



Study # 14

Genesis Chapter 12

Summary of the passage: This chapter informs the reader of Abraham's specific call to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go forth as a nomad to dwell in the land of Canaan. It informs us that he was accompanied by Sarai, his wife, and by Lot His nephew (Abraham's brother Haran's son). Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran to make the journey to Canaan. At Sichem God appeared to Abram, after which Abram built an altar unto the Lord. He had left the idolatry of the Chaldeans behind and began to worship God by faith in obedience to His word (Heb. 11:8-10). A famine moved Abram to move down to Egypt with Sarai and Lot. There they were tempted to tell the lie that Sarai was Abraham's sister. In mercy God convicted Pharaoh of the matter and drove Abraham out without harm. Sadly, the sight of Egypt affected Lot and contributed to his future fatal decision to choose Sodom as a place of residence (Ch. 13:10).

Key verse: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Verse 1).

God's call to Abraham to move to the promised land of Canaan set a new course for Abraham and the nation of Israel. To Abraham was given the covenant promise to be the head of a new nation, a promised land and God's attending blessing. It separated Abraham from idolatry to set up true worship and lead a people in the way of obedient worship and service unto the Lord.

God's call to Abraham was a new beginning for God's chosen people. The covenant given to Abraham included God's purpose of redemption for His church.

Observations – Lessons from this chapter.

1. God's call to Abraham took place in the Chaldean city of Ur, Abraham's birthplace.

The call to go to a new land came to Abram before the family's move to Haran. The history of Abraham's call is in the past tense. It says, "Now the LORD had said unto Abram." (ch. 12:1). This is confirmed in the New Testament by Stephen before his martyrdom, "The Lord of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charan" (Acts 7:2). The New Testament account dates Abraham's call to the time when he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees.

2. Terah, Abraham's father, led the family to Haran with the full intention of going onward to Canaan.

Note the words, "to go into the land of Canaan" (Genesis 11:31). Terah was the head of the family and responded to the call of God given to Abram, his son.

The city of Haran is a distance of about 400 miles North West of Ur, which is south of Babylon. It was a large step in the right direction, but for some reason stopped short, for they "dwelt there" [Haran] (ch. 11:31), for a time. Terah's death marked the end of the family's stopover there. No reason is stated for the delay in Haran. Note that Abram did not hesitate further after his father's death, but went forth to Canaan, "as the LORD had spoken unto him" (Ch. 12:4).

3. Abram decided to obey God's call because of God's promises.

Note the "I wills" in verses 1 – 3. These are promises for:

- **God's direction** "unto a land that I will shew thee" v1,
- **God's multiplication** "And I will make of thee a great nation" v2,
- **God's motivation** "And I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (v2),
- **God's protection** "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee."

These promises were the basis for Abraham's strong faith. He believed God, and obeyed God according to the veracity of His word. Abraham is held forth in the hall of faith (Hebrews 11) as an example of faith in God's word. He believed in the reality of the future place of his inheritance (Hebrews 11:8). To go out, "not knowing whither he went," was faith in action, for he walked by faith, not by sight. Abraham was enabled to do so because he took God at His word.

4. Abraham became an altar builder as a first principle of His worship unto God.

Having left his homeland and its idolatrous culture, Abraham began to worship God on the terms of a sacrifice for sin. The first reference to Abram worshipping by an altar was at Sichem [later known as Shechem] in the plain of Moreh (v6). Abram had an encounter with God and realised his need to commune with God by a blood offering. When we read of Abraham building an altar, we must assume that a sacrifice for sin was offered on that altar. Altar building became a way of life for Abraham for this is the first of many. See how he built another altar at Bethel where he "called upon the name of the Lord" (v8). At God's appearance he must have felt the distance between his own sinful nature and God's holiness, so he learned the secret of true worship by blood sacrifice, which had been practiced by Adam, Abel and Noah. Worship on the merits of blood atonement is what distinguishes between true and false religion. Abraham's sacrifices were typical of Christ our sacrifice, the promised Saviour of the world.

5. Abraham's descent into Egypt had disastrous consequences (v10-20).

Due to a famine in the land of Canaan, Abraham kept moving southward until he entered the land of Egypt. He instinctively knew that it was a place of danger and feared that he would be harmed as the Egyptians would be attracted to Sarai, for her beauty. His scheme was ill-conceived and endangered Sarai even more. It was a scheme based on lying that Sarai was Abram's half-sister while denying that she was his wife. In mercy, God intervened by sending "great plagues" (v17) which caused Pharaoh to fear God and cast the offending couple out of Egypt. This subterfuge was repeated when Abraham met Abimelech, King of Gerar (Gen. 20:1).

Later, the impact of this visit to Egypt caused Abraham's nephew, Lot, to choose Sodom. He compared Sodom's lush vegetation to be, "like the land of Egypt," while he failed to consider the wickedness of the people (Ch. 13:10-13).

Application: – How does this apply to me?

- God's call to Abraham was a matter of sovereign election. If you ask, Why did God call Abram and his family? Then you must also ask, Why me? God chose one nation out of many to be His people. God elects whom He will for His own glory (Ephesians 1:4,11-13). Abraham is the father-figure of God's purpose of election for His entire church. As God acted righteously and mercifully when He called Abraham to separate from an idolatrous people to worship Him in truth, so He is righteous in calling individual sinners out of the world, to know and worship Him through the gospel. God's election, therefore, magnifies the mercy of God to undeserving sinners. In the New Testament, Christians are addressed as the "elect" of God (Rom. 8:33, 1Tim. 5:21, 2 Tim. 2:10, 1Peter 1:2).
- Never attempt to worship God without focusing on the merits of the Saviour's blood. Christ is our mediator to intercede for us through His own blood. Bible worshippers always appeal to the blood of Jesus Christ, in worship. This is the New Testament equivalent to Old Testament altar building.
- The believer is always responsible for his own actions. To follow the world will always lead to complex situations that will weaken and even destroy the believer's testimony, just as when Abraham went down to Egypt.

Things to do in light of this study:

Pray for faith to obey God as Abraham did, when he left all to go forth to Canaan. Step out from the realm of false worship and be a separatist in your worship and discipleship for God.

There is need for personal separation and ecclesiastical [church] separation to be free from ungodly influences.

