

Unbroken Promises

Lesson for September 4, 2022

Unit I: God Calls Abraham's Family

Scriptural Background: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7

Printed Text: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7

Key verse: Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. (Genesis 12:7, NKJV)

Word Study

Hook

A friend tells of overhearing two little girls, playmates, who were counting over their pennies. One said, "I have five pennies." The other said, "I have ten." "No," said the first little girl, "You have just five cents, the same as I." "But" the second child quickly replied, "my father said that when he came home tonight, he would give me five cents, and so I have ten cents." The child's faith gave her proof of that which she did not as yet see, and she counted it as being already hers, because it had been already *promised* by her father.

God's dealings with us are always on the order of the understanding of this child and what He did with Abram and Sarai. He makes His promises, and he will keep His promises; but just how and when He will keep them is something for which we must wait. But keep them He will, and in ways other and better than we can think, as He works for our good in all things.

Key Terms

1. **Altar** (12:7) – A place of sacrifice. any structure of earth or unwrought stone on which sacrifices were offered. Altars were generally erected in conspicuous places. The word is used in Hebrews 13:10 for the sacrifice offered upon it--the sacrifice Christ offered.
2. **Blessing** (12:2) – God's favor and protection. Biblical blessings are often associated with protection and happiness. God's blessings are meant to protect us, guide us to the path of righteousness, and give us hope.
3. **Families** (12:3) – A group of one or more parents and their children living together as a unit. All the descendants of a common ancestor. Clans; tribes; relatives; "peoples".
4. **Land** (12:1) – Earth; country. God promised to show Abram a land (Genesis 12:1). This land extended from the river Euphrates to the river of Egypt (Genesis 15:18-21).
5. **Nation** (12:2) – A large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular country or territory. People; herds.
6. **Vision** (15:1) – The ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom. Sight; appearance.
7. **Yahweh** (12:1) – The he most well-known name for God in the Old Testaments. The name Yahweh shows Gods covenant lordship over Israel. The Lord revealed this name to Moses at the burning bush in the process of calling him to be His agent for liberating the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. The name came to be regarded by Jewish people (c. 300 BC) as too sacred to be spoken, and the vowel sounds, YHWH, are uncertain.

Lesson Background

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It records the beginning of time, life, sin, salvation, the human race, and the Hebrew nation. It begins with primeval history centered in four major events: the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and the dispersion of the nations. Genesis then narrates the history of four great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

With very few exceptions, Jewish and Christian scholars alike believed that Moses wrote Genesis. His authorship is supported by the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Palestinian Talmud, the Apocrypha, the writings of Philo, and Josephus.

The initial setting for Genesis is eternity past. God then, by willful act and divine Word, spoke all creation into existence, furnished it, and finally breathed life into a lump of dirt which He fashioned in His image to become Adam. God made mankind the crowning point of His creation, i.e., His companions who would enjoy fellowship with Him and bring glory to His name.

The historical foundation prior to today's lesson is:

Genesis 1-11 (primeval history) reveals the origins of the universe, i.e., the beginnings of time and space and many of the firsts in human experience, such as marriage, family, the Fall, sin, redemption, judgment, and nations. Genesis 12-50 (patriarchal history), explained to Israel how they came into existence as a family whose ancestry could be traced. God's people came to understand not only their ancestry and family history, but also the origins of their institutions, customs, languages, and different cultures, especially basic human experiences such as sin and death.

Because they were preparing to enter Canaan and dispossess the Canaanite inhabitants of their homes and properties, God revealed their enemies' background. In addition, they needed to understand the actual basis of the war they were about to declare in light of the immorality of killing, consistent with the other four books that Moses was writing (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Ultimately, the Jewish nation would understand a selected portion of preceding world history and the inaugural background of Israel as a basis by which they would live in their new beginnings under Joshua's leadership in the land which had previously been promised to their original patriarchal forefather, Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 established a primary focus on God's promises to Abraham. This narrowed their view from the entire world of peoples in Genesis 1-11 to one small nation, Israel, through whom God would progressively accomplish His redemptive plan. This underscored Israel's mission to be "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6). God promised land, descendants (seed), and blessing. The three-fold promise became, in turn, the basis of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:1-20). The rest of Scripture bears out the fulfillment of these promises.

