

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “Venture Of Faith”

Genesis 12:1-20

2002

### Introduction

In Genesis 12, we are introduced to Abraham who is unquestionably one of the greatest men of faith in the Old Testament:

1. Nearly one-fourth of the book of Genesis is devoted to this man’s life.
2. There are over 40 Old Testament references to him.
3. There are nearly 75 references to him in the New Testament.
  - a. Paul presented Abraham as an example of a man who was justified before God by faith apart from works (Romans 4).
  - b. James referred to Abraham as a man who demonstrated his faith by his works (James 2:21-23).
  - c. The writer to the Hebrews pointed to Abraham as an illustration of a man who walked by faith, devoting more space to him than any other individual in chapter eleven (Hebrews 11:8-19).

But Abram didn’t start out as a giant in the faith. He was transformed into one by the testing of circumstances and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Donald Barnhouse said:

“Faith is not a mushroom that grows overnight in damp soil; it is an oak tree that grows for a thousand years under the blast of the wind and rain.”

### I The Calling Of God

#### A. Leave [Verse 1a]

##### 1. Your country

Ur of the Chaldees is located 160 miles from the Persian Gulf and 220 miles SE of Baghdad in modern-day Iraq. It was once thought that Ur was a very primitive city. But archeologists have since learned that this was a city of great wealth and considerable culture, containing among other things, a library and a university. “Ur may have been one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the Tigris-Euphrates area when Abraham emigrated northward to Haran.”  
(Tenney, M. The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 1.)

### Application:

1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

## 2. Your people

**People** = Mowledeth = Abram's extended family and community

Abram and the people of Ur and Haran were idolaters – worshippers of the Moon Goddess - Joshua 24:2, 14-15

**Application:**

2 Cor 6:15-17 “What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.”

## 3. Your father's household

**Household** = Bayith = “Home and immediate family”

Doing just a little math, we discover something interesting about the timing of Abram's obedience to God's call.

- Terah was 130 years old when Abram was born.
- Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.
- That would make Terah 205, which is the year of his death.
- Conclusion: Abram left Haran shortly after the death of his father, Terah.

**Application:**

Luke 14:25, 33 “Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-yes, even his own life-he cannot be my disciple ... In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

B. **Go** to the land I will show you [Verse 1b]

In one sense, the command of God to Abram was very specific. Abram was told in detail what he must leave behind. He must leave his country, his people, and his father's house.

On the other hand, God's command was deliberately vague and distressingly devoid of detail: “... to the land which I will show you.”

As Hebrews 11:8 puts it, “... he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

**Application:**

1. You cannot stay in Ur and go to the land at the same time.  
Put more directly, you cannot stay where you are spiritually and follow the Lord at the same time.
2. The faith to which we are called is not faith in a plan, but faith in a person. Much more important than **where** Abram was, God was concerned with **who** he was, and in **Whom** he trusted. The Christian life is not

knowing exactly what the future holds, but knowing Him Who holds the future.

### **Application:**

God is still concerned with geography, timing and calling. But His overarching concern for believers today is not location – the where, what and when of ministry – but of the mission to make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

## **II The Promises Of God**

A. I will make you into a great **nation** [Verse 2]

His offspring would be in number like:

1. The dust of the earth - Gen 13:16-17; 28:14
2. The stars of the heavens - Gen 15:5
3. The sand of the seashore - Gen 22:17

This first promise of God to Abram was literally fulfilled in the nation of Israel.

B. I will bless you

**Bless** = Barak = “To confer divine benefit”

1. God blessed Abraham materially with flocks, herds, and material riches.
2. God blessed Abraham socially with honor, influence, and responsibility.
3. God blessed Abraham spiritually; through his line the Messiah would come.

C. I will make your **name** great

**Great** = Gadal = “Honor, advance, magnify, promote”

The command of God to Abram is, in effect, a reversal of what men attempted at Babel – to find security and renown by banding together and building a great city (11:3-4).

