

SESSION 10

- a. Now the LORD had said to Abram: 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.**
- i. Abram’s partial obedience did not take God’s promise away. Instead, it meant the fulfillment of the promise was delayed until Abram was ready to do what the LORD told him to do.**
- ii. Abram would certainly become a giant of faith, even being the father of the believing (Galatians 3:7); yet he did not start as a hero of faith. We see Abram as an example of growing in faith and obedience.**
- iii. More important than Abram’s faith was God’s promise. Notice how often God says I will in these verses. Genesis chapter 11 is all about the plans of man. Genesis chapter 12 is all about the plans of God. Genesis 12:1-3 explains how God promised Abram a land, a nation, and a blessing.**
- b. To a land I that I will show you: After stating He wanted Abram to leave his country and his relatives, God promised Abram a land. Specifically, God promised the land of Canaan, what might be called “greater Israel.”**
- c. I will make you a great nation: God promised to make a nation from Abram. He will have children and grandchildren and further descendants, enough to populate a great nation.**
- d. And make your name great: God promised to bless Abram and to make his name great. There is probably no more honored name in history than the name of Abram, who is honored by Jews, Muslims, and Christians.**

e. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you: God also promised He would bless those who bless you and to curse him who curses you. This promise – inherited by the covenant descendants of Abram, the Jewish people – remains true today and is a root reason for the decline and death of many empires.

i. Historically speaking, nations that have treated the Jewish people well have often been blessed. “When the Greeks overran Palestine and desecrated the altar in the Jewish temple, they were soon conquered by Rome. When Rome killed Paul and many others, and destroyed Jerusalem under Titus, Rome soon fell. Spain was reduced to a fifth-rate nation after the Inquisition against the Jews; Poland fell after the pogroms; Hitler’s Germany went down after its orgies of anti-Semitism; Britain lost her empire when she broke her faith with Israel.” (Barnhouse)

ii. This promise has also affected the church. The times when the church took upon itself the persecution of the Jewish people were dark times not only for the Jews but also for the church.

f. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed: Not only was Abram promised blessing, but God also promised to make him a blessing, even to the point where all the families of the earth would be blessed in Abram. 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. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:8-9).

ii. And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 5:9). The work of Jesus will touch every people group on the earth.

iii. Boice quoted the observation of Martin Luther, who said the promise in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed should be written “in golden letters and should be extolled in the languages of all people,” for “who else... has dispensed this blessing among all nations except the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ?”

iv. This also indicated a missionary vision that God intended Abraham’s covenant descendants to have. They were to look beyond themselves to all nations, to all the families of the earth. “There, you see, was the missionary character of the seed of Abraham, if they had but recognized it. God did not bless them for themselves alone, but for all nations: ‘In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.’” (Spurgeon)

2. (4) Abram’s departure from Haran.

So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

a. 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.

b. 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.

3. (5-6) Abram’s arrival in Canaan.

Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.

a. All their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran: Abram left Ur of the Chaldeans with his father and his nephew Lot, stopping in Haran long enough to acquire many possessions and people.

b. So they came to 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).

c. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem: This was Abram's first stopping point in Canaan. He came to a notable oak tree (the terebinth tree of Moreh).

i. The name Shechem means shoulder. It probably gets its meaning from the geography of the area. The idea may be that the two hills Gerazim and Ebal were like "shoulders" with Shechem in the midst of them. Shechem was not only in the midst of two mountains but it was also right in the middle of Canaan.

- This is where Jacob came safely when he returned with his wives and children from his sojourn with Laban (Genesis 33:18).**

- This is where Jacob bought a piece of land from a Canaanite named Hamor, for 100 pieces of silver (Genesis 33:19).**

- This is where Jacob built an altar to the Lord and called it El Elohe Israel (Genesis 33:20). This established the connection between Jacob and what became known as Jacob's well.**

- Shechem was the place where Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was raped – and the sons of Jacob massacred the men of the city in retaliation (Genesis 34).**

- This was the plot of ground that Jacob gave his son Joseph, land Jacob had conquered from the Amorites with his sword and bow in an unrecorded battle (Genesis 48:22).**

- This is where the bones of Joseph were eventually buried when they were carried up from Egypt (Joshua 24:32).

- This is where Joshua made a covenant with Israel, renewing their commitment to the God of Israel and proclaiming: as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24).

- Shechem's New Testament name is Sychar – where Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 (John 4:5-6).

d. And the Canaanites were then in the land: Abram came to the land God promised, yet the Canaanites were still in the land. They had no intention of giving the land to Abram, and would not give it up until they were forced out some 400 years later.

4. (10-13) Lot chooses his portion of land.

