

Genesis 12:1-20

ABRAM MOVES OFF TO BIBLE COLLEGE

Timeline: 2083 AM or 1922 B.C.

G.A. Stuttert Kennedy once said, *“Faith is not believing in spite of evidence; it is believing in spite of the consequences.”*

I believe that to be true. The Bible is not a book of blind faith. It makes many statements that can be validated. Secular history corroborates many of the events in the Bible as well as place names that can be seen even to this day. One such place is Ur of the Chaldees.

Gen. 11:31,32

31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter- in- law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. 32 So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

In 1922, archaeologist Sir Leonard Wooley was commissioned to excavate around the ruins of the great ziggurat at Ur. He made many amazing discoveries there. The ziggurat was totally excavated and can be seen today. It was dedicated to the worship of the moon god Nanner. There was also evidence of human sacrifice. Royalty were buried with their servants and horses. Geometry and trigonometry were in use. Many texts were unearthed, including medical inscriptions that ranged from breathing maladies to removal of brain tumors. Needless to say, they were a backward culture.

However, we have a slight problem with this location being the city of Ur mentioned in the Bible. Have you ever looked at one of the maps of Abram's journey and wondered why he took such a circuitous route? I

always wondered why Abram went the way that was shown. I understand the need to follow the water, but it still seemed like Abram was going around his armpit to get to his elbow. Furthermore, the Chaldeans and their language weren't known to be in existence at the time of Abram. They came into play during the time of Daniel, approximately 1300 years later. And they were also known to have lived much farther to the north. So, there you have it, the Bible is wrong.

Not so fast, my friend. There is another city by the name of Ur. In fact there are a few cities by that name. What we have to do is find the one that matches all the criteria set forth in the Bible. First of all we are told that prior to the incident at Babel, the people settled in a plain in Shinar. There just so happens to be a plain by that name in southeastern Turkey, just north of the Syrian border.

The first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus tells us that the land of the Chaldeans lay above Babylon. Cuneiform tablets unearthed in Ebla, dating from around the time of Abram mention the city of Ur being located in the district of Haran. Does that name sound familiar?

Haran was the place in which Terah died. It is also the name of Abram's brother that died before Abram left home. While the names are spelled the same in English, they are different words in Hebrew.

So, if we are to find the Biblical Ur, we need to look in the plain of Shinar; in the district of Haran. Can we find such a place? Yes we can. Maps show that there is a city now named Urfa (Ur) in the plain of Shinar (Cinar). Urfa is just northwest of Haran. Surrounding towns also have some similar names: Serug, Nahor, Terah and Nimrod. With the exception of Abram, these are all names of immediate relatives of Abram. So we can build a good case that it was from this region in Southeastern Turkey that Abram and his family originated.

Speaking of this region, the Encyclopedia Britannica states:

The town lies in the fertile plain of Haran ringed by limestone hills on three sides... Traditions of earliest foundation associate the site with the legendary king Nimrod, and Muslim legend associates the place with Abraham: a cave beneath Urfa's ancient citadel is said to be Abraham's birthplace.

There are two towers there that were erected for the worship of Baal in ancient times.

Finally, we have a basis for the use of the term "Chaldees."

Note:

Jos 24:2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.

The religion of the traditional city of Ur, in the very southern area of Mesopotamia was that of the god Nanner. There is nothing there to link it to "Chaldees." However, the religion of the people in the plain of Shinar (SE Turkey) worshipped a smorgasbord of at least 79 gods. What was this pantheon called? Kaldis! There are many towns in this region that retain part of that word. This agrees with the statement that Terah and Nahor were polytheistic in their paganism.

Therefore, I believe this is more likely to be the place from which Abram journeyed to the Promised Land.

Now that we have seen where he left, let's look at where he's going.

Gen. 12:1-5

I Now the Lord had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country,

From your family

And from your father's house,

To a land that I will show you.

2 I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you

And make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

4 So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.

Abram was seventy-five when he entered Canaan. That means that he tarried in Haran for five years. Abram didn't leave Haran until his father died. I believe there are a couple reasons for this. First of all we are told that his father worshipped pagan gods. I don't believe Abram was allowed to enter Canaan while his father was alive.

As we go through Genesis we will see that there are some habits of Abram and his seed that may sound strange to us. We need to understand how people in the Middle East saw the sanctity of land. We saw last week how the other nations were allotted to false gods, (elohim). We also read that Israel was God's inheritance. God is holy and therefore the things associated with Him were holy or had to be made holy. Wherever the presence of God was to be found, that place, by definition was holy ground. When we get to the tabernacle and later, the Temple, only priests that were sanctified by ritual acts were allowed on that holy ground. The idea of holy ground was also equivocated with the camp of Israel while they were traveling to the Holy Land. Once they settled in the Holy Land – God's domain – the entire land was considered holy ground. After Namaan was healed in the Jordan River

he asked permission to take some of the dirt back to Assyria with him. He recognized that the God of Israel was all-powerful and therefore the land was holy. He wanted some of that land. This is also why in the ceremony for the Day of Atonement; the scapegoat that bore the sins of the nation was driven out of the camp. Therefore whenever God appears in scripture or His presence is manifested in any way, an altar is built and that spot is considered holy. This is why we will see Abram building altars of stone here and there. It is also the reason we see him returning to these same places time and again.

