Session 2: from Abram to Egypt
Bible Study in Plain English

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Session Two: From Abraham to Egypt!
Abraham & Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, Esau and the road to Egypt

Ancestors in Faith.
Abram was a shepherd who lived with his family in a town called Haran. One day, as Abram quietly tended his flocks, something surprising happened. Abram heard a voice.

What did the voice say to Abram? Whose voice did Abram hear? Read Genesis 12: 2-3 to find out! Write your answer in the writing space below.

Off they went!
Abram returned to his house and told his wife, Sarai, what God had said. Abram believed he had heard the voice of the one, true God. So Abram, his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, packed up everything they owned and prepared for the journey.

Where were they headed when they left their homes? Read Genesis 12:4-6 to find out! Find this place on a map and mark it.

Dateline
The approximate year of this journey is 1800 BCE, but scholars really aren’t sure precisely when this story occurred.
A friendly parting.
Abram and his nephew Lot shared the land God gave them. They wanted no strife between them. So Lot and Abram divided the land.


The Promise.
Abram then looked at the valley that stretched before him. God made incredible promises to Abram.

What were those promises? Read Genesis 13:14-18 to find out. Write them in the writing space below. Let this sink deeply into your consciousness.

Write some notes
What did God promise Abraham and Sarah?

Abram trusted God without seeing the land that would be given to him. How are you called to trust God without knowing for sure where it will lead you? What is your experience of trusting your family and friends?

Note this!
Abram found that the territory God gave him was bordered on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, on the east by the valley of the Jordan River, on the north by Syria, and on the south by Egypt. It was a narrow strip
of land no more than 100 miles at its widest and 350 miles long. It was
called Canaan. Canaan was an important link on the trade routes
connecting Egypt with the farthest ends of the Fertile Crescent. It was
also the route used by conquering armies that would pass that way in
coming centuries, such as Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Persians.

**A Covenant in Flesh.**
When Abram was very old, God called again, this time to give Abram a
new name to go with his mission.

What was the new name which God gave to Abram? Read
Genesis 17:1-8 to find out! Underline his new name in your
text. From now on, he will be called only by this name.

What else did God promise Abram at that time? Why do
you think land was such an important part of God’s
covenant? What does this mean in light of today’s conflicts
in the Middle East?

**Let’s make a deal.**
God was making a covenant with Abraham. God promised Abraham that
his descendants would be numerous and have a land of their own.

What physical act did God ask Abraham to perform on
himself and all his male descendants after him? Read
Genesis 17:9-14 to find out. Why do you think God asked
for this?

**Never too old.**
God also had something to say about Abraham’s wife, Sarai. Your wife
shall no longer be called Sarai but Sarah, God told Abraham. Even now
in your old age, I will bless you both with a son, and you shall call him
Isaac.

When God told them they would have a child, how old was
Abraham? How old was Sarah? Read Genesis 17:17 to find
out. Write your answer in the white space below.
How did Abraham respond when he was told they’d have a baby at their old age? How would you respond to such a thing?

**You’ve got to be kidding.**
When God appeared to Abraham by the terebinth tree of Mamre, he was probably very surprised! He looked up from his tent and saw three men standing nearby. Abraham hurried from his tent to offer them water to bathe their feet and good food to eat. Then they asked about Sarah and told Abraham at the same time next year Sarah would have a son. Sarah overheard this conversation.

When Sarah heard she would be having a baby, what was her reaction? Read Genesis 18:12 to find out.

**Guests.**
It seemed so outrageous to her that she could give birth at her age. But the visitors asked, “Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too marvelous for the Lord?”

**She laughed.**
A year later Isaac was born. The name *Isaac*, in fact, means “she laughed.” Sarah, who had been so sad for so many years because she could not have children, now had reason to rejoice. But she didn’t know about the test God had in store for Abraham.

How did God “test” Abraham? Read Genesis 22:1-19 and tell the story aloud in your own words, even if you’re the only one in the room right now.

God asked a great sacrifice of Abraham to test his faith. How is your faith tested in your family, in your community, or in your daily work?

**Sodom is destroyed!**
After leaving Abraham and Sarah, the angels went to visit Sodom, a city full of depravity. They stayed with Lot and enjoyed his hospitality. But during the night, the men of Sodom came to Lot’s house, demanding the angel visitors so they could rape them! Rape was a common way for a victor to demean his enemies. (It still is in modern times!) Lot defended
his visitors and in return, they helped him and his family escape from Sodom before the city was destroyed.

Lot’s wife famously paused and looked back, disobeying the command of the angels. What happened to her? Read Genesis 19:26 for the answer.

The Family Tree.
So Abraham and Sarah had a son whom they named Isaac. They lived together in Canaan. Isaac and his wife Rebekah had twin sons, whose names were Esau and Jacob. Esau was born first; therefore he had the birthright which meant he would become head of the family. But Jacob convinced Esau to sell him his birthright.

How did Jacob get Esau to sell his birthright? Read Genesis 25:29-34 to find out.

