

GENESIS 12:1-9 (THE FOURTH DISPENSATION – GOD’S PROMISE)

Today we’re staring chapter 12 of Genesis and it is the beginning of the fourth “dispensation” or way of working in human history. So far we’ve seen three dispensations. The first was Innocence, which covered man’s very short time in the Garden of Eden.

After that came the second dispensation, Conscience. This went from the time of being expelled from the garden until the time of the Flood of Noah. And the third was Government, which went from the time after the Flood right up until where we are now. The fourth dispensation is a time of promise to the sons of God.

We’ve seen God’s Funnel at work ever since the time of Adam. God chose one of his Adam’s, Seth, to establish His line which will lead to Jesus. From Seth, one son has been selected from each of the subsequent generations – all the way down to Abraham.

And now, throughout this Dispensation of Promise, we will see God validate a covenant that He made to Abraham in his son Isaac and then in his son Jacob, who is Israel.

Introduction: What kind of a God do we serve? Is He changing? Vindictive? Does he promise and then renege? Or is God the faithful and covenant keeping God who truly is unchanging, all knowing, and the sovereign ruler of the universe? We had better hope for the second option, or our faith is in vain!

Text Verse: You will give truth to Jacob
And mercy to Abraham,
Which You have sworn to our fathers
From days of old. Micah 7:20

We all have choices to make and how immensely important is the choice, “Shall I take God at His word?” When we do, it leads to life. When we don’t there is only sadness and condemnation awaiting us and so... May God

speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Divine Directions

¹ Now the LORD had said to Abram:

**“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.**

This is known as the call of Abraham and it actually occurred when he was living in Ur by the Euphrates River and so goes back to that time. We know this because Stephen confirms it in Acts chapter 7. From Acts 7 we read –

“Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, ³ and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.’ ⁴ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. Acts 7:2-4

In this call, Abraham or Abram, is asked to cut three specific ties. The first is to his country. It would be like God asking one of us to leave America, renounce our citizenship, and go to a place that He will show us. Until recently no one on earth would have wanted to leave this greatest nation on God’s green earth.

And even now, despite our current woes, it is still the place of our widest range of affections and the place we are so comfortable in – because of language, because of familiarity, because of ties and heartstrings, and for a host of other reasons.

The second tie he’s asked to cut is his place of family. This certainly means more than just the people in his house. It includes all of the people of his culture. You never know how much your surrounding culture is ingrained in you until you go to another one.

When I went to live in Malaysia, there were things there that were so foreign that even when I left 3 years later, I couldn't get used to them. Thinking about them today still drives me insane.

The third tie he is called to cut is his father's house. This really is his home and family. This included his cousins and those he grew up with. It included the smells that came when passing through the front door, and the place where he automatically left his shoes without even thinking about it after working in the field.

Maybe it included the tree that he planted at six and then watched grow for so many years of his life. Abram is being called to cut all these ties and to move to a place that he has never seen and without even being told why. All God said is that it would be "...a land that I will show you."

We don't know how old he was when he received this call, but in the last chapter we looked at it said his father Terah, was 70 years old when he had Abram, Nahor, and Haran. So it has been more than 290 years since God spoke directly to man.

The last time He did was after the flood in the year 1657AM. This was in chapter 9 verse 17 when God made a covenant with the people of the world – "And God said to Noah, 'This *is* the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* on the earth.'"

Like bookends on the time where God was silent, He closed His mouth after making a covenant with Noah and then He opens it again to direct Abram to go to the covenant land He will give him. The sign of the covenant will come later, but God now speaks and His word is a covenant in and of itself... and here is the promise –

**² I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.**

Abram's gonna be rewarded and receive restoration for everything he's giving up. He was told to leave his country and in place of it he will be made into a great nation. He was told to leave his family and in place of this he is promised to be blessed. And he was told to leave his father's house and in place of it he's promised that his name will be made great.

If you look at what Abram gave up and what he received, the difference is immense. He gave up a land of idolatry to inherit the covenant land of God. He left his family and he would become the father of many nations. And he left his father's house and he became the man of faith, renown throughout history.