We read in verse 1 that “The Lord had said, ”Get out of your country...” The tense in the Hebrew is important here because in English it reads as if it was in the past tense. But in the Hebrew, it reads, “God had been saying...” The difference is that God had been continually telling Abram to go for years.

Now that helps me. Abram is just a regular guy like me. I’m sort of thick. God usually has to tell me time and time again to do something. I wonder if I heard from God or if it was just me. We see the same thing in Acts 15 where the Apostles use the phrase, “It seemed good to us...” This means that they didn’t have a burning bush experience when trying to determine what to do next. They prayed about it and reached a consensus; believing it was the will of God that they proceed. We have all been in that boat.

- Do I take this job?
- Do we move over there?
- Etc., etc.

One of the great attributes of the Bible is that God is honest enough to let us see the faults of the people He has chosen! There are no halos on any of these people. Jesus is truly the only perfect person in the whole book! If one were attempting to make up this story: if the entire book

were some concocted story attempting to “sell” a religion, this would not be the case. God calls and allows people to take part in His overall plan. God uses dysfunctional people, just like us to minister to others. We are on the same plain as Abraham and the Apostle Paul! That should be encouraging.

We also see that Abram wasn't told exactly where to go. He was just told to get up and go.

God did not give Abram explanations; he simply gave him promises. We should not expect anything different. We seem to pause and wait for all the details, but that isn't the way God works. Faith has to be involved. Seventeenth century Puritan preacher, Thomas Fuller stated that when it comes to people and their relationship with God, there are three different types.

1. Intenders – Terah may have been an intender, but he never made it into the Land of Promise.
2. Endeavorers – Lot endeavored to follow God up to a certain point, but he failed because he walked by sight and not by faith.
3. Performers - Abraham and Sarah were performers because they trusted God to do what He promised even when things looked bleak.

Into which category do we fit?

God made seven promises to Abram.

God promised Abram 7 things:

1. I will make of thee a great nation
2. I will bless thee
3. I will make thy name great
4. You shall be a blessing
5. I will bless those that bless you
6. I will curse those that curse you
7. In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed

The rest of God's plan from Genesis to Revelation hinges on these promises.

While we are talking about promises, I think it is important to say that we have to be careful. There are some folks that apply all the promises of the Bible to them. God made these promises to Abram, not you or me. We can't necessarily take what God promised to someone else and apply it to ourselves. We have to look at the context and see to whom God is talking. We have to determine whether or not it is a general promise, such as the promise of salvation or whether it is a specific promise such as "I will make of thee a great nation."

Now this tells us that we are not necessarily qualified to know whom God will use and who He won't use.

1 Cor. 1:27-29

1Co 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

1Co 1:28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

1Co 1:29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

God can and will use anyone. And when God calls someone, He meets that person where they are. Abram is going to be the start of a nation. God didn't go through the schools of the day, and there were many in that region to get a theologian. He picked a pagan. God saw his heart and knew that in Abram there was a desire to know the truth and then act on it.

He is looking for the same thing in us today.

So Abram journeyed to the South, it is always good to be in the South. As he goes southward we start hearing more place-names. This is just another way of validating the Bible.

Abram was not allowed to move forward until his father had passed away. While Terah may have moved his family closer to Canaan, he apparently was still an idolater.

I believe that God allowed Abram the grace to stay and take care of his father until his death. We can also see that there are some people that can hinder our journey. They are spiritual baggage you might say. But shouldn't we minister to these people. Yes, we should, but if they don't want to listen, sometimes we have to leave them in God's hands and move forward. We also have to see that Abram was what we might call a baby in the Lord. He was new in the faith. Therefore he is in a little more danger of being dragged back into the idolatry in which he had been raised.

When we first become Christians, we are sort of crossing over from life to another. We have old friends and old habits. Many of these habits will go away as we grow in Christ. Many of our friends may drop out of the scene. How many of you still run with most of the people you ran with in high school?

You see, as life goes on, things change. Our life in Christ is a journey. Abram was at a very formative age. God had to separate him from the influences that might easily stumble him.

“The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings.”

George Morrison

When we see pictures of Abram's story in children's books, we see a handful of people traveling as peasants, but that isn't the case. Abram was a rich man when he entered Canaan. He has all sorts of servants and livestock. Later we will see that he had trained

soldiers working for him. These weren't farmers that grabbed rakes and shovels to fight. These guys were proficient in war. Abram had his own private army. And he will be even richer by the end of this chapter.

5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. 6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.

Notice that the Canaanites were in the land. Abram is a pilgrim here. He won't see all the results of God's promises, but He is still playing his part. If he hadn't, we might not be sitting here today.

We have a tendency to think all of God's promises for us are in our immediate future. That isn't always the case. The Christians in Paul's day were looking for the imminent return of Christ. Some even quit their jobs, sold all they had and just waited. We, just as Abram have to be busy doing the will of God. We are to redeem the time until He returns.