And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.

a. Like the garden of the LORD: Lot made his choice purely based on what he could see with his eyes. He cared only for the material abundance of the land, and cared nothing for how it would impact him and his family spiritually.

i. As much as anything, faith means we do not walk by what we see, but by what we know to be true in God: For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Abram walked by faith; Lot walked only by sight.

b. Pitched his tent even as far as Sodom: It was only this far for now, but later Lot became a leader of this sinful city. Valuing only the things that can be seen increased his wealth temporarily, but Lot would eventually lose it all.

i. Of course Lot thought, “I can serve God as well there as here. They probably need a witness.” But he deceived himself, as many since him have done. Jeremiah 17:9 states, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

ii. “In the end, he who sought this world lost it, and he who was willing to give up anything for the honour of God found it.” (Maclaren)

iii. It wasn’t Lot’s choice that led his heart astray. His heart was already astray, and it was demonstrated by his choice.

B. God confirms His promise to Abram.

1. (14-15) God promises the land to Abram and to his descendants forever.

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.”

a. After Lot had separated from him: God wanted to talk to Abram alone after Lot left. This was a promise made to Abram, not to Abram’s nephew.

i. This promise of the land had been made to Abram when he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 12:1-3, Acts 7:2-4). God now repeated the promise.

b. All the land which you see I give to you: God also wanted to remind Abram that even though Abram had been generous enough to grant some of the land to his nephew Lot, God still said the land belonged to Abram.

2. (16) God reminds Abram of His promise to give Abram many descendants.

“And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered.”

a. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth: This was quite a promise to make to a childless man in his seventies or eighties. Yet Abram knew to walk by faith and not by sight.

b. Your descendants: Again, this promise of many descendants was made to Abram when he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 12:1-3, Acts 7:2-4). To assure Abram, God repeated the promise.

3. (17-18) Abram walks through the land God gave to him.

“Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.” Then Abram moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.

a. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you: As a token of Abram’s reception of the land by faith, God wants Abram to explore the land of promise, to walk through it as if it were his, though he did not have a record of ownership to the land yet.

i. In the same way, God wants us to explore a land of promise, for us – His Word – where God has given to us exceedingly great and precious promises (2 Peter 1:4), where He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). He wants us to walk through this land, possessing it by faith.

b. Dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron: The name Mamre means, vision. Hebron means communion. Abram once again walked in the LORD’s vision for him and in communion with the LORD.

c. And built an altar there to the LORD: Abram built another altar. He lived life in constant awareness of the need for a sacrificial atonement and covering.

Genesis 12:1-5a; 13:11-18

God's blessing is seen in the promises He keeps.

Every journey begins with a first step. Whether it is a vacation trip, starting a new job or marriage, schooling, or a hobby project, there is an initial move to begin the journey. Today's session chronicles the opening of Abram's (Abraham's) journey that set in motion God's redemptive plan and culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without Abram's first step of faith, this world would probably be a much different place. As with any journey, his pilgrimage of faith took many twists and turns. There were sad detours of disobedience and great acts of trust. Nonetheless, Abram's example has stood the test of time—not just in Scripture, but also across Christian history.

As you reflect on Abram's faith in today's verses, think about your own faith journey and that of the adults in your group. How obedient have you been on your spiritual adventure? Ask God to strengthen your faith, as well as the faith of those doing life with you in Bible study.

What are promises God has kept that are expressions of His blessing?

Understand the Context (Genesis 12:1–14:24)

So far in our study of Genesis, the focus has been on monumental events in the history of the world. These events include the creation of the world and of humanity. They also include the disobedience of Adam and Eve and their subsequent removal from the garden of Eden. Next came the first murder by Cain, followed by the worldwide flood and the division of all people into various clans and nations based on shared specific languages.

With chapter 12, Genesis shifts from the description of global events to the stories of individual people who interacted with God. Most notably, the focus falls on a single family: The family of Abram (who would later be known as Abraham).

Genesis 3–11 (a period of approximately 2,000 years) emphasized the problem of humanity's sin. People were created for fellowship with God. However, these opening chapters recount how people consistently moved away from God. Throughout these chapters, human beings constantly failed in their relationship with God.

Thankfully, God chose not to give up on His created ones and set into motion His plan to pursue us and draw us back to Himself. To do this, God selected Abram and his descendants as His chosen people. Through these chosen people, who would eventually become the nation of Israel, God sent His ultimate solution for sin: Jesus, the promised Messiah.

With Genesis 12:1, the entire story of Genesis slows down considerably. The swift panorama of history is replaced with the steady, ongoing narrative of Abram's family. The focus eventually narrows to four different people from that family (Abram/Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and Joseph).