This is the way God works in the life of those who are obedient to Him. What we give up for the sake of Christ is to be counted as rubbish in comparison to the glories which He will bestow upon us by simply calling out to Him in faith. Nothing which is left behind can compare to the beauty of what lies ahead.

Jesus Himself said – “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,³⁰ who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

**³ I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;**

God has spoken and made a promise to Abram. The only thing that we could call a condition on this promise is that he leaves his country, family, and father's house and go to the land he'd be shown. If he does this, then the promise stands and it must be otherwise unconditional because nothing else is added.

If not, then this isn't the Creator God and Abram would have wasted his life pursuing that which is less than God. Like so many who had gone before him and so many who have come since, misdirected faith is wasted faith....

Either Jesus is Lord or He isn't. Either we are saved by grace through faith alone or by grace through faith but with works being necessary. Either Christianity is true and islam is false, or islam is true and Christianity is false, or they are both false.

Either Ellen G. White of the 7th Day Adventists was a prophet or she was a false prophet. Either Mormonism is true and Christianity is false or Momonism is false. Either Jesus is a created being as claimed by the Jehovah's Witnesses or Jesus is the uncreated God.

Where is your faith directed? It is the most important question in the world because if your faith is misdirected, then you are still in your sins and only hell awaits. You see, in the book of Numbers we are told this:

“God *is* not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Numbers 23:19

Abram was asked to leave home and go off to a place that God would show him. And in exchange God made a promise – an otherwise unconditional promise – to him. And because it's written in what we believe is God's word, then we are asked and expected to believe it just as it was spoken and just as it is recorded.

This is especially important because this promise of a blessing is passed from Abram to his son Isaac and then from Isaac to Jacob who is Israel. The promise to Isaac is in Genesis chapter 26 –

² Then the LORD appeared to him and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵ because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

And from Isaac, the promise was passed down to his second son, Jacob, who is Israel, in Genesis chapter 28 –

¹⁰ Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. ¹⁴ Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”

The reason why I’m quoting these verses is because Paul brings them up in Romans chapter 9 through 11 and says they still and always will apply to the people of Israel. In chapter 11 he says –

Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable.

What is Paul saying here? Well, who is he speaking about? He is speaking about unbelieving Jewish people – in general, the nation of Israel. And what does he say? They are enemies of the church because of the gospel. That’s pretty clear.

An unbelieving Jew is no different than any other unbeliever. If they don’t hold to the gospel, they are the gospel’s enemies and are thus enemies of those who hold to the gospel. One plus one is two. But Paul didn’t stop there like so many scholars seem to believe.

Replacement theology says that the church replaced Israel; that Israel is out and so for them it's end of story baby. But how someone can come to that conclusion when reading Romans is more than mystifying. What else does Paul say? "Concerning election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers."

Who are the fathers? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the 12 sons of Israel and even David is called a patriarch in the book of Acts. Israel is beloved because of the promises made to these people. They are the elect of God. If they are elect, then they cannot be cast off as a corporate body, only individually when they reject Christ.

And so God still must, and does, have a plan and a purpose for them. Why? Again, just as before, Paul explains it in the same verse. It's because the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Anybody who has read and studied chapters 9 through 11 in Romans and cannot see this clearly has been blinded. Either they were blinded by God, during Israel's time of punishment, or they are blinded by one of two other things.

The first possibility is a hatred of the Jewish people – anti-Semitism. And this is more prevalent in Christianity than you may realize. The second would be an unwillingness to open their eyes to what God has done because they would rather hold to what they have been taught rather than what God has revealed.

God has never rejected Israel and this is so obvious and so clear in our world today. All of the prophecies which predicted Israel's return were fulfilled in 1948, proving God's faithfulness to this unfaithful nation. This book, called the Holy Bible, is based on the covenant promises of God to His people.

The only time that a covenant like this can be broken is when it is conditional, and this covenant, after Abram's getting up and going, ain't conditional. But people know better than Paul and they know better than God too.

