Genesis 12B (2011)

Abraham wanted to upgrade his abacas to Windows 7. Isaac takes his father aside and gently questions him. "Father Abraham," he says, "you can't run Windows 7 on your abacas. It's old, it's too slow. It doesn't have the power to handle Windows. If you want to run abacas for Windows 7, you'll have buy an Abacas Pro model with at least 8 megabytes of memory. We can probably find an Abacas Pro at our local Bethel Buy, but I don't know where we will find that much RAM."

But Abraham, the man of faith, gazed calmly at his son and replied, "God will provide the RAM, my son."

- At the start of chapter 12, Abram, the man of faith, was called by God and given a covenant
    - We studied the basic framework of that covenant last week in vs. 1-3
        - We saw God give Abram a promise for land, a posterity, and a blessing that would reach the whole world
    - There is still a lot more to learn about God's promises to Abram
        - God restates the terms of the covenant again in future conversations
        - So we'll wait for those future moments to continue our own discovery of all that the Abrahamic Covenant offers
    - Meanwhile, let's study today what Abram does in response to God's call and to the promises of the covenant

Gen. 12:4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
Gen. 12:5 Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.
Gen. 12:6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.

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- In response to God's instructions to depart, Abram leaves Ur and then Haran
    - The evangelist Stephen told us in Acts 7 that Abram waited until his father died before leaving Haran and continuing to Canaan
- We might hesitate at this moment and ask whether Abram was fully obedient to God's call to leave his relatives and his father's house
    - First, we know he took his father with him from Ur to Haran
        - And he took his nephew Lot all the way to Canaan
    - Was Abram wrong to brings these men along?
    - The short answer is no
        - In the case of Terah, Abram could not have stopped Terah if he tried
            - Terah was the patriarch, and Abram would have had no authority over Terah
        - More importantly, Moses was following God's call in escorting Terah back to his ancestral home
            - Remember what Stephen said:

Acts 7:3 and said to him, ' LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.'
Acts 7:4 " Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living.

            - God directed to Abram to move on to Canaan only after his father died
                - God was permitting Abram to fulfill his duties as a son to his father, caring for Terah until he died
        - In the case of Lot, the answer is less clear
            - Abram had likely become Lot's provider when Lot's father, Haran, died
            - If so, Abram could no more leave Lot behind than he could leave Sarai

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            - So we would expect Abram to bring Lot to Haran

        - On the other hand, Lot would have been an adult by the time Terah died and Abram resumed his travel to Canaan

        - So we might assume that Lot decided to tag along and Abram allowed him to do so in disobedience to God's instructions

            - We're going to see in a few chapters that this Abram's decision to allow Lot to accompany him to Canaan has long lasting consequences

- In v.4, we're told that Abram is 75 years old when he leaves Haran after his father died

    - But we also know from chapter 11 that Terah was 205 years old when he died

        - If we subtract 75 (Abram's age when Terah died) from Terah's age, we get 130 years

        - But in 11:26 we're told that Terah was 70 when he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran

        - This has led many to ponder whether this is a contradiction in Scripture

    - It's no contradiction, but rather a matter of making a bad assumption

        - In 11:26, we're told that Terah becomes the father of three sons when he's 70

        - But we know that Terah didn't have triplets...these boys were born over a period of time

        - Abram is listed first leading many to assume he was first born, thus the contradiction in ages

        - But in reality, Moses lists the names in order of importance, not birth order

            - Abram is first, Nahor is second and Haran is last, because Haran dies young

            - Since Haran is the first to have a child, it's likely that he was oldest and Abram was second or even third

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        - Therefore, we know that Abram was born when Terah was 130 years old

- So in v.5, Abram and his entourage enter Canaan
    - Abram has obeyed in leaving behind his father's house
        - This was his father's ancestral home in Haran, but God's command carried a deeper significance for Abram
            - God was asking Abram to leave behind his father's inheritance
            - Inherited wealth was essentially land, animals and servants
            - God had told Abram to leave that inheritance behind and trust in God for a better inheritance
        - And here we see Abram taking an affirmative step of faith
            - God continues to ask men and women of faith to serve Him by walking away from things we value in this world
                - For the hope of something better in eternity
            - He calls missionaries to leave the comforts of their culture
            - He calls pastors, teachers, elders and others to sacrifice free time or sleep to serve the body of Christ
            - He calls His children to sacrifice dignity and personal safety to preach the gospel and live as witnesses
            - He calls all of us to sacrifice financially at times to support the work of ministry
    - But notice how Abram entered Canaan though
        - He had a family, he had possessions, he had servants
        - Abram walked away from his father's estate but still God ensured they had accumulated a provision in Haran
            - God isn't unconcerned with our needs or unwilling to bless us materially

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Matt. 6:31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'
Matt. 6:32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.
Matt. 6:33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

- But our prosperity in this world is not the Lord's first priority
  - And He wants to make sure it's not our first priority either
- His priority is our dedicated service to Him, as Abram did

- As Abram entered into Canaan, he walked through the land taking stock of it
  - How strange this assessment must have felt and looked to an outsider
    - Here's Abram, the head of a single family walking, into Canaan, a land occupied for generations by powerful tribes descended from Ham grandson
    - And he's surveying the land as it's new owner yet without any visible means of forcing it's occupants out
  - To the world, Abram appeared as the stranger, the one with no claim to the land
    - And yet in truth, Abram was the rightful heir of the land and the current occupants were the strangers...strangers to the promises of God
  - What's more, Abram pitches his tent in the by the oak of Moreh near Shechem
    - This is an important place in the history of Israel
      - The Hebrew phrase translated "oak of Moreh" can be translated the terebinth of the teacher, which is a reference to a center of pagan teaching
      - The same place appears frequently in Scripture and is always associated with Israel invading Canaanite idolatry
    - It's here that Abram chooses to first pitch his tents

