



Lessons from Abraham

Stop Doubting

What Are You Doubting Right Now?

I am a huge fan of the Raiders. I love watching football and the Raiders are my favorite team. This year they have been terrible, but it is not just this year. For several years they have been one of the worst teams in football. Sunday morning they had a game and I had serious doubts they would win. I had no faith in them and when I got home, I expected they already had lost. Now, does it matter if I doubt the Raiders will win? Does it affect anyone else? Perhaps if I were a gambler but since I am not, I think my lack of faith in the Raiders winning is not at all an issue. But what if I doubt my wife, or my children, or my coworkers, or someone I hire or fellow church members, or the Bible, or God. Doubt can seriously impact the quality of your life and change who you are. Today we will look at a time when Abraham, who is known for his great faith, went through a time of doubt, and as I like to put it, "unfaith". Here is the Big Idea we will propose today. Take a break from doubt and live by faith in Christ.

The earliest bit of information we have about Abraham is recorded in Genesis 11 and 12. There we find out that Abraham and his wife Sarah as well as his nephew Lot traveled with Abraham's father Terah to Haran from Ur. But later, the Lord spoke directly to Abraham and told him to leave Haran and go to the land the Lord would show him which turned out to be Canaan, some 800 miles or so away. The book of Hebrews says this of the momentous decision Abraham made to do as God commanded. **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.** (Hebrews 11: 8 NIV) This was of course an act of faith in God that motivated him to take the terrifying and arduous journey to where God wanted Abraham to settle. It was not just Abraham that exhibited this strong faith but also his wife Sarah and nephew Lot. When Abraham made it to Canaan, everything went quite well. They got there safely and began their shepherding business. God Himself commended Abraham's faithfulness and made a huge promise to him once he was in Canaan. **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.** (Genesis 12: 7 NIV) Notice the depth of this promise and what it implied.

Abraham, who was by this time 75 was told that God was going to give the land where he was staying, Canaan to Abraham's offspring. Of course, the question of him even being able to father children had to be circling about in Abraham's mind as God made this promise. But also, there was the issue that this land was clearly where God wanted Abraham to stay, to put down his roots. To make it clear that Abraham got it, he built an altar to the Lord right there. This was not a temporary landing spot like Haran was. This was for Abraham and Sarah, according to God, his permanent home. By faith, Abraham accepted that determination and stayed in Canaan, until he didn't.

Now keep in mind that the writer of Hebrews states it was faith that got Abraham to go to the place he would receive as his inheritance. Circumstances changed, however. There was a famine in the land where God brought Abraham to live. **Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.** (Genesis 12: 10 NIV) Why did Abraham leave the land God clearly gave him for his home and go down to Egypt? The obvious answer is because there was a famine in Canaan but not in Egypt. It seems that Abraham only planned on staying in Egypt for a short while; until the famine in Canaan ended. Did that move reflect faith in God on Abraham's part or doubt, or as I like to put it, "unfaith"? He was sent by God to Canaan, not Egypt and the land that was to one day belong to his descendants was Canaan, not Egypt. It could be argued that it is not fair to question Abraham's faith in God at this point as any of us may have made the same decision but consider Abraham's next move. **As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."** (Genesis 12: 11-13 NIV)

Does that reflect faith in God or unfaith, belief or doubt? Abraham put his wife at risk of being taken as the wife of Pharaoh or some other powerful Egyptian wanting a trophy wife by making this demand of her. Doubt is the logical course of action in a case like this. You don't know what to do, the situation seems difficult, even scary and so doubt makes sense. Faith by definition implies a level of questioning in a matter, generally less than 50% probability that a

good outcome will happen. There is no need to have faith if you are pretty certain everything will go well, that your plan is a good one and you have things in place to succeed or weather the difficulty. Faith means that things are in doubt, that everything can fall apart. For Abraham, it was quite obvious. Some Egyptian, seeing how lovely Sarah was, could kill Abraham to get her for himself if he knew Sarah and Abraham was married (or so he thought). But where was God in that reasoning? How was the Lord factored into Abraham's planning?

Two of the disciples went on a similar track when it comes to unfaith or doubt. Thomas and Peter were both promised by Jesus that although He would die, in three days He would be raised from the dead. Each acted as if it couldn't be so, or they ignored the promise altogether. Jesus was quite specific about what was to come. **He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.** (Mark 8: 31 NIV) Clearly all the disciples including Thomas and Peter knew Jesus insisted He would be killed but then rise from the dead a mere three days later. So why, if he believed Jesus, did Peter deny knowing Christ three times while Jesus was in custody of the Jewish leaders? He clearly had no confidence in God to protect him or in Jesus' words that death could not stop Him from living. You don't deny knowing someone who you believe is able to overcome death! And Thomas...How could he refuse to accept the report that the other disciples had seen Jesus alive after He was crucified if he believed Jesus at His word that after only three days being dead, He would rise from the dead? Only doubt or to put it another way, unfaith could lead to him rejecting the report of the other disciples. Both had to live the rest of their lives with the memory of lacking faith in Christ and denying His word.

There is an incredibly important historical account reported by Matthew that is crucial to consider. **As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; and their sight was restored.** (Matthew 9: 27-30a NIV) Do you notice the force of faith in what happened? The healing was built entirely upon the amount of faith the two blind men had that Jesus could do it. This was certainly an impossible ask on the part of the blind men. The logic on this would have been clear. Blindness would stay with them the rest of their lives. Faith operates only in the realm of the less than fifty percent chance something will happen, mostly in the realm of ten percent or less chance something will happen. Notice a detail that is critical to getting a clear picture of the ramifications for you. The blind men begged Jesus for healing and at that point they were blind. Jesus asked them if they believed He could heal them and even after they said "yes", they still were blind. Jesus touched their eyes and still they were blind. But then Jesus made the declaration that what came next would determine the way things went for the blind men. According to their faith the blindness would either stay or go. It was then, as clearly the faith of the blind men surfaced like cream rises to the top, their sight was restored.

I understand that you live in the age of unfaith, of powerful doubting God. Doubts about God surround you, they pervade the spiritual and social environment everywhere you go. The culture of our time is unfaith when it comes to Christ and what He might do. It takes a major shift intellectually to develop real faith in God, life changing faith in God. What Abraham failed to do when he brought his wife to Egypt, you can do. You can believe God and live that way. What happens to you is decided by the quality and depth of your faith in Christ. How things turn out for you is a function of what you decide Jesus can and will do with you. The Big Idea for you is immense and crucial to build into your life. Take a break from doubt and live by faith in Christ. Abraham's unfaith in bringing Sarah to Egypt and then demanding she lie about their marriage created a culture of doubt in his home so that when Sarah and Abraham were told in their old age they were going to have a son, Sarah could not believe God and even scoffed at the promise. Have you brought unbelief into your home because of your doubts in God? Many things God has planned for you require faith in Him and to see it happen, you need to believe in Him just like those blind men did. What is it that you would like God to do for you? Are you ready to put some faith to that request?