We first encounter Abram as a part of the family tree of Shem (Gen. 11:10-32). Abram accompanied his father, Terah, on a journey from the Mesopotamian city of Ur that was supposed to end up in Canaan. However, when they reached the city of Haran, the text tells us that Terah settled there and died there. Abram was still living in Haran when God called him and directed him to complete the trip that his father had started.

Genesis 12–14 sets the stage for Abram's story, highlighting God's covenant relationship with Abraham, his deception in Egypt, his relationship with his nephew Lot, and his encounter with a mysterious priest/king named Melchizedek. Central in this narrative are the obedience of Abram to God's call and the covenant of blessing promised by God. Although Abram left his home in Mesopotamia, God promised an even greater homeland in Canaan. Eventually, his descendants would create a nation that would bless the world.

As you read Genesis 12:1-5a; 13:11-18, consider our personal responsibilities to God in response to His promises

Move (Genesis 12:1-5a) 1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." 4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5a And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan.

Key Concept: Abram's Covenant

In the "Abrahamic covenant" God made seven promises to Abram:

- He would lead Abram to a new land. This, of course, was the land of Canaan, later referred to as the promised land.
- He would make Abram a great nation. Several nations eventually came from him. (See Gen. 25.)

- He would bless Abram. God bestowed material possessions and people that were a part of his clan.
- He would make Abram's name great. Even today, all three of the world's major religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—claim a relationship with him.
- He would make Abram a blessing to others. Through Abram and his descendants, others would receive favor from God.
- He would bless or curse others based on how they treated Abram. This promise indicates that God ("I will") is the source of the blessings or curses.
- He would bless all people on earth through Abram. This foreshadowed Jesus, the Messiah.

(v. 1) *The Lord said:* Several hundred years had passed since God had announced His covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:17). When God spoke to •**Abram**, He announced another covenant. This covenant included the command for Abram to leave his home and to resettle in a land that God would show him.

According to Acts 7:2-4, Abram was living in Ur when he received God's call. Genesis 11:31 indicates that his father, Terah, would only go as far as •Haran. Abram continued to Canaan after Terah's death.

(v. 1) *Go:* Most ancient covenants were bi-lateral. Each party agreed to their assigned responsibilities and benefits. However, God's covenant with Abram was one-sided. Abram's role was simply to obey. God said **go** and that's precisely what Abram did (see v. 4).

(v. 4) *Abram went:* This was Abram's first step of obedience. This act of faith likely included a new allegiance to God, since Joshua 24:2 indicates that Abram's father, Terah, had worshiped idols.

(v. 4) *Seventy-five years old:* This was the first of two obstacles facing Abram. His age and his wife's barrenness seemed like roadblocks to God's promises. The second obstacle was the presence of the clans and tribes already living in the promised land.

(v. 5a) •*Sarai:* This name means "princess." Later God changed her name to "Sarah" (Gen. 17:15). While the meaning is generally the same, the name change highlighted the new destiny God had planned for Sarah. Rather than staying childless, she would give birth to a people as numerous as the dust of the earth.

(v. 5a) People that they had acquired: These were male and female servants that Abram and his nephew, Lot, had **acquired** over the years. This would have formed a large retinue of people and possessions.

Take time to read Genesis 12:1-5a. Then use Hebrews 11:8-19 to gain additional insights into Abraham's faith journey. Abraham's faith was tied directly to the promises that God gave Him in the covenant relationship defined in Genesis 12. Centuries later, Paul used Abraham's response to these promises as a definition of true faith. Read, and perhaps memorize, Romans 4:20-21. Note that genuine faith is believing that what God has promised He is well able to deliver.

Separate (Genesis 13:11-13)

11 So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

(v. 11) •Lot: Lot was Abram's nephew, the son of Abram's brother, Haran. Evidently, Haran died in Ur sometime before Terah led his family to the city of Haran. When Genesis 12:5 referred to all of Abram's people and possessions, the same would have been true for Lot. He also had many possessions and livestock. No doubt God's blessings on Abram had fallen on Lot, as well. In addition, Abram (and likely Lot) picked up more animals during his disappointing experience in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20).

Soon the size of their combined flocks and herds became too much for the land to support. In addition, their herdsmen began arguing over grazing rights. This would be the first of many disputes between the clans of Abram and Lot. Lot's descendants became the Moabites and the Ammonites, nations that often were at odds with the Israelites (19:36-38).

(v. 11) Jordan Valley: In the decision to separate, Lot rejected the land of promise in favor of the Jordan Valley. He chose the more "exotic" portion of the land. This would be the region of Canaan east of the Jordan River.

