See Hebrews 11:11-12. Notice also in the “tent texts” how Abram pitched his tent, and there he would build an altar, calling on the name of the LORD {**Genesis 12:8, 13:3-4, 13:18**}.

The second time we read of Abram’s tent, the altar, and his calling upon the name of the LORD can be found in **Genesis 13:3-4**. This time, however, Abram displays a deeper trust and dependance upon the one who called him out of Mesopotamia. In **Genesis 12:10**, the famine in Canaan prompts a faith crisis with “the father of our faith”. The fear of going hungry led Abram away from the land God had just promised {**12:7**}. God did not tell him to go to Egypt—and Abram had to decide, “In what do I trust?” This misstep of faith led to an even greater dilemma in the potential marriage of his wife to the Egyptian Pharaoh! This too, was prompted by Abram’s **fear** that he could be killed because of others in the land wanting to have the beautiful Sarai for themselves {**12:11-12; 20:11-13**}. Abram was supposed to be a blessing {**12:3**} yet finds himself bringing great plagues upon Pharaoh’s house {**12:17**}. {See **Isaiah 30:1-3** for an insightful commentary}. God’s liability to His promise defends the dishonest Abram, and he is rebuked through a heathen ruler. In all of this however, Abram is learning that **God will be faithful**.

So, it is in Genesis 13, as we progress in Abram’s life and evaluate his missteps and steps of trust, we read of a contrast between Abram and his nephew Lot. Lot also dwelt in tents but upon Lot seeing the well watered land of Sodom and Gomorrah {**Genesis 13:10**}, Lot chose for himself this lush location {**13:11**} and moved his tents as far as Sodom {**13:12**}. By the time God’s judgement of Sodom is ripe, we read of Lot *sitting in the gate of Sodom* {**19:1**} and dwelling within the city in his **house** {**19:2ff**}. Lot walked by sight—and lost everything {see **Luke 17:32-33**}. Abram walked by faith and became a most revered patriarch.

What can the modern day faithful learn from this? Famines and hungers for something in life will come. This can bring anxiety and fear and the famines in one’s life can also create a faith crisis. In the midst of the crisis—do not compromise. Abram’s compromising brought forth more anxiety, not less! The antidote of overcoming is to trust in the faithfulness of God, the provisions He provides, and the direction He leads. When we fail (as Abram did) we should go back to the place of the altar (our altar is Jesus, **Hebrews 13:10**) and call upon the Name. Abram’s example to us is clear and should give us hope {**Romans 15:4**}.

At other times, it’s not the famine that is the genesis of despair, but losing sight of the kingdom of God. Lot was looking at the wrong things, not *the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God*. Remember Lot’s wife. When one’s attachment is to the lush lands and gardens of Sodom (representing materialism and hedonism) or to Egypt (which figuratively symbolizes alliances with the world) our alien “tent dwelling mindset” is in danger of shifting to a permanent-world paradigm. When Egypt and Sodom are part of ones “personal domain”, it is easy to live in anxiety if these things are taken away. How can we can be separated/detached from the things

of the world and live as aliens and strangers? {See **1 Peter 1:1; 2:11**}. This detachment will bring less stress, worry, anxiety, and fear to life. To be noted, the detachment itself is not the goal—but the mindset of *looking for the city...whose architect and builder is God* is. That which we hold onto tightly becomes the very thing we may need to let go of.

- ❖ What can *dwelling in tents* imply for us in our steps of faith?
- ❖ What are famines/hunger in your life that you can trust in God more?
- ❖ Are there areas of materialism or comforts that you would get anxious about if you did not have them? Abram was very rich—but put his trust in God, not things. How can we live in this way?

EVALUATE GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN THE TESTING OF OUR FAITH

Hebrews 11:17-19; Genesis 22:1-19; James 2:21-23

Abraham has come a long ways in his spiritual development since his initial call to leave Ur of the Chaldeans. He had many trials and experiences of which he overcame (even with temporary steps of failure), but one trial above all others was about to put his ultimate obedience of faith to the greatest challenge and pressure point of his entire life. Abraham's greatest treasure was not in his abundance *in livestock, in silver and in gold*, but his most beloved was his improbable promised son Isaac. Abraham had a long wait of hope for this son, born when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, but promised many years before. And now, the God that gave is asking for Abraham to release this most precious promise. God did not explain Himself or tell his faithful friend to "not worry about it". The command was given—how would Abraham respond? So *Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; ...and arose and went to the place of which God had told him*. Three days of walking, and considering what and maybe how God would keep His promises. Every step towards Moriah was a step of faith. What could be going through Abraham's mind as he journeyed? What was he feeling? Fear, worry, doubt, extreme anxiety, hope against hope? Abraham had been dwelling in the land of promise now for many years and had many examples of God's goodness. And just as his wife Sarah *considered Him faithful who had promised* {**Hebrews 11:11**}, Abraham too is thinking and speaking in the same vein. When Abraham *saw the place from a distance, Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you."* By day three, Abraham had *considered* {**Hebrews 11:19**} *worst case that God is able to raise even from the dead.*

Christians today have the advantage of recognizing this Old Testament event as a gospel portrait illustrating the ultimate apex event to all of history—the Son of God being sacrificed for our sins. Abraham did not have that advantage of a heavenly viewpoint but did give us an example of trusting in a faithful God who will provide our

every need. Jehovah-Jireh, the LORD Will Provide {**Genesis 22:14**}—is more than an eloquent name for God. This name is a reality of who God is when we walk as Abraham walked. Let us not hold on to our “personal domains” too tightly but allow God’s sovereignty to have preeminence in our life. In so doing, we can experience our very own fears, worries, anxieties, depressions and disappointments dissipate into a peace which surpasses all comprehension through faith from our God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith in action is a faith that overcomes fear!

- ❖ What trials have you gone through where your faith was tested? And how difficult was it to consider (evaluate) God’s faithfulness during the trial?
- ❖ What is your most valued treasure? A relationship? A dream? A possession? A vocation, etc.? Do you consider your walk with God greater?
- ❖ Share a time when Jehovah-Jireh has provided for you in time of need.