7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he 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. 9 So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

God appeared to Abram here and he built the altar. This was holy ground. He then moved and pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai. Bethel means "House of God." Ai means "place of ruin" or "garbage heap." It was here that he called once again on the name of the Lord. Once again he builds an altar. That was holy ground.

Gen 12:10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.

Now Abram has come upon a difficulty in his walk with God. There is a famine in the land. But we don't read of Abram crying that God had sent him there to die. He dealt with it and moved on. Why could he do this? Because he knew that God was involved and that He was in control. Sometimes it is easier to handle a famine when we are new in our faith. At that point we still have some vigor. A new Christian is often not as apt to be complacent as one that has known the Lord for a long time.

So Abram made the decision to head south towards Egypt. Many people preach that this is Abram relying on the world instead of God. While it is true that Egypt can be symbolic of the "world" the Bible doesn't make any derogatory remarks about it here. I believe Abram is being pragmatic. He knows he can buy food in Egypt. There is a catch though as we will see.

Unearthed inscriptions in Ur speak of a Yemeni princess writing to Joseph in Egypt asking for food. Most people relied upon Egypt in times of drought. Egypt was fertile and continually flooded by the Nile. It was the breadbasket of the region. This was just a practical decision.

Can you imagine Sarai asking him if he was sure God sent them there? God doesn't always move us to the land of milk and honey. The land won't have that distinction until Israel returns as a nation.

Gen 12:11 And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance.

Gen 12:12 Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

Gen 12:13 Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."

Ok, this is funny to me. Gentlemen put yourselves in Abram's shoes and imagine telling this to your wife. Mine would knock me off my camel!

Contrary to popular opinion, adultery wasn't tolerated everywhere at this time. Therefore, royalty had the option of killing the husband, thereby getting rid of the charge of adultery. Apparently murder was acceptable in some cases. (haha)

But what we see here is fear creeping into Abram's heart. Famine didn't scare him, but guys wanting to kill him because his wife was beautiful did.

We all have more fears in some aspects of our lives than in others. There are some calamities that we handle better than others. This is human. What we have to learn from this is that God is still in control. The same God that led Abram to food is the same one that will keep him alive while he is getting the food. God didn't lead or allow him to get there so he could die. Remember, God has 7 promises to keep.

Now look at what happened while Abram was in Egypt.

Gen 12:14 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful.

Gen 12:15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house.

Gen 12:16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

In verse 16 we see that Abram was treated well for Sarai's sake. He was given sheep, oxen, donkeys, servants and camels.

(I can imagine Sarai looking out the window of the harem and seeing Abram getting all this livestock!)

So you can look at you wife and wonder just how many donkeys she is worth.

Pastor Joe Focht tells of a pastor friend of his that was offered 200 camels for his wife while on a trip to the Holy Land. On the trip home they had a dispute. He told her she was lucky there was no way he could get 200 camels on the airplane. :>)

What we really need to see is that God is taking lemons and making lemonade. We will see this often in the Bible. God's people make bad decisions and then God bails them out, but He uses the situation in order to further the cause as well as an object lesson. This can keep us from freezing up like a deer in the headlights when we don't know which way to go.

Now God doesn't want Abram to get too comfortable in Egypt, he needs to get back to Canaan. God also doesn't want Sarai to suffer for her husband's lack of backbone either, so He makes sure that Pharaoh is uncomfortable with them being there.

Gen 12:17 But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Gen 12:18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"

Gen 12:19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way."

Gen 12:20 So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

So God plagues Pharaoh and his house. God will pull this out of the playbook in Exodus also.

But the important thing to see is that God was still in charge.

- The life of Abraham is an example for all Christians that want to walk by faith. Abraham was saved by faith. (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1-5; Gal. 3:6-14)
- Abraham lived by faith. (Heb. 11:8-19)
- His obedience was evidence of that faith. (James 2:14-26)
- Abraham obeyed when he did not know where, how, when or why.
- So should we.

- Abraham and Sarah were not perfect, but their walk was generally characterized by faith and faithfulness. When they sinned, they suffered but the Lord was always ready to extend grace upon their repentance.

- Abram didn't know what he was getting into when he began his journey. Neither do we. But we need to understand that tests often follow triumphs.

- Abram was 70 when he received the call and 75 when he began to seriously walk with God. It is never too late and you are never too old to answer the call of God. Seek the Lord and start moving now!

- If you don't know what to do, just ask, there is plenty around here that needs to be done.

- We are all on the same plain as Abram.

- We are all serving the same big God.

- Don't be an intenderer or endeavorer. Be a performer.

- Remember where God has spoken to you and mark it as holy ground.

Application:

- God has an overall plan.
- We fit into this plan at some point for a specific reason
- When God call us He takes us where we are when He call us
- This guarantees that whatever He has called us to do we won't be over our heads
- We see that even when we make a bad mistake, even when we act in fear or doubt that God is still in control and helps us, He doesn't get disgusted and go fine someone else
- Find your place in God's plan and walk humbly but confidently knowing that He is in control