Or, they think they do. And so they insert the church into the picture where it doesn't belong and they remove Israel from where it does belong.

Let us remember this, especially in this nation today, where we are so close to turning our blessing upon the people of Israel into a curse. The nation who fights against God's elect is the nation that will disappear in fire and destruction.

God has chosen to plant the people of Israel once again in the Land of Israel. Who would we be fighting against if we decide they aren't worth fighting for? ...God!

³(con't) **And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**

This half of verse three is fulfilled in two ways - first, through the line of Abram which became the Jewish people. Through this line have come the very oracles of God, the Holy Bible. With only a few exceptions, every book in the Bible came from and was saved for posterity by Jewish hands.

And also from the Jewish people have come wonderful blessings which have graced all the people of the world. Although they are only 2% of 1% of the population of the world, they have made up about 20% of the Nobel laureates in the past century.

And the areas where they have lagged in these awards are subjective areas where ungodly people make ungodly choices about ungodly things – such as giving algore a Nobel Peace Prize for something that is based on an outright lie or giving barak obama a Nobel Peace Prize which covered the period of his presidency when he had accomplished... actually nothing.

When put side by side in real human achievement though, the Jewish people have excelled in literature, chemistry, medicine, physics, economics, etc.

Apart from the Jewish people as a whole though, but still as a part of the Jewish people, this blessing given by God to Abraham finds its ultimate fulfillment in the greatest Jewish Person, Jesus Christ –

the Messiah of the world who came from Abraham and in whom truly, all of the families of the earth are blessed.

Jesus took on humanity through the line of Abraham and He tasted God's wrath and human death for everyone. It is through Him that all people, tribes, tongues, and nations are reconciled to God.

II. Obedience to the Word

⁴So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him.

So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him. He is being obedient to the word which he was given. It's probably good to note that the word of the LORD to Abram is the same as the word of the LORD today.

The only difference is that instead of it coming in dreams, visions, or prophetic utterances, it now comes in the page of the Bible – and I personally believe only in this way.

Do you know that the Bible has rules about the conduct of a church? For example, in the book of 1 Corinthians there are specific rules about speaking in tongues in a church. And do you know that they are almost never obeyed?

If the Bible has been breathed out by the Holy Spirit as the Bible states, and the Holy Spirit gives the guidance for speaking in tongues, then you can know – 100% you can be certain – that if a church which isn't obeying the rules given about tongues, then the tongues have not come from the Holy Spirit.

Don't be led astray in your thinking by people who would rather make a show than learn their Bible.

It isn't complicated. Abram was given a word from the Lord and he obeyed. We have, likewise, been given the word of the Lord and we disobey it at our own loss.

If we can't get such simple things straight, then what do we expect about the weightier matters which affect our souls? Pay attention to the call of the Lord and don't lose out over pride or ego. If you want to be remembered by God as a person of faith, then obey the word of the Lord, just as our father Abraham did.

⁴(con't) **And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.**

Abram was born in the year 2009AM and his father died in the year 2084AM when Abram was 75 years old. Once his father was dead, Abram left Haran and headed to the Promised Land.

⁵**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 is now the leader of the family. He leads the way in this new adventure. Their father Terah died, O so close to the Promised Land, but he never entered it. And how many people start their journey of faith, but never finish it.

They study about Jesus, hear what they need to do, and they never make the final leap of faith into His protective care. And so they remain forever outside of the grace of God.

But Abram and his wife, and Lot and everything they had, including human servants, picked up and departed to Canaan – the land of servants. And the Bible says they safely arrived too.

When I lived in Malaysia, there was a pretty sizeable portion of Indians who lived there, 8% of the population. When Malaysia was being colonized by the British, some of the wealthy landowners in India picked up to move there.

When they did, they took along their Indian servants. The Brits eventually left, but the Indians, who worked in the tea plantations and as house servants, stayed. This is one way the people of the world get around – some by choice and some by force.

⁶Abram 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.