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            - Abram invades Canaan and by his arrival announces that this land will one day become Israel's and the Messiah's
            - Symbolically shining God's light, penetrating the lostness and darkness of that pagan world

- Here's the power of faith and obedience at work
    - Our faith has the power to save us, as only faith can do
        - But as James taught us, if that faith isn't put to work, it is useless
    - But when our faith is put into action through obedience to God's call, it becomes a mighty thing
        - It holds the power to penetrate lostness and deliver the light of hope in Christ
    - Abram was just one family with no hope to take control of that land
        - He knew his day to own the land would come long after he died
        - But in the meantime, he served God's purpose by entering the land and confronting the Canaan culture head on
    - In a sense, we have the same mission given to Abram
        - We have faith and a call to serve God
            - God has told us to leave our dependence on this world
            - To walk away from what holds us, binds us to the world
        - And then we've been made to share in the promises of Abram
            - We have the hope of a future inheritance, one we receive after our death
            - And while we wait, we are being led in our walk of faith to place God will show us
        - And the Lord has told us that He is sending us into lostness and darkness to bring the light and the truth
            - And we're not to shrink back from that call
            - We walk confidently and pitch our tents in the heart of paganism and idolatry because that's what ambassadors do

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2Cor. 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
2Cor. 5:18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,
2Cor. 5:19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.
2Cor. 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- You and I are new creatures, made new by faith in Christ's death and resurrection
  - And the old things of our nature and lifestyle have passed away
    - Like Abram's idol-worshipping traditions and life in Ur
    - It's history for us
  - And God has given us a ministry, the ministry of reconciliation, the gospel that reconciles men to God
- So Paul tells us we are to be ambassadors for Christ, as if God were speaking to the world through us
  - Our recent team sent to Juarez, Mexico, experienced first-hand what it means to step into the hart of lostness and darkness
    - But they also saw the power of God working through His people in the midst of that situation
    - God is a God of new beginnings, and He seems to do His best work in the worst places
  - But you don't have to travel to Juarez to be an ambassador for Christ
    - Austin is filled with terebinths of paganism and darkness
    - And we are appointed to break into those places as well
  - And when we obey, God will go with us
    - He doesn't ask us to preach necessarily

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- Abram just walked and lived in the land, but it was enough to get people's attention and make God's presence known

Gen. 12:7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.
Gen. 12:8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.
Gen. 12:9 Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

- As Abram obeys and pitches his tent in the land, God appears for the second time
  - He reaffirms to Abram that he is in the right place
    - But now God reveals a new detail concerning the inheritance
    - God will give this land to Abram's descendants
      - Now Abram begins to understand that the land won't be fully possessed until Abram's descendants receive it
      - This is likely the point when Abram came to understand that the land was not to be his in his own lifetime
  - Many have assumed that Abram and his family were always nomadic by tradition
    - So they don't think anything of Abram living in tents throughout his time in Canaan
      - But that thinking ignores the Abram's history
      - He grew up living in a prosperous city, Ur
      - Even after he and his father moved back to Haran, they lived in the city we're told
    - But since he arrived in Canaan, Abram is seen living in tents
      - In fact, he will live in tents his entire life in the land, which the writer of Hebrews explains as an act of faith

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Heb. 11:9 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;
Heb. 11:10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

- Abram wasn't a nomad by tradition...he lived in tents as a matter of faith
  - He lived his faith in God's promise to deliver the land at a later point, to Abram's descendants
  - And ultimately, a faith that the real inheritance he looked forward to receiving was the eternal one

- As Abram sees the Lord appear to him in the Land, he responds with an altar
  - Altar building will become an increasingly important tradition among the patriarchs
    - As we discussed when Noah built his altar, altars are places of worship
    - But more specifically, they are places of sacrifice
      - An altar is the table upon which an animal is placed so that its blood may be poured out
      - It's also the place where an offering is made to God
  - Patriarchs will build altars when they wish to express worship to God for His faithfulness and his blessing
    - And it's here on the occasion of God's reiteration of His promise to Abram that Abram worships with an altar
      - Which means he also made sacrifices
    - Standing in the heart of the Canaanite culture and pagan teaching, Abram invades the darkness and sets up a testimony to God's forgiveness
      - And he worships
  - And notice that Abram repeated this practice as he moved southward through the land
    - He stops again between Bethel and Ai

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- Notice Abram purposely camps outside two cities, remaining between them rather than moving into the cities
- Clearly, he is going out of his way not to become a part of the Canaanite culture

- And again he builds an altar to the Lord, calling upon the name of the Lord

- Today, we don't build altars
  - In fact, there's a reason you don't see an altar in this church
  - Nor should you see an altar in a Christian church, because an altar is a place of sacrifice
    - But Christ's sacrifice of Himself is the one sufficient death for atonement of sin
    - No other sacrifice is required nor should we even imply that one is needed
  - Instead, the word of God tells us how to set up altars in our world as Abram did

Rom. 12:1 **Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**
Rom. 12:2 **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

  - We repeat Abram's example not by presenting animal sacrifices on stone tables
    - But by presenting ourselves as holy sacrifice, living unto God
    - This is our spiritual worship
  - And while Abram proved God's will for his life and the Canaanite lands by hearing from the Lord while living among the Canaanite people
    - We prove God's will to a lost and dying world by listening to God's word, allow it to transform our mind and life
    - Making us Christ-like, so that we may represent Christ to the pagan culture around us

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