

Second Revelation - Genesis 12:4-9¹

Before the Lesson: Print the handout, “A Journey of Trust” for each class member to be used in the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question: (Use one of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

Which kind of travel appeals to you more - every detail planned or plan as you go?

Which kind of travel appeals to you more - traveling with a group or alone?

Information:

In last week’s lesson, Abram had a revelation from God. A voice told him to leave his home in Haran. So, he did.

This was Abram’s first step of faith. Ur and Haran were polytheistic cultures. We do not know when Abram decided to worship only one God. Scholars debate whether Abram believed there were other gods with El as the greatest and most worthy of worship, or whether Abram believed that El was the only God.

“When God called Abraham from Mesopotamia, Abraham’s family was polytheistic: they ‘served other gods’ (Josh 24:2). But this topic doesn’t come up in the stories about Abraham in Genesis. God calls Abraham and enters into a covenant with him and his family. This is an exclusive relationship between one god and a particular family. In the ancient world, these features belong to the category of family religion, in which the family god is often called ‘the god of the father.’ In addition to the customs of family religion, ancient people also worshiped the gods of tribe, city, or state. In the stories of Abraham, however, the god of the father is also ‘God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’ (Gen 14:19). The Abraham story shows the merger of family and state religion, yielding the worship of a single god. From the biblical perspective, Abraham was the first monotheist.”²

Abram listened to God and moved with his family and his material wealth from Haran to ... a place he would learn about later. He was called to go to TBA.

Today, we pick the story up as he moves toward the land of Canaan.

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² Ronald Hendel, "Abraham", n.p. [cited 25 Sep 2020].

Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/people/main-articles/abraham>

- Have a class member read Genesis 12:4-6.

Abram lived in a patriarchal society. Men ruled. When Abram leaves town, all his family must leave with him. Outsiders may have judged it odd that Abram would leave the comfort of his home and the long-earned reputation as a successful 75-year-old businessman. But the Voice had spoken. Abram listened and obeyed.

Who were the people who left Haran with Abram? (His wife, Sarai; his nephew, Lot; his slaves)

“Slavery was a common institution throughout the ancient Near East. As subsequent stories in Genesis make clear, this was not the sort of chattel slavery later practiced in North America. These slaves had certain limited rights, could be given great responsibility, and were not thought to lose their personhood.”³

How does this image of traveling relate to a faithful life?

“The metaphor of journey or sojourn is a radical one. It is a challenge to the dominant ideologies of our time which yearn for settlement, security, and placement. ... The metaphor of journey as a way of speaking about faith is utilized in the New Testament in important ways. Christian discipleship is understood as following ‘the way.’”⁴

What travel images resonate with you? (a camper, a hiker, a vacationer; geography, strange or familiar lands; mile markers, etc.)

Let’s listen to the words of Jesus as he tells us to follow him in our spiritual journey.

- Have class members read Matthew 8:22; 9:9; 10:38.

What is required of someone who follows you? (Trust that you have a plan; trust that you have their best interests in mind; to follow is to move, change, and be in a different place.)

- Have a class member read Genesis 12:7-9.

This is the second revelation that Abram has from God. It is a much shorter story.

In this story, what is different from how God is revealed in the first story? (In the first story, God is heard. In this story, God is seen and heard.)

What might be significant about that? (God uses different methods; Faith seems easier if we see evidence, etc.)

³ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 51.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 122.

In the first revelation and now in this second revelation, only God speaks. Abram says nothing. Abram listens/sees, then acts. His first act was based on obedience. His second act is based on humility.

Abram builds an altar and calls on the name of the Lord.

An altar is something seen – as the Lord was seen and as the land was seen. Building and using an altar is a “public profession of faith.”

Most of us in our class have made a “public profession of faith” in one way or another. Maybe you “walked the aisle.” Maybe you went through catechism. Maybe you have an entirely different story. Who will share with us your public profession of faith story?

Today, we do not build altars, but we do have rich symbols to remind us of our commitment to following Jesus – baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

How did/has your baptism affected your faith?

How did/has the Lord’s supper affected your faith?

“‘To call on the name’ means to turn to the one named as the single referent of life. Thus, the cultic practice of Abraham expresses a life-identifying decision he had made in verse 4. It is appropriate to link this decision of Abraham to the primal commandment to ‘have no other gods.’ ... Abraham’s calling on Yahweh’s name means that he had resolved to cling to none other than the promise-maker.”⁵

In the first revelation, God promised to make Abraham’s name great. Here, Abraham calls on the name of God. How does this demonstrate that Abram’s faith is growing?

“If I think there is only the cosmic void, and I am all there is, then scrambling for all the marbles and making them mine is the reasonable or at least normal way to go about life. To the extent that I give God a place in my consciousness of things – building an altar and invoking the name of this God, for example – my own natural drive for self-aggrandizement is subject at the very least to the challenge by this God.”⁶

God is taking a chance on Abram. Abram is taking a chance on God. Who is taking the greater chance?

Transformational Exercise

[Distribute the handout, “A Journey of Trust.”]

⁵ Brueggemann, 124.

⁶ Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven’t Heard* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 62.

Notice the seven Steps of Faith that Abraham and Sarah will explore on their spiritual journey. Last week, God told Abram to leave Ur. Abram did, along with his family members, workers, and slaves. They believed that the Voice was trustworthy.

In today's lesson, Abram gets the revelation from God that the land Abram is passing through will one day belong to his descendants. Remember that Abram is 75 and childless. Still, Abram builds an altar and trusts God that, somehow, this will happen.

The second step of faith is trust. (The handout has the seven steps of faith listed, as...)

Belief

Trust

Obedience

Partnership

Intimacy

Righteousness

Stewardship

[Invite class members to reflect and write about the following prompts. After some time for reflection and writing, invite those who are willing to share their story. Then close in prayer.]

Think back on your spiritual journey as a disciple of Jesus.

- What is something you trusted God for, even though it may not have seemed logical?
- Did it seem natural or unnatural?
- Did you have to give up anything, anyone, any place?
- How does your second step in faith compare to Abram's?

[Close in a prayer something like this: *God, you ask us to trust you even though so much of our faith is based on the unseen and the unprovable. Give us faith that hears your word and trusts in it. Give us faith that trusts in your plans above our own plans. Amen.*]

A Journey of Trust

Belief

Trust

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Reflect on your spiritual journey as a disciple of Jesus.

- What is something you trusted God for, even though it may have not seemed logical?
- Did it seem natural or unnatural?
- Did you have to give up anything, anyone, any place?
- How does your second step in faith compare to Abram's?