After entering Canaan, Abram went as far as Shechem. This location is key to the Bible in both testaments. It's between Mount Gerizzim and Mount Ebal. Here, God will meet with Abram. It is the spot where Israel's daughter Dinah will be raped and Israel's sons Simeon and Levi kill all the men of the town.

It's the spot where Joseph's bones would be buried after Israel returns from Egypt and it became a town which belonged to the Levites. After the Israel divided and became two countries, it would become the capital of the northern 10 tribes of Israel.

It is also the same town known in the New Testament as Sychar where Jesus spoke to the woman at the well in John 4. The history of the place is rich and goes back through the ages to Abram and the place where God first met him in the Promised Land.

There in Shechem, Abram stopped at Alon Moreh, or the terebinth of Moreh. Some translators say "oak" and some say "plain of Moreh." The word *Moreh* means "teacher" and in a moment we will see where the name came from and who the Teacher is.

III. A Promised Possession

⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."

This verse is one of the most important to know and understand of any you will come across in the Bible. By it, you can continue dating history. By it, you can understand how long the people of Israel were in Egypt, by it you

can understand the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith apart from the law.

So much is tied up in this one verse, that if we were to take it as a stand alone for a Bible study, we could spend hours on it. The Lord “appeared to Abram” What does this exactly mean? It is the first time this phrase occurs in the Bible and I believe that this is a divine visitation by the Master of time and space, Jesus.

Numerous times in the Old Testament, the Lord appears in human form to people. It will happen to Abraham, to Joshua, to the parents of Samson, to Gideon and to others. This is the eternal Christ who is coming to meet Abram.

Yes, I believe Jesus appears in His own past and directed human history leading to Himself. When He came to Abram, he made an unconditional promise, “To your descendants I will give this land.”

There is nothing tied up in the promise and it is God’s land to parcel out. We will see how this promise will be made true throughout the rest of the Bible. This verse is so important that Paul cites it Galatians 3 and he uses it to say that it points to the work of Christ. Here is what he says –

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.¹⁷ And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.¹⁸ For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

⁷ (con’t) **And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.**

After receiving the promise, Abram built an altar to the Lord there. The spot where the Lord stood is hallowed by His presence and he acknowledges this in the building of the altar.

In building this altar, he is making an open profession of his belief in Jehovah, thus establishing worship of the true God on the soil of the Promised Land, and he is also declaring faith in the promise he has just been given. We could equate this altar with our accepting baptism – it is an open profession of our faith.

Here at the Terebinth of the Teacher, Abram met the great Teacher who would be recognized as such over 40 times in the New Testament gospels.

⁸ And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent *with* Bethel on the west and Ai on the east;

After leaving the shade of the Terebinth of the Teacher, Abram moved to a mountain east of Bethel and west of Ai. Bethel means “House of God” and it will become a very important place throughout the Bible. It is where Jacob saw the ladder reaching to heaven which Jesus claimed in the book of John was Him.

Ai means “heap of ruins.” The spot where he is now is a picture of life on earth. The house of God, Bethel, is a picture of heaven and the heap of ruins, Ai, is a picture of hell. Abram is between them – having “pitched his tent.” Pitching one’s tent means you are a temporary pilgrim on your way to somewhere else.

Abram then is a picture of us. We are pilgrims in the land of servants and we are between heaven and hell. Will we be a servant of the Lord and take the ladder, which is Jesus, to heaven, or will we be a servant of sin and be destroyed in the heap of ruins?

All of us have a choice to make while we are here before we move on. Abram made the right choice.

^{8 (con’t)} there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

Abram knew that the only house where divine protection can be realized is the house where the proper worship of God is established – a lesson for

each of us – particularly when children are involved. And so Abram built an altar and called on, or invoked, the name of the Lord.

By invoking the name of the Lord, he is acknowledging that the Lord is the Mediator between him and God. This is why the Lord appeared to him at the Terebinth of the Teacher. Jesus is our one and only Mediator and somehow, Abram knew this too.

