

Remember: Our working definition of Biblical faith:

**FAITH IS CONFIDENT OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WORD,
IN SPITE OF CIRCUMSTANCE OR CONSEQUENCE**

Remember: 3 KEY PRINCIPLES OF FAITH (11:6)

1. **FAITH IS ABOUT PLEASING GOD** (not making something happen)
2. **FAITH IS ABOUT BELIEVING IN GOD** (not about the miracle we desire)
3. **FAITH IS ABOUT SEEKING GOD’S WILL** (not asking for my will)

TODAY’S TEXT

Hebrews 11:8-12 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

BIBLICAL ORDER OF EVENTS

Terah (Abraham’s father) lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (in the southern part of present-day Iraq, near the Euphrates river). (Gen. 11:28)

Terah’s first son, Haran, was born when Terah was 70. (Gen. 11:26). This is a later first birth than any of his ancestors since the flood. Haran was the father of Lot and Milcah (who later married his younger brother), but died in Ur before the family left. (Gen. 11:27-28)

Abraham was born when his father Terah was 130 – likely the youngest of the three sons. (assumed from comparing Gen. 11:26, 32 and 12:4). So Terah was a miracle father, giving birth late in life beyond the norm of all his ancestors. (Gen. 11). Abraham was indeed a miracle baby!

God spoke to Abraham when he was still in Ur, telling him to go to a land God would show him. This fact is only recorded in the New Testament statement of Stephen before his stoning. But it lends credence to why the family left Ur and explains Genesis 11:31.

Act 7:2 [Stephen:] The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in *Mesopotamia*, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.” Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran.

Genesis 11:31 They went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan

Terah, undoubtedly following prompting from his son Abraham, leaves for a land unknown following

the Euphrates River. Terah was at an advanced age – probably well over 150, and yet he trusts in God who spoke to his youngest son. He takes with him his family, including son Abraham and daughter Sarah by a different mother, who also was now Abraham's wife, and Lot his grandson (son of deceased Haran) and all their possessions. (Gen. 11:3; 12:5; 20:12).

Middle son Nahor, who married his older brother Haran's daughter, named Milcah, either stays behind or goes on the journey but is not mentioned.

The family travels NW following the Euphrates River as far as Haran (likely naming the city after Terah's deceased oldest son, Lot's father. Haran is 10 m. north of present day Syria's border, in Turkey – c.200 miles east of the NE corner of the Mediterranean Sea.

They settle in Haran for some 35-50 years until Terah's death at age 205. (Gen. 11:32) They were following God's call, but were sensitive to father Terah's fragile condition.

After Terah's death, the Lord again speaks to Abraham, this time in Haran.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the Lord said to Abram [*not yet named "Abraham"*], *"Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

Abraham, Sarah and Lot leave Haran heading south to Canaan, undoubtedly led by God to go that direction. Abraham is 75, Sarah is 65 and Lot is probably an older age than his uncle, since his father had been 60 years older than his uncle Abraham. They take with them great wealth and flocks. (Gen. 12:4-5; 17:17; 13:2)

They travel to Shechem in Canaan. There the Lord appears to Abraham again, affirming His promise to give this land to his descendants. Abraham worships God by building Him an altar. (Gen. 12:7)

They travel a little further south and pitch tents between Bethel and Ai where Abraham builds another altar to the Lord to worship. (Gen. 12:8)

They begin to travel further south, but a severe famine sends them to Egypt for a season. (Gen. 12:9-20)

They return to the South Country (Negev) of the promised land and there is strife between Abraham and Lot over sufficient feeding ground for their many livestock. (Gen 13:1-7)

Lot goes east to the Jordan valley and Sodom, while Abraham settles in Canaan. (Gen. 13:13)

Again God comes to Abraham affirming this land belongs to his descendants forever. Abraham settles in Hebron, and again builds an altar to the Lord to worship. (Gen. 13:14-18)

There is war of many kings in the land. Abraham meets Melchizedek and gives him a tenth of all. (Gen. 14)

The Lord again comes to Abraham, promising him a son from his own body.

Genesis 15:4-6 *Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him [Abraham], saying, "This man [servant Eliezer] will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

Abraham and Sarah doubt the promise will come through her, so Sarah gives her handmaid Hagar to Abraham as a wife, that they might bear a child through Hagar. Ishmael is born when Abraham is

86 and Sarah 76. (Gen. 16)

When Abraham is 99 and Ishmael is 13, the Lord again appears to Abraham and affirms His covenant, changes Abraham and Sarah's names ("father of a multitude" and "princess"), and specifically promises a son by Sarah. (Gen. 17:1-16)

Genesis 17:16 "I will bless her [Sarah], and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

God visits Abraham via 3 angels affirming the birth of Isaac. Sodom and Gomorrah are judged with fire and brimstone. (Gen. 18-19)

Isaac is born. Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90. They rejoice in God for His miracle.