The text describes this as a lush green area and likens it to the beauty of Eden (13:10). This comparison may also have been an allusion to the coming disaster that awaited Lot's family. In just a short while, this lush land would become scorched earth with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Key Place: Sodom

The wickedness of **Sodom** was so famous that its name has been equated with evil for centuries. The location of this city, as well as the other cities of the plain, is uncertain, but evidence suggests that they could have been near the Dead Sea. The wickedness of this city wasn't limited to unnatural lust (see 19:4-5), but also the sins of pride and social injustice. These are mentioned in Ezekiel 16:49-50, along with the fact that the people committed "abomination."

(v. 11) *Journeyed east:* This is another example of moving **east** as a symbol of separation in the book of Genesis. For more examples, see Genesis 3:24; 4:16; and 11:2.

(v. 12) *Abram settled in the land of •Canaan:* As the elder of the traveling families, Abram had every right to choose the fertile plains of the Jordan for himself. However, God had promised him **the land of Canaan**, which was far more important to Abram (12:7). Abram had already traversed the land, building altars for worshiping God along the way.

(v. 12) *Cities of the valley:* Five cities in this region had formed a political unit: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar (Bela). These cities and their kings are referenced in Genesis 14:2 in a description of their war against three opposing kings—a war Abram would be pulled into so he could rescue Lot.

Sodom was the chief city among the group, but all five cities were condemned by God because of their wickedness. The parenthetical statement in verse 13 describing the wickedness of the cities is a foreshadowing of judgment to come. This entire lush green valley would be burned with the fire of God's wrath (19:27-29).

(v. 13) *Great:* The Hebrew wording describes more than the nature of the sin. It reflects the degree or magnitude of their sin. The word suggests "force," "might," or "abundance." The same word (translated "very") was used earlier in the chapter to describe Abram's vast wealth (13:2). In a sense, the residents of Sodom were setting the standard for evil. Wickedness was a powerful presence in the city and that influence filtered out to the other cities in the region.

SUMMARIZE: Claim (Genesis 13:14-18)

14 The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." 18 So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

(v. 14) Look: As Lot had looked on the valley around the Jordan, God told Abram to **look** around at the land He was giving him and his descendants. The contrast is stark here. Lot chose the valley for himself, while God chose Canaan for Abram.

(v. 14) Northward and southward and eastward and westward: Everything Abram could see eventually would belong to his descendants. Nothing was left out. Of course, the possession of this inheritance would not permanently take place for many years. The children of Israel would first be slaves in Egypt and then conquer the promised land under Joshua.

For Abram, though, mentally and spiritually taking possession of the land was a step of faith as he trusted God's promises. This is especially true since at the time he had no offspring and, because of Sarai's barrenness, the prospects of an heir were quite dim.

(v. 15) Forever: This land would be a permanent bestowal on Abraham and his descendants (see Gen. 17:8.) Prophecies throughout the Old Testament pointed to the permanency of this gift from God. This permanent bestowal continues to be a sticking point for modern-day Israel in her relationship with surrounding nations.

(vv. 15-16) Offspring: Three different times God used pictures from nature to illustrate the extent of Abram's **offspring**. Here, God compared his descendants to the **dust of the earth**. Later, in Genesis 15:5, God likened their number to the stars in the sky. Finally, in Genesis 22:17, God promised that the number would be as vast as the sand on the seashore. In each case, the emphasis was on the inability of a person to place a number on how many descendants Abram would have.

(v. 17) Arise, walk: God had commanded Abram to look so he could visually take in all the land that God was giving to him and his offspring. Now, he was instructed to **walk** throughout the land and to claim it as his inheritance from God.

Key Doctrine: The Church

The New Testament speaks of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. (See 1 Chronicles 16:23-24; Psalm 67:1-2; Revelation 7:9.)

(v. 18) Oaks of •Mamre: In light of the controversy over grazing rights, it is interesting to note that **Mamre** means "grazing land." Despite their seminomadic existence, this became the primary dwelling place for Abram and his immediate family for years to come.

Known for its many oak trees, Mamre was located about two miles north of the village of **Hebron** or about 19 miles south of Jerusalem. This was the area in which Abram later

purchased a cave for a family burial site. For centuries, that was the only spot of Canaan actually owned by Abram and his descendants.

(v. 18) *Built an altar:* After this second affirmation of the covenant from the Lord (see 12:1-4), Abram worshiped God, thanking Him for His favor. Building altars was a regular part of Abram's life. Genesis mentions Abram building altars at Shechem (12:6-7), near Bethel (12:8), and at Mount Moriah (22:9). Worship was also an integral part of his life, as He expressed gratitude for the intimate relationship he had with God.