Abram was secure and comfortable in Ur, a great city. God called him to leave that city and to exchange his townhouse for a tent. In exchange, God promised Abram a great name – the very thing that the people of Babel sought so passionately for but failed to attain (Genesis 11:4).

### **Application:**

I believe that God has designed mankind to desire and pursue greatness. But rather than finding that greatness the world’s way, Christ taught that true greatness is found in:

1. Being the least and the servant of all - Matthew 20:26
2. Losing your life for the sake of Christ and others - Luke 9:24
3. Being last now so that you might be first in His kingdom - Mark 9:35

D. I will make you a **blessing**

Blessing would come through Abram in several ways:

1. Unbelievers would be blessed through their association with Abram and his descendents. For example:
  - Laban's household was blessed by Jacob's service.
  - Pharaoh household was blessed by the leadership of Joseph.
2. People of all nations would be blessed by the Scriptures which were entrusted to the Jewish people – Romans 3:2.
3. Ultimately, the whole world was blessed by the coming of the Messiah, who was traced through the human ancestry of Abram (Romans 9:4-5).

**Application:**

Being a blessing to both believers and unbelievers is one of the great privileges of the Christian. There are few things that bring greater joy than to know that God has used you to be a blessing to someone else.

1. I will bless those who bless you [Verse 3]
2. I will curse those who curse you

I will *curse* = 'arar = "To bitterly curse"

*Curse* = Qalal = "To make light or small; to despise"

Ex 23:22 "If you listen carefully to what he [the Angel of the Lord] says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you."

**Application:**

This promise is primarily centered on the Jewish nation of Israel.

Donald Barnhouse: "When the Greeks overran Palestine and desecrated the altar in the Jewish temple, they were soon conquered by Rome. When Rome killed Paul and many others, and destroyed Jerusalem under Titus, Rome soon fell. Spain was reduced to a fifth-rate nation after the Inquisition against the Jews; Poland fell after the pogroms; Hitler's Germany went down after its orgies of anti-Semitism; Britain lost her empire when she broke her faith with Israel."

This is one of the reasons why the United States has been so blessed. We were one of the first modern nations to grant full citizenship and protection to Jewish people. And we remain one of the only nations on earth to extend our friendship, support and concern for Israel.

3. All people will be blessed through you

This promise is confirmed again in Gen 18:18-19 and Genesis 22:17-18

Galatians 3:6-9 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be

blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

### III The Faith Of Abraham

#### A. Abraham **left** as the Lord had told him [Verse 4a]

From the account in **Acts 7:2-5** we learn that the God appeared to Abram while he was still in Ur of the Chaldeans before he moved to Haran with his father, Terah. In other words, God's call on Abram's life occurred first in Ur of the Chaldeans.

#### **Application:**

There are many people today who respond to God's call to be followers of Christ, but only partially obey. Yes, they have left the gross idolatry and rebellion of "Ur", but instead of enjoying the abundance of life in the promised land of Canaan, they settle for something in between – they settle down in Haran, which means, "barren." And like Abram, they have wasted many years of their lives living in the comfortable and familiar land of "Haran" – a land of spiritual compromise.

#### B. Abraham **went** to Canaan [Verse 4b-6]

1. He was **75** years old (He died at 175 years of age)

**Application:** It's never too late

Despite Abram's age, responsibilities and various commitments, he stepped forward in a venture of faith in obedience to God.

What's holding you back from launching out in obedience to God?

2. He took with him:

- a. His wife Sarah
- b. His nephew **Lot**
- c. His accumulated possessions
- d. His acquired people

Again, we see a partial obedience by Abram. God had commanded him to leave his family and household, but he brings with him his nephew Lot. And as we know, Lot ended up being a source of grief and trouble for Abraham.

#### C. Abraham arrived in **Canaan** [Verse 7-8a]

1. The Lord appeared to him and said:

a. To your **offspring** I will give this land

**Offspring** = Zera` = "Seed or posterity"

Seed is a reference to:

1. The nation of Israel - John 8:33
2. All believers (Jewish & Gentile) - Gal. 3:29
3. The Messiah Himself - 1 John 3:9

It is interesting to note that Abram never owned any of this land except his burial plot in Machpelah (Genesis 23:1-20).