Abraham is "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11)

Galatians 3:7 It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

THIS A REMARKABLE LOVE STORY

Here we have a remarkable love story for this message given on Valentine's Day. There is love of family, love of God and love of husband Abraham and wife/sister, Sarah.

Clearly the family of Terah was a close-knit, loving family of faith. One son (Nahor) married the daughter of older brother Haran – showing loving affection of family. Though peculiar to us, this was a common practice in those days, as seen from the Biblical records of marriages. Abraham also married his half-sister. Both of them shared Terah as a father – another show of loving family affection. When the leaving of Ur was planned, father trusted the youngest son Abraham's encounter with God. And grandson Lot, without a living father, was taken along - another sign of family love. When they reached Haran and settled, they did not leave for Canaan until patriarch/father Terah died – yet another sign of family love and honor of father. And even the dispute between Abraham and Lot shows love on Abraham's part to give Lot his choice of land.

This was also a family of faith. Abraham heard and listened to God, and then followed. Father Terah also trusted, and followed. We see in the Genesis account that both Abraham and Lot were trusting in God, even amidst their territorial disputes. And we see Abraham repeatedly building altars to worship his Lord and God. Sarah too is shown to be a woman of faith – doubting God's promise at first, but then trusting by faith. The love of this family to God, long before becoming the "first family of the chosen people" is remarkable.

And then we see the love story between Abraham and Sarah. They mutually trusted God's word in leaving Ur, and then Haran – and they made the arduous journeys together in love. Despite Sarah's infertility, they remained faithful to one another for decades and Abraham never left Sarah, though the common culture of the day would have allowed him that privilege. Even the act of Sarah giving Hagar to her husband as a second wife is a sacrificial act of love. They both knew how many years they had longed for a child between them, their love wanting to try and try again for it to happen.

Yes, and even the two times that Sarah told foreign dignitaries that she was Abraham's sister instead of wife was an act of love, for she wanted to protect the husband that she loved. And remember, it wasn't a lie.

They laughed together over what they thought was an impossibility even for God, and then they rejoiced together over the miracle of God's provision in their old age. And God allowed this loving couple to live together as husband and wife well into their hundreds.

May we learn from this story the importance of our love of blood family, our love of God, and our love of spouse – if God has so blessed us.

THE HEBREWS SUMMARY OF THE GENESIS ACCOUNT (11:8-12)

(v. 8) God called Abraham to go to a place where he would receive an inheritance, and he obeyed and went, not even knowing where he was going. FAITH!

(v. 9) Abraham lived as an alien in Canaan living in tents. Son Isaac and grandson Jacob followed, who were fellow-heirs of the same promise. FAITH!

(v. 10) Abraham was looking forward to a heavenly city with solid foundations, designed and built by God. FAITH!

(v. 11) Abraham was able to give seed, and Sarah was able to conceive at ages well beyond the norm, trusting God's faithfulness in keeping His promise. FAITH!

Abraham became the ancestor of innumerable descendants at an advanced age. (v. 12) FAITH!

TRANSFERABLE PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY

- ✓ When God calls, I must obey, though the path and future is uncertain
- ✓ My path to obedience will not be easy, but be obstructed with difficult challenges
- ✓ I must keep focused on my ultimate heavenly rest and reward
- ✓ With Christ as my strength, I can do anything to which He calls me
- ✓ God will be around every corner of life, fulfilling His promise of protection, provision and power

May I close with a brief reminder of how this church, Oaks Bible Church, was begun.

We were but a number of disoriented believers having just experienced the severe wounding of the church we had attended. We gathered in a weekly Bible study in a neutral setting to get our bearings and hold onto the rock of our Lord Jesus and His Word, as we each sought our next step in our spiritual journey. Founding a new church was far from our thinking. And yet one by one God called out to draw us together. I was not the first to hear the call, nor the last. I wanted to be sure it was indeed God calling us to be a new church. But once this pastor was certain of His calling, I obeyed and followed His leading, ceasing to doubt.

It was a challenging road of choosing leadership, writing documents, attaining governmental permissions, and securing a facility to call home. There was much prayer, conversation, opinions voiced and compromises made – yet all with the clear conviction that the Word of God both living and written must be lifted high.

And along the way there were numerous pauses to worship God in prayer and thankfulness for His miraculous provision. He had promised us a future blessing as a church. Each had his/her own version of what that might look like, but only God knew the full reality of what it would become.

None of us could have imagined the multiple and difficult bumps in the road we have encountered, but neither could we have fully imagined the joys that a loving, praying, committed family of believers would bring. It is a love story still being written – and praise God that you all are part of the story! When God calls you to a church, to a family or to a marriage – follow and obey!