Genesis 12:1-9 records the call of Abram and his obedience. The first three verses recorded the call and the promises; the rest of the section describes the obedience of Abram. The passage is constructed on two imperatives. The first is the basic call for Abram to leave the land in verse 1:

Genesis 12:1-3, 7: When God established a covenant with Abraham; it was another dramatic turning point in human history. Abraham and his heirs (the nation of Israel) received an unconditional promise.

Under this covenant, God promised to make Israel a great nation, to bless the seed of Abraham, to give him a great name, to make him a blessing, to bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him, to give him the Promised Land, and through his descendants to bless all the families of the earth with a Redeemer.

Lesson in Depth

I. Chosen and Called to Let Go (Genesis 12:1-3)

The Lord ... unto Abram: This passage is the promise whose fulfillment extends all through Scripture (either in fact or in expectation), to Revelation 20. The actual Abrahamic Covenant is introduced (in 12:1-3), actually made (in 15:18-21), reaffirmed (in 17:1-21), then renewed also with Isaac (26:2-5), and Jacob (28:10-17). It is an everlasting covenant (17:7-8; 1 Chronicles 16:17; Psalm 105:7-12; Isaiah 24:5), which contains four elements:

- Seed (17:2-7; Gal. 3:8, 16; where it referred to Christ);
- Land (15:18-21; 17:8);
- A nation (12:2; 17:4);
- Divine blessing and protection (12:3).

Get thee out: These elements to Abram are mentioned:

- Out of his “country”;
- Away from his “kindred”; and
- Away from his “father’s house”.

Joshua 24:2 states that his family practiced idolatry. Abraham is not told where he is to go, on “unto a land that I will show thee,” which requires faith on his part.

This covenant is unconditional in the sense of its ultimate fulfillment of a kingdom and salvation for Israel, but conditional in terms of immediate fulfillment (17:4). Its national importance to Israel is magnified by its repeated references and point of appeal throughout the Old Testament (2 Kings 13:23; 1 Chronicles 16:15-22; Nehemiah 9:7-8).

Its importance spiritually to all believers is expounded by Stephen and quoted in Acts 7:1-8). When God established a covenant with Abraham, it was another dramatic turning point in human history. Abraham and his heirs (the nation of Israel) received an unconditional promise.

Into a land: Abram was still in Haran (11:31), when the call was repeated to go to Canaan. In Acts 7:2-4, God revealed through Stephen that this promise was made to Abram *when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran*. Genesis 12:1-3 *repeats* a promise that God **had said to Abram**. God repeated the promise now that his father was dead, and Abram was compelled to a more complete obedience.

God had chosen Abram. He first sent him away from the sin ridden city of Ur of the Chaldees. He is telling Abram not to be held back by his family. He told Abram to leave this big, fine, beautiful home in Ur of the Chaldees and go into a strange land.

If he leaves, there are three promises that Yahweh makes to him. They might even be translated in each case as inflected to express plea, insistence, imploring, self-encouragement, wish, desire, intent, command, purpose, or consequence, “Let me”:

- “Let me “make of thee a great nation”, and
- “Let me “bless thee,” and
- “Let me make thy name great.”

Name great: Abram’s magnificent reputation and legacy was fulfilled materially (Genesis 13:2; 24:35), spiritually (Genesis 21:22), and socially (Genesis 23:6).

The last words in verse 2 may be translated so that you shall “be a blessing.” Abraham is to be a great nation, be personally blessed, and receive a great name, so that he may be a blessing. Certainly, this is true for us today. “*And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*” (Galatians 3:29).

