



# 18 | GENESIS 12

## JESUS AND FATHER ABRAHAM

*God's plan of redemption includes people from every people group and every part of the world. The confusion of this world can only be cured through salvation in Jesus.*

### Outline

1. **THE CALL TO FAITH (12:1-9)**
  - A Call to Surrender
  - A Call to be Blessed
  - A Call to Obey
  - A Call to Enjoy God's Presence
  - A Call to Worship
2. **THE TEST OF FAITH (12:10-20)**
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### Songs

*By Faith*

*Christ Our Hope in Life and Death*

*Blessed Assurance*

*Speak O Lord*

*Living Hope*

### Announcements

**WELCOME:** We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

### Introduction

We **sing the children's song, "Father Abraham"** had many sons; many sons had Father Abraham, and I am one of them, and so are you. So, let's just praise the Lord!" Such is what Paul tells us in Galatians 3

*Galatians 3:29* | If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Amen! We as Gentiles are grafted into Israel and heirs to Abraham's covenant. Though it is formalized in Genesis 17, we see the foundations of this covenant in Genesis 12 and 15.

*Key thought:* Salvation by faith alone means that you are completely accepted by God on the basis of Christ. There is no condemnation in Christ. You are fully known and fully loved if you are in Christ.

Let's consider how Abraham was called to faith, and what it means to live the life of faith. It's a call to **surrender**, a call to **blessing**, a call to **obey**, a call to **communion** and enjoy God's presence, and a call to sacrifice and **worship** and praise God. This is the life of faith.

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## 1. THE CALL TO FAITH (12:1-9)

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Here we see the patriarch is called **Abram** and later God gives him a second name, **Abraham**. In Hebrew, the name **Abram** means **exalted father** and **Abraham** means **father of a multitude**. Both names represent what God would do for Abraham because of the promised seed. Abraham would truly be a "**father of a multitude**" **through his descendent Jesus Christ**, the Savior of the world.

**Abram** is **called to leave everything for Yahweh**. He's to leave all that is related to the idol worship he is presently in: his **country, his culture, and his own dear family**. He's to follow Yahweh to a new place far away from Ur of the Chaldeans. The New Testament quotes Genesis 15:6, "**Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness**" (cf Rom 4:3).

### A CALL TO SURRENDER

*Genesis 12:1* | 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."

God's first word to **Abram is given an imperative: go!** The three things he is to leave behind are **his country, his people and culture, and his own precious family**.<sup>1</sup> He was to go be a pilgrim on this earth. It's a call to complete surrender and God-dependence.

#### FIVE SOLAS

Theologically, we call that "faith". Abraham's call reminds us of the **five solas of the reformation**.

#### *Through Scripture Alone*

Now **Abram didn't have a Bible**, so he needed the special, **direct revelation of God** in order to believe. **God must call us and open our eyes, or we would never**

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<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, "Genesis," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 19.

**believe.** Without God’s voice, he would never have come to God, since “**no one seeks after God**” (Rom 3:12). The word of God broke through into **the darkness and deadness of Abram’s soul** and God hear a new voice speak to him about a new place and a new people.<sup>2</sup>

So Abram, a descendant of Shem, **lived on in dark Ur enslaved to idols until God spoke** to him. God must speak, and say, “Let there be light.” **There is power in God’s word!** “**Faith comes by hearing**, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). This call from God was Abram’s inspired word from God. And it was inscribed for us in Scripture. We must understand that we are “**dead in trespasses and sins**” until God speaks to us and makes us alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-10). If you want to hear God speak to you today, like he spoke to Abram, read the Bible!

### *By Grace Alone*

Like the “Follow me” call of Jesus to his disciples, God’s summons to Abraham required leaving family and the service of all idols (*cf* Mk 10:28f.; Jn 12:25; 1 Thess 1:9). Terah’s household **had worshipped idols—specifically Nanna, the moon god of Ur** (Josh 24:2).<sup>3</sup> Abraham’s call to faith was an **arrangement of divine grace, not human works**. If it were not for grace, Abram and his father Terah, his wife Sarai would have continued in their idolatry. The Abrahamic covenant, as the **prototype for the new covenant that we have in Jesus**, entailed following the Lord by grace through faith. He was to follow the Lord into the land which he would show him.<sup>4</sup> It was not some nebulous call to faith, but one in which he would have to depend on a growing relationship with Yahweh, carried along by the Lord’s divine providence.

