

Living In-Between  
Genesis 12:1–9, 10–20  
Sunday, June 7, 2026

We are starting a new sermon series today that will carry us through the summer, in which we're going to be looking at the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the book of Genesis. All throughout scripture it refers to God as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," so we're going to look at *who they are* and what it means to call *their* God *our* God. These are the three *founders* of our faith, the faith that Jesus himself held. So where does our faith *come from*, and what does that tell us about where it is *going*?

We're going to start today at the very beginning of this story, when God calls Abram. He will eventually come to be known as *Abraham*, but right now, he's just Abram, a 75-year-old man living in a city called Haran, around 400 miles north of Israel, in what we know today as southern Turkey. He was *originally* from a city called Ur in present-day Iraq, but Abram's father had moved the family from Ur to Haran, and they settled there. So Abram is a long way from home, and he's about to go even farther. Because one day, God says to Abram, "Go from your country and your family and your father's house to the land that I will show you." God promises to make a great nation of Abram, to make his name great, so that he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. So, Abram *went*. He goes south and settles in the land of Canaan, which we know today as Israel.

If we're familiar with the story of Abram, that's probably the part that we're familiar with. God said, "Go," and Abram, in an act of great faithfulness, went. We don't often focus on the *second half* of this chapter, which I want to read for you now:

<sup>10</sup>Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. <sup>11</sup>When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; <sup>12</sup>and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup>Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account."

<sup>14</sup>When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup>When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. <sup>16</sup>And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels. <sup>17</sup>But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

<sup>18</sup>So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup>Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone." <sup>20</sup>And Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.

So God says, "Go," and promises to bless Abram and take care of him. Abram goes, but he doesn't fully *trust* that promise. A famine hits the land that God told him to go to, so Abram *leaves* the place God told him to go and goes to Egypt instead. When he *gets* to Egypt, he is afraid that the Egyptians will kill him to take his wife. So he lies and says that his wife Sarai is his sister. They take his wife *anyway*. Abram's story is already off to a rocky start. He doesn't always do what God tells him to do because he is afraid of dying. First he's afraid that the famine will kill him, then he's afraid that the Egyptians will. So he takes matters into his own hands, tries to preserve his own life, and things don't work out so well.

So maybe the first lesson we can learn from our ancestor Abram is to *trust God* and not make decisions out of fear that try to force our own way through life. And that's a good, important lesson to learn. *Thy* will be done, not *my* will be done. But that's not what I want to focus on today. I am more drawn to what happens *in between* these two stories. Because from the time that God says, "Go," to the time that Abram messes up in Egypt, there is a time when Abram is actually *in the place* where God wants him to be. Verse 8 says, "From there he moved on to the hill country 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 invoked the name of the Lord."

Abram sets up camp with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. In Hebrew the name Bethel means "house of God." It was a sanctuary, a sacred place with lots of water. It was a bustling, important city.

Ai *used* to be an important city. It was a ruin, a wasteland. In Hebrew the name Ai means, “heap of ruins.” It had long since been abandoned. It had been a secular city, by no means a house of God or sanctuary. So Abram sets up camp right in between the two. In between the new and the old, the holy and the forsaken. In between a safe sanctuary and a dangerous, unpredictable wilderness. In between two lands, one holding the potential for *life*, the other holding the potential for *death*.

Abram lived his life *in-between*. In between *homes*; he was always on the move. In-between the *promise* of God and the *fulfillment* of that promise. In between his *old life* and a *new life*; what was safe and secure and comfortable, and what is uncertain and unpredictable and uncomfortable. He lived in-between the house of God and a heap of ruins. In between *faith* and *fear*; trusting God and yet worrying that he was going to die. He lived in-between *hope* and *resignation*; the hope that God would give him children and the resignation that it’s probably too late for that. He lived in-between *life* and *death*.

Abram was constantly living *in-between*. And that is a very uncomfortable, uncertain place to live. You never feel *settled*. You never feel *at home*. You don’t always feel *safe*. And yet *that* is exactly the place where God told him to go. *That* is the place where God’s promise to him will be fulfilled.

And like Abram, *we* live *our* lives in-between. Sometimes in between *homes, jobs, relationships*. In between medical tests and results, diagnosis and treatment, treatment and healing. Like Abram we live our lives in between the *old* and the *new*; the way our lives *used* to be and the way they are *going* to be. In between *faith* and *fear*, wanting to trust God and yet worrying about *so much*. We live in between *hope* and *resignation*; hope that this world and our lives will get *better* and resignation that they might *not*. We live in between *sin* and *forgiveness*, for ourselves and for other people. In between the kingdom of *God* and the kingdom of *this world*. In between Christ’s *first* coming and his *second*. In between the

*promise* of God and the *fulfillment* of that promise. We live in between *life* and *death*. In between *heaven* and *earth*.

That in-between can be a very difficult, uncomfortable, uncertain place to live. And like Abram we are often tempted to force our way to one place or another. But what if this is the place where God is calling us to be? What can we learn from Abram about how to live our lives in the in-between?

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Well, look what Abram *does* when he is living in between Bethel and Ai, in the place where God wants him to be. It says, “there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord.” That word *invoked* in Hebrew means, “to call upon or proclaim.” Abram *worshipped* and he *proclaimed* or *called upon the name of the Lord*. Author Brian Zahnd says that what we see in Abram is, “the steady orientation of his soul toward God.”<sup>1</sup> When Abram was living in the in-between, with all of its uncertainty, he oriented himself toward God.

And so for *us*, when we are living in the uncertainty of the in-between, we can orient *ourselves* to God. We can worship. We can pray. We can call out to God for the help and the guidance that we need. We can read scripture or other books that direct us toward God. We can go for a walk or a hike or just sit outside and behold the wonder of God’s creation, reminding ourselves that we live in a world that is *saturated* with the presence of God. We can sing. We can engage in some sort of act of service, however big or small.

And I know that when we are living in the midst of uncertainty or challenges, we might not always *feel* like worshipping or singing or praising God. But this past week the men’s group was working through a chapter of the book of Isaiah, and at one point the study guide we were using said this, “Do you only

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<sup>1</sup> [Brian Zahnd, \*Unseen Existences: Of Heaven, Earth, and the Divine Mystery in All Things\*](#)

praise God when you *feel* like it? Or do you praise God *in order to feel as you should?*<sup>2</sup> It's like exercising. We don't always *feel* like exercising, going to the gym, going for a walk. But when we push through and *do it*, nine times out of ten, we end up saying, "I feel better. I'm glad I did that even though I didn't *feel* like it." We might not always feel like worshipping or singing or praising God or somehow directing ourselves toward God, but when we *do*, it can make us feel the way we *should*.

Because *those* are the times when we need God the most; those in-between times when life is uncertain or uncomfortable, and we're afraid, or we're just *waiting*, and we don't know what we should do or which way we should go, or how we're ever going to make it through. Those are the times when we open ourselves up to God because we need more than we can do on our own. The challenges in life are *opportunities* to grow in our trust of God.

What are *you* living in between? Where is God calling you to go? What is God calling you to leave behind? And how do *you* need to trust God on the way? If you can find some way to steadily orient your soul toward God, then no matter what happens, you will at least know that you are not going through it alone. God is with you, journeying with you, step by step. And God has promised us in Jesus Christ that what waits for us at the end of the journey is *life* and *blessing*, because no one who follows the way of grace ever comes to a bad end. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> [Howard Peskett, \*Isaiah: Trusting God in Troubled Times\*](#)