I will bless those who bless you: The promises of blessings were for Abram, if he left family and home, and went where God sent him. The blessing was not just for Abram, but for all the families of the earth who are faithful like Abram (Christians). God promised Abram that he would be a great nation, and his name would be made great, and through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This amazing promise was fulfilled in the Messiah that came from Abram’s lineage. God’s blessing to Abram was not for his own sake, or even the sake of the Jewish nation to come. It was for the whole world, for **all the families of the earth** through Jesus Christ.

I will curse him who curses you: Those who “curse” Abram and his descendants are those who treat him lightly, despise him, or treat him with contempt. God’s curse for such lack of respect and disdain was to involve the harshest of divine judgments. The opposite was to be true for those who bless him and his people.

II. Committing to the Call (Genesis 12:4-5;7)

So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him: Abram’s first act of obedience is recorded in verse 4 as he “departed out of Haran”.

And Lot went with him: This was more partial obedience by Abram. God commanded him to go out *from your family* (Genesis 12:1) yet he brought his nephew Lot. Lot would not be a blessing to Abram. He would be nothing but trouble and inconvenience.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran: Abram came into the land of Canaan at this advanced age. Fathering a child through Sarai seemed a long-forgotten hope.

Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions: Abram left Ur of the Chaldeans with his father and his nephew Lot. Abram left Ur with his father, but his father Terah died and was buried in Haran. Abram stopped in Haran long enough to acquire many **possessions** and **people**.

They went forth to go into the land of Canaan: Abram came into **Canaan** as a stranger, to live in a land populated by tribes that were set in violence and sin (Genesis 34:1-5) but would become even worse (Genesis 15:16).

Verse 6 (omitted from this lesson) details how Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. Sichem was a Canaanite town located in the valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim (Deuteronomy 27:4, 12). West of the Jordan about 15 miles and North of Jerusalem about 30 miles. He came to a notable oak tree (**the terebinth tree of Moreh**). Moreh was most likely a resident of the area for whom the tree was named.

And the LORD appeared unto Abram: Once Abram was in the land, God reminded him of His promise. The land Abram saw belonged to Abram and his descendants. It was actual territory that Abram saw with his physical eyes.

I will give this land: (See Genesis 13:15; 15:18; 17:7-8; Galatians 3:16). God was dealing with Abram, not in a private promise, but with a view toward high and sacred interests long into the future, i.e., the land which his posterity was to inhabit as a peculiar people. The seeds of divine truth were to be sown there for the benefit of all mankind. It was chosen as the most appropriate land for the coming of divine revelation and salvation for the world.

Altar unto the Lord: By this act, Abram made an open confession of his religion, established worship of the true God, and declared his faith in God's promise. This was the first true place of worship ever erected in the Promised Land. Isaac would later build an altar also to commemorate the Lord's appearance to him (Genesis 26:24-25), and Jacob also built one in Shechem (Genesis 33:18-20).

Not many people have had the Lord to appear to them. When He does, they will build an altar, as well. God promised the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants. Abram did not question how, or when, God would do this, Abram showed his belief, and sincerity, and humbleness by building an altar and worshipping.

III. Reconfirming Commitment (Genesis 15:1-7)

In Genesis chapters 13-14, Abram settles by the oaks of Mamre at Hebron and builds an altar to the LORD. God reaffirms the promise he has made to Abram. The promise includes both land and offspring to fill the land—two elements of a great nation. Yet, so far, Abram remains childless, which raises the question of how God will fulfill his promise.