### *Through Repentant Faith Alone*

Abram’s call in Genesis 12:1 is truly a call no different than ours today. It’s a call to “**turn from idols to serve the living and true God**” (1 Thess 1:9). This was Abraham’s call to faith. You see, Abram was from Ur of the Chaldeans where there was another ziggurat similar to the tower of Babel, but the tower at Ur was topped with the temple of Nanna (the moon god), which Abram and his whole family worshipped.<sup>5</sup> Abram left all to follow the Lord by faith. So Paul explains Abraham’s faith as a prototype for new covenant faith.

*Galatians 3:6-9* | So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”<sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.<sup>8</sup> Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”<sup>9</sup> So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

No one can come to God unless they come through Christ by repentant faith (Jn 14:6).

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<sup>2</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ge 12:1–4.

<sup>3</sup> See also A.R. George, *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian Civilizations* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 114.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 123.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 181.

## *In Christ Alone*

Abram's call to faith is a call to leave everything for the Lord. He's to put his complete faith in Yahweh, who will come to earth in human flesh, born of a virgin in Bethlehem. Every knee will bow to Yahweh Paul and Isaiah say, so that is what Abram is doing. He's **turning from idols to Christ**.

**Leaving homeland** and family **in the ancient world** was a **much greater decision** in today's mobile, individualistic culture. We have phones, **FaceTime, Zoom**, not to mention airplanes, cars, etc, Abram risked everything he held most dear to obey God's call.

**Christ similarly challenges us today to leave everything** to follow him. This is why the Lord equates following him as **a call to go to your own funeral** (Mt 10:37–39; Phil 3:8).<sup>6</sup>

## *To God's Glory Alone*

Of course, all of this works **for God's glory alone since Abram** was not seeking God at all. He was dead in his sins. Abram did nothing. He was **made alive by the voice of God**. He was given the gift of repentant faith. **God therefore gets all the glory!**

### **A CALL TO BE BLESSED**

Now understand, the call to faith for Abraham and for you, is a world changing endeavor. Faith is a gift from God in order to reflect his own glory in and through us to bless the world. Look at God's promise of blessing to Abram.

**Genesis 12:2-3** | "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. <sup>3</sup> 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."

## *A Great Nation: Fertility*

**Genesis 12:2a** | And I will make of you a great nation.

God promises to make **a great nation** out of this man Abram with the barren wife. And it's not just any nation, it is the **nation of Israel**. This means God would bless Abraham with fertility in his and Sarah's old age. God would bless Abraham with a people so great that it would number the **"stars of heaven"** and be **"more than the sand"** on the seashore (Gen 15:5; cf Jer 15:8). God would make a great nation out of Abram, **giving him a large population, a large territory, and a spiritual character**—all which make a nation great (cf 12:7; 13:14–17, etc.; Deut 4:7–8).<sup>7</sup>

## *A Great Name: Fame*

**Genesis 12:2b** | And I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 70.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 275.

What this blessing is referring to is not only a great nation, but a **royal name**. God would one call a humble shepherd boy to be king, and through David God would give Israel a “great name.”

There is quite a contrast between 11:4 (“we may make a name for ourselves”) and 12:2 (“**I will make your name great**”).<sup>8</sup> One is a statement of pride and arrogance from Babylon. The other is a statement of humility in trusting and **surrendering to God**. Indeed, God exalts the humble (cf Jas 4:6, 10). **David was a man after God’s own heart** (1 Sam 13:14), and God’s name would go with him for perpetuity. He says to David, “**I will make for you a great name**.... Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam 7:9, 16). Ultimately the eternal king is not David, but David’s seed, **the Lord Jesus Christ** who has a forever throne and a forever kingdom. “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16).

### *A Great Nobility: Flourishing*

Genesis 12:3 