

“BEGINNINGS: Abraham and the Promise”
Genesis 11:27-12:8 selected verses

11:27 This is the account of Terah’s family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot.

28 While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth.

29 Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai.

30 Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot,

and his daughter-in-law Sarai, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan.

But when they came to Harran, they settled there.

32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

12:1 The LORD had said to Abram,

“Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

2 “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated

and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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.

Introduction

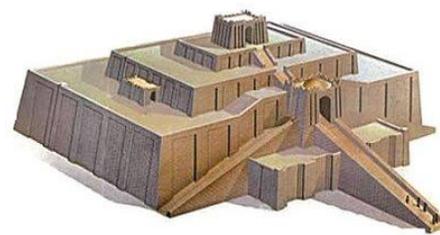
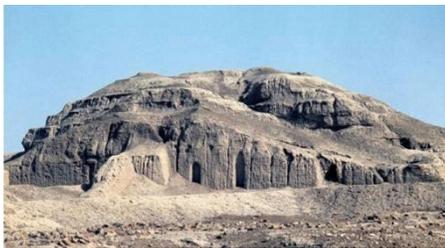
Every parent wants the kids to eventually move out of the house. But that hopeful reality seems to be in peril. A recent survey (2016) by Pew Research revealed that the number one living arrangement for 18-34-year-olds is living with their parents. The parent's house outranked living with a married or cohabitating partner. This is the first time in more than 100 years that living in the basement is more popular than living with your husband or wife. Pew believes this is because Millennials are putting off getting married until later in life. Young men are the worst culprits in this trend: they have a higher likelihood of moving back home than young women. Fatherhood and motherhood always have been tough roles, but now they might be getting even harder—or at least a lot longer.

In our traveling through Genesis, we come to the story of Terah and his son Abram. It says, “This is the account of Terah’s family line. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran... The LORD

had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you...’ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.”

I. Important Background

Why would Abram and Sarai want to leave the large, sophisticated city of Ur and move to Canaan, a much less developed place without the amenities of even an ancient city? Ur was a well-developed city with about 250,000 people. Archaeology has uncovered two and three story houses with what would have been pleasant court yards. Literacy and education were common. Math included square and cube roots to figure out geometric problems. The famous ziggurat showed their architectural abilities.



Thousands of clay tablets show cultural, legal and business life in Ur. So, why want to leave? God spoke to Abram. It says that Terah worshiped other gods, but not Yahweh. It is through Abram that the one living and true God was again being revealed.

God’s call inevitably leaves one with a necessary choice. Ur and its refinement – Canaan with a much more primitive culture. An invisible God – the moon god graciously appearing in monthly fullness. The unknown – the familiar. Trust? or Distrust? Abram/Abraham is known as the father of faith.

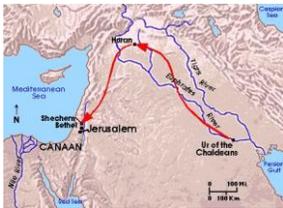
Where were the significant forks in the road for your life? I was born in Wood-Ridge, NJ. When I was three, my mom and dad had the nerve to move away from both families – 6 miles away! to Nutley, NJ. Not even on the college radar, God dropped Westminster Choir College in Princeton in my path. It’s where I became a Christian. Churches, jobs, and people all directed my life toward being a pastor at 32 years old – in NJ, then Long Island, then Utah. Where next? Abram was 75 when he set out. I’m only 64.

Commenting on getting older, Bob Hope said, “I don’t feel old. In fact, I don’t feel anything until noon. Then it’s time for my nap.” And, “You know you’re getting old when the candles cost more than the cake.”

Where has faith, life and love brought you so far? And what may God be calling you to do for now?

After being born and raised and a banking career in England, Stuart Briscoe was called as pastor to Elmbrook Church near Milwaukee in 1970. Over 30 years, he is credited with transforming Elmbrook from a church of 300 members to the largest church in Wisconsin, averaging 7,000 in worship each week.

Stuart Briscoe wrote this: “In matters of faith and obedience, nothing has changed since Abram’s day. God still uses people. He still calls individuals. He still expects reverential trust and filial obedience. And he still unfolds his plans for people in ways which leave them *lost in wonder, love, and praise.*” Cumbria, England to Wisconsin, USA. Who would have guessed?



So here’s a map of Abrams’ travels. Ur of the Chaldeans near the Persian Gulf traveling a long way northwest along the Tigris and Euphrates Fertile Crescent to Haran and then south-southwest to Beth-el in the land of Canaan. That’s about a thousand miles. The writer of Hebrews 11 said it like this: “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.”

II. Set in Motion

With the choosing of Abram, God set in motion his multi-generational plan to bring salvation, redemption, life eternal to this human race through this promise: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Those promises of God 4,000 years ago have worked their way to Jesus the Messiah 2,000 years ago and into our lives today. God’s amazing love is offered to all. Trust in him as Abram did.

The Lord promises, “I will... and I will... and I will... and I will...” A great nation, blessing, a name great, blessed to be a blessing, blessing or curse, and blessing offered to all the families, the people groups, the nations, the world. This in marked contrast to a world that had come to ruin because it insisted on making a name for itself independent of God. Babel wanted to make a name for themselves; God promised to make Abram’s name great.

Abraham became great because of one thing: he lived by faith. He believed in this God he never saw. He obeyed a command that had no guarantees. He took the risk of traveling to a far country and living there as a stranger. His life was shaped by promises and lived in risk. In Romans 4, the apostle Paul writes a marvelous account of Abraham’s faith. “Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the

promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” (Romans 4:20-21).

Fellow Presbyterian pastor Eugene Peterson (now retired) said, “I would like to live like that – but before I do, I want to know how it turns out. Where will I end up, where are the dangers, where are the drop-offs, where are the rest stops?” Yet Peterson knows well that those living by faith only need to know the next step.

Conclusion

That’s actually how all of us live life anyway. We don’t know the dangers and drop-offs ahead of time. So whether you are 75 years old or younger or older (the median age of members in the Presbyterian Church USA is 62), the Lord has plans for your life of faith. Those plans are discerned through your reading, experience, and knowledge of the Bible; through prayer as you ask for guidance and direction; through Christian friends and family who know you and have a sense of your faith.

Why did God choose Abraham? I don’t know. Why does God choose anyone? Only in his wisdom, grace, and providence. Apparently, the Lord chooses people, one by one, in every time and place, to know and love and serve him. And here we are this morning, called to live by faith in the promises of God.

Let us pray.

11:27 This is the account of Terah’s family line. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. **28** While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. **29** Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai. **30** Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. **31** Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. **32** Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. **2** “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” **4** So Abram went, as the LORD had told

him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. **5** He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. **6** 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. **7** 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. **8** 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.

Hebrews 11:1-12

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. 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. 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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.