The Battle of the Vale of Siddim, also often called the War of Nine Kings or the Slaughter of Chedorlaomer, is an event that occurs in the days of Abram and Lot. The Shemite kings crush the Canaanites and capture Abram's nephew (Lot), whose family lives among them. Abram is himself a descendant of Shem and therefore blessed by God in his pursuit and rescue of Lot. After this, the king of Sodom meets with Abram.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram: The battle of the kings, the captivity of Lot, the rescue of him and his goods, and of those of Sodom and Gomorrah by Abram, and the conversation that passed between him, and the kings of Sodom and Salem. The word of the LORD came to the people of the Bible in many different ways. It might come by a personal appearance of God, by an audible voice, by visions or dreams, by the ministry of angels, by the working of the Spirit of God upon the mind, by the making alive of a passage of Scripture to the heart, or by the ministry of a prophet or preacher. Here, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. Christ, the essential Word, appeared to Abram in a human form, visible to him, and with an articulate voice spoke unto him: saying, “fear not, Abram”, calling him by his name.

This was not only to encourage Abram, but to dissipate his fears to which might be, the nations that belonged to the four kings he had conquered and slain should recruit their armies, and come against him with greater force; and the brethren and relations of those he had slain should avenge themselves on him.

I am thy shield: To protect him against all his enemies, be they ever so strong and numerous; as Christ is the shield of his people against all their spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world. Which being held up in the hand of faith, called therefore the shield of faith, is a security against them. “I am thy shield”: God served Abram as his divine protector (Psalms 7:10; 84:9).

And thy exceeding great reward: Though he had generously refused taking any reward for the service he had done in pursuing the kings, and slaughtering them, and bringing back the persons and goods they had took away. Yet he should be no loser by it, the Lord would reward him in a way of grace with greater and better things. God himself would be his reward, and which must be a great one, an exceeding great one; as Christ is to his people in his person, offices, and grace.

God came and spoke to Abram in this vision, because Abram had about given up on having a family and the promises of God coming true. God’s first statement to Abram, as it is to us today, is “fear not.” Fear is not faith. It is the opposite of faith.

He told Abram, here, (I didn’t say that you could do this by yourself). God said, I am your protector, and this thing that I will give you is not of your own doing. It is a reward to you, because you believe me, for no other reason.

Lord GOD, what will You give me: Certainly, Abram appreciated the promise from God. At the same time, there was perhaps a sense in which it sounded empty to Abram. It was as if Abram said, “What good is it that You are my shield and reward? The only thing I’ve ever wanted with any passion in my life is a son. Where are the descendants You promised me?”

I go Childless: In response to God’s encouragement and admonition (verse 1), Abram showed what nagged at him. How could God’s promise of many descendants (13:16), and of being a great nation (12:2), come about when he had no children?

Eliezer of Damascus: To Abram, God's promise had stalled; so, adoption of a servant as the male heir, a well-known contemporary Mesopotamian custom, was the best officially recognizable arrangement to make it come to pass, humanly speaking. Ten years have passed, and Abram is still without an heir. Following the custom of the day, he suggests that perhaps he ought to adopt his "Steward ... Eliezer of Damascus" as his legal "heir."

However, God refuses this offer and clearly promises that Abram will have a child "out of thine own bowels" (i.e., physically procreated).

Despite the unbounded grandeur and preciousness of the promise, or rather assurance, now given, Abram is still childless and landless; and the Lord has made as yet no sign of action in regard to these objects of special promise.

To me thou hast given no seed: Abram's bold honesty before the LORD is a wonderful example of prayer. Instead of holding in his frustration, he brought it before God with an honest heart.

Abram was telling God: I don't have any children for these promises to be carried out through, what good will it do to give me anything? It will die with me, and this servant will inherit my goods for lack of a son to leave it to. Abram was really feeling sorry for himself. To some degree, this question doubted God. Yet we can discern the difference between a doubt that *denies* God's promise and a doubt that *desires* God's promise. Abram *wanted* to believe and looked to God to strengthen his faith.

This one shall not be your heir: Abram would not end his days with Eliezer as his only heir. God would indeed fulfill the promise made long before, originally recorded in Genesis 12:2 and 13:15-16. Abram needed to be reminded of the promises of God, and we also need the reminders.