2. Abraham built an **altar** to the Lord:

- It was a place of worship

Hebrews 13:10 “We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.”

- It was a place of sacrifice

Ephesians 5:1-2 “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

- It was a place of absolute surrender

Romans 12:1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.”

a. In Shechem

**Shechem** = Its name means, "shoulder," probably because the city was built mainly on the slope, or shoulder, of Mount Ebal. It is located in modern-day Nablus.

b. In Bethel

**Bethel** = Beyth-' El = “House of God”

3. Abraham **called** on the name of the Lord [Verse 8b-9]

First instance: Gen 4:26 "At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.”

Gen 13:4 “There Abram called on the name of the LORD.”

Gen 21:33 “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.”

**Application:**

Rom 10:12-13 “... the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

D. Abram pitched his **tent**

Abram, though quite wealthy and powerful, never had a house. He lived in a tent until his death 100 years later.

Hebrews 11:9-10, “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.”

**Application:**

In 1 Peter 2:11 we are exhorted to live “as aliens and strangers in the world.” We are to live as people who have their permanent dwelling place in heaven, not on earth. Unfortunately, too many Christians want to build mansions on earth and are happy with tents in heaven!

#### IV The Faltering Faith Of Abraham

A. He went down to **Egypt** during a severe famine [Verse 10]

Abram was not wrong for being concerned about the famine or feeding his family, but he was wrong for failing to trust God to provide for his needs.

Isaiah 31:1 “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.”

#### Application:

Is there an area in your life where you have compromised in your trust of God?

Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Ps 34:19 “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.”

B. He **lied** about his wife [Verse 11-15]

Amazing! Even at age 60 Sarai is such a beautiful woman that just being seen with her was a life-threatening experience. Talk about being a heart-stopper!

**“Please say you are my sister”:** This was in fact a half-truth. Sarai was Abram’s half sister (Genesis 20:12). Yet Abram’s intent here was clearly to deceive, and he was trusting in his deception to protect him instead of trusting in the Lord.

#### The problem with lying:

1. It makes it easier to do the next time

He later tried to pull the same stunt with Abimelech in Genesis 20:12.

2. It influences others around us

In Genesis 26:7, we discover Abraham’s son, Isaac, pulling this exact same stunt with his wife Rebekah and Abimelech.

3. It brings a reproach to the name of God

Sadly, a pagan king must rebuke Abram for his deception and lack of faith in God

#### Application:

How do you respond when the pressure is on? When the finances are low? When you’re having conflict with your spouse or a co-worker? When you have no idea what to do next? When you are discouraged or angry?

Whether you realize it or not, your life, character and choices influences people around you – your spouse, your children, your family and friends. ***You may be the only “Bible” they’ll ever read!***

1. To protect himself

There are a few choice titles that come to mind to describe a man like this:

a. Self-serving jerk, insensitive brute, chauvinistic pig

Prov 29:25 “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”

2. To **benefit** himself [Verse 16]

In addition to being a jerk, he was also an opportunistic bum. He profited from his wife’s moral and spiritual endangerment.

Psalms 37:3-4 “Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

C. He put others around him at **risk** [Verse 17-20]

1. He put his wife at risk

2. He put Pharaoh and his household at risk

**Inflict** = Naga` = “To strike violently”

Pharaoh and his household were inflicted with serious diseases and the women were rendered barren - Gen 20:18

God blessed Abram even when he wasn’t doing what he should; and God continued to protect Abram, even when Abram was being a liar. God did not call back His promise to Abram, because the promise depended on God, not on Abram.

## Conclusion

Everyone here is living in one of three spiritual places -- Ur, Haran, or Canaan.

a. Ur is the land of death and darkness, the land into which we were born.

b. Haran is the half-hearted lifestyle of compromise where we settle down in a life of spiritual compromise.

c. Canaan is the land of power and blessing, the place of the Spirit's fullness.

Where are you living today?

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