The trick.
Isaac didn’t know his sons had made this deal. So he prepared to bless Esau and confer the birthright upon him. But Rebekah, who liked Jacob better, tricked her husband. While Esau was out hunting, Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob, making him the head of the family.

Rebekah tricked her husband, Isaac into conferring the birthright upon Jacob. The story is in Genesis 27:1-29.

Esau got pretty angry about this. He planned to kill Jacob. But Rebekah once again came to the rescue and sent Jacob to live with her uncle in Mesopotamia. On his journey, Jacob stopped for the night at a town called Bethel. As he slept, he had an extraordinary vision from God.

What was the vision Jacob had that night? Read Genesis 28:13-15 to find out.

Note this
Jacob and Esau never fully reconciled. In the end, Jacob’s sons went on to found the twelve tribes of Israel and we know the remnant of them today as the Jews. Esau, for this part, went on to found the people of Edom, a smaller nation south of Jerusalem. For centuries, the Edomites were a bitter enemy of the Jews.
The vision.
In Mesopotamia, Jacob became the father of twelve sons. Then Jacob and his family decided to return to Canaan, where he had been born. On the way, he had a strange mysterious encounter with God.

Write some notes
What was the encounter that Jacob had along the road to his home? Read Genesis 32:23-31 to find out. Tell this story in your own words. Who was the man with whom Jacob wrestled? Why did Jacob receive a new name? What was that name? Write it in the writing space below. It’s a very important name.

Sacred pause
Take a moment now to reflect on the meaning of the story of Jacob and God, wrestling with each other. When have you faced a major change in your life - and spent time “wrestling” with your options?

Talk with someone about the various titles and names you have had during your lifetime. How were you called as a baby, and later as a child? How were you called in your youth or by your partner or spouse? How were you known professionally? What’s so important about having a name?

A big family.
After Jacob’s encounter with God on the way, his name was changed to Israel. Each of his twelve sons became the head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. One of those sons was named Joseph. What happened to him is one of the most interesting stories in the Bible.

Read it for yourself
What are the names of the 12 sons, each of whom headed one of the tribes of Israel? Read Genesis 35:23-26 to find out. Which of these names are most familiar to you?

The Road to Egypt.
Jacob, now also called Israel, lived in Canaan, as his father before him had. Of all his sons, he loved Joseph best.
How did Jacob show his love for Joseph? Read Genesis 37:3 to find out.

**Betrayal.**
Joseph’s brothers did not like him. Joseph tattled on them to his father, Jacob. He received lovely gifts from Jacob. And he had dreams that suggested he was to rule over his brothers somehow! Can you really blame the brothers? But what the brothers did changed history forever.

**Write some notes**

**What did they do to Joseph? Read Genesis 37:18-36. Write a brief summary of this story in the writing space.**

**Egypt.**
So Joseph was now living in Egypt where he proved himself to be quite capable of interpreting dreams. This landed him a job with the Pharaoh himself whose dream Joseph correctly understood to mean that a famine was coming for which they should all prepare.

How did the Pharaoh reward Joseph for his wisdom and understanding? Read Genesis 41:41-43 to find out.

**Family reunion.**
What happened next? Well, Jacob and his family, including those remaining eleven sons, became victims of a famine themselves. They had no food but they heard there was grain available down in Egypt. Jacob sent his sons to fetch some, and during the exchange that followed, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers.
How did Joseph do that? And what was the reaction of his brothers? Read Genesis 45:1-5 to find out! What is the significance of this moment?

Joseph’s brothers returned home and told their father, Jacob, all that had happened. What did Jacob decide to do after hearing that his son, Joseph, was still alive? And who did he take with him? This story is told in Genesis 45:25-46:7.

**Dateline**
Jacob and his families arrived in Egypt about 1750 BCE. The Pharaoh welcomed them with open arms! He allowed them to settle there because they were Joseph’s family. For hundreds of years they lived and prospered there.

**Sacred pause**
Let’s pause for a moment and retell this whole story in our own words: “How did the people of Israel come to live in the land of Egypt?”

- Abraham and Sarah have a child; they name him Isaac. The family tree starts with them.
- Isaac and Rebekeh marry and have two children: Jacob and Esau.
- Jacob tricks Esau and receives the inheritance. Jacob now continues the family tree under his name.
- Jacob has 12 children, one of whom is Joseph.
- Jacob wrestles with God and his name is changed to Israel.
- Joseph is sold into slavery and winds up in Egypt.
- The Pharaoh has a dream which Joseph correctly interprets.
- He honors Joseph by putting him in charge of his affairs.
- There is a famine in Canaan; Jacob (Israel) and his remaining sons are starving.
- They go to Egypt and Joseph provides for them.
- Joseph forgives them and invites the whole family to move to Egypt.
- All the people of Israel move to Egypt and live in comfort - for the time being.

**Conclude your study.**
Take a moment to tell each other what new insights into faith you gained in this study. Then conclude with a brief prayer of thanksgiving.