One who will come from your own body shall be your heir: God explained exactly what He meant in His promise to Abram. He meant that it wasn't a spiritual descendant who would inherit the promise (such as Eliezer), but an actual flesh-and-blood descendant. This was necessary because we sometimes *misunderstand* God's promises. This promise was repeated to Abram with such clarity and certainty that it was reasonable to suppose that he expected it would be soon fulfilled. Yet in the chronology of Abram's life, the fulfillment of this promise was still 15 years away.

Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them: The Lord reiterates the promise concerning the seed. As he had commanded him to view the land and see in its dust the emblem of the multitude that would spring from him, so now, with an inspirational simplicity of practical illustration, he brings him forth to contemplate the stars, and challenges him to tell their number, if he can; adding, "So shall thy seed be." God not only *told* Abram the promise again, but He *confirmed* it with an illustration. The stars in the sky showed how vast the number of Abram's descendants would be.

God that made all these out of nothing, by the word of His power, is able to fulfill his promise, and multiply the seed of Abram and Sarai. Here, we perceive, the vision does not interfere with the notice of the sensible world, so far as is necessary.

He believed in the Lord: When Abram put his trust in God, specifically in God's promise to him (descendants leading to the Messiah), God credited (accounted) this belief to Abram's account as righteousness. This was not his original act of faith, but further evidence of his confidence in God. In light of (Hebrews 11:8-10), clearly Abram had already experienced saving faith at the time of his original call.

And He accounted it to him for righteousness: This is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith. This is the first time *believe* is used in the Bible and the first time *righteousness* is used in the Bible. This is the New Testament gospel in the Hebrew Scriptures, later quoted four times in the New Testament.

Romans 4:9-10 makes much of the fact this righteousness was accounted to Abram before he was circumcised (later happening in Genesis 17). No one could say Abram was made righteous *because* of his obedience or fulfillment of religious law or ritual. It was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abram as righteous.

The faith that made Abram righteous wasn't so much believing *in* God (as we usually speak of believing in God), as it was *believing God*. Those who only believe *in* God (in the sense of believing He exists) are merely on the same level as demons (James 2:19).

Then He said to him: We don't know if the events beginning with Genesis 15:7 followed close upon what happened in Genesis 15:1-6; the flow of the text seems to indicate they did.

I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it: That a specifically identifiable land (see verses 18-21), was intimately linked with Abram's having many descendants in God's purpose and in the Abrahamic Covenant was clearly revealed and, in a formal ceremony (verses 9-21), would be placed irrevocably beyond dispute. This wasn't the first time this promise was given (see also Genesis 12:1-3, 12:7, and 13:15-17). Yet this was a dramatic and clear restatement of God's promise to give the land to Abram and his covenant descendants. He said to Abram here, you didn't leave Ur just to find a better place to make a living. I brought you out so that I might give you this land as an inheritance.

Lesson Summary

This all-powerful God who was here reminding Abram that He was capable of all things, is the exact same God we worship today. As believers, we are sometimes inclined to forget, or take for granted, the great privilege we have in drawing near to the same God who created the universe and all it contains, out of nothing.

Here is that God, appearing to Abram in his hour of need. It is worth noting, also, not just the timeliness of the Lord's interventions in Abram's life, but the perfect sufficiency of the answers He offers to prayer.

Abraham was not a perfect man, but he did have a heart for God. His faith was weak at times, and he failed God, just like we do, even though we truly love our God.

Abraham built an altar each day and prayed, seeking God's forgiveness and directions. God spoke to Abraham and told him that He was giving him and his children all the land he could see. God said I am going to give you so many descendants that you won't even be able to count them.

Abraham's faith became weak once more because he was getting older each day and had no children. He and Sarai were beyond the normal age of having children. Abraham had questions, but he continued to trust God to do the impossible.

There are approximately 8,810 *promises* in the entire Bible. In the Old Testament there are 7,706 and in the New Testament there are 1,104 wonderful promises. Deuteronomy 28 has 133 *promises*, which is more than any other chapter in the Bible. "We're sitting on the premises when we ought to be standing on the *promises*!"