⁹ So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

We finish up today with this verse. Abram was a pilgrim in the land of servants and after meeting with the great Teacher, he heads toward the South.

I hope you've seen how rich and deep these passages about Abram are and the beautiful pictures and symbols they contain. They all point to Jesus Christ and His work in time and history as He carefully works out the great plan of redemption for mankind.

He has given us pictures of paradise and pictures of hell and he has shown us the way to obtain the former and avoid the latter. In the end, what He asks for is very simple – faith.

Jesus asks us to believe that He is who He said He is and He did what He said He has done. If we can just believe, He promises that He will safely carry us to the home which He has prepared for us.

Abram built an altar where the Lord had been and he continued to worship the Lord as he traveled. For some of us, the Lord has already tread upon our hearts and so we need to consecrate our hearts to Him as an altar worthy of His greatness.

Some of us may not yet have received Christ. Let me take just a minute and explain how you can...

If you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are eternally saved. The Bible says that even now you are seated with Him in the

heavenly realms. I would pray that you would dedicate your life to acknowledging that fact by placing Him properly in the altar of your own heart. To the glory of God who saved you.

The Call of Abraham

Now the LORD had said to Abram, "A directive I have for you"
Get out of your country and from your family too

And depart from your father's house, my son
Yes, leave everything behind
I want you to leave because you are the one
You are a great part of the plan I have designed

Off to a land that I will show you
There I will make you a great nation
I will bless you, this is what I'll do
But you must first start on this great migration

I will make your name great, my promise is true
And you shall be a blessing
I will curse him who curses you
There will be no second guessing

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed
So Abram departed, and for the journey he was dressed

He departed as the Lord had spoken, taking along no doubt
And Lot went with him as did his wife and others too
He was seventy-five years old when they headed out
So to the place called Haran, the company bid "Adieu"

Off to the land of Canaan, Abram did head away
And they arrived in that land – the land of promise
They passed through to Shechem and there they did stay
Abram was of faith and not a doubting Thomas

There at the Terebinth of Moreh, with Canaanites all around
The Lord appeared to him saying, To your descendants I give this piece of
ground.

So he built an Altar to the Lord whom he met there
Yes, he built the altar on that very spot
He acknowledged his Mediator, the one who handles prayer
And so should we do the same, with contemplative thought

Abram then moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel
And there he pitched his tent, Bethel on the west
And to the east was Ai, a picture of the place called hell
Abram was a pilgrim on the earth, but he passed the test

There he called on the name of the Lord
And clung faithfully to God's holy word

So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south
And surely as he went the praise of the Lord was in his mouth

We remember Abram this man whose faith was great
And each of us should surely follow in his path
Let us love the Lord with all our heart and let us patiently wait
For the coming of Jesus, who keeps us from God's wrath

Yes, let us love our Lord and give Him all our praise
Let us serve the King and glorify Him all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...

The Jew

*Scattered by God's avenging hand,
Afflicted and forlorn,
Sad wanderers from their pleasant land,
Do Judah's children mourn;
*And e'en in Christian countries, few
Breathe thoughts of pity for the Jew.
*Yet listen, Gentile, do you love
The Bible's precious page?
Then let your hearts with kindness move
To Israel's' heritage:
*Who traced those lines of love for you -
Each scared writer was a Jew.
*And then as years and ages passed,
And nations rose and fell,
Though clouds and darkness oft were cast
O'er captive Israel,
*The oracles of God for you
Were kept in safety by the Jew.
*And when the great Redeemer came
For guilty man to bleed,
He did not take an angel's name
No - Born of Abraham's seed
*Jesus, who gave His life for you,
The gentle Savior was a Jew.
*And though His own received Him not
And turned in pride away,
Whence is the Gentile's happier lot?
Are you more just than they?
*No: God in pity turned to you -
Have you no pity for the Jew?
*Go, then, and bend your knee to pray
For Israel's ancient race;
Ask the dear Savior every day
To call them by His grace;
*Go, for a debt of love is due
From Christian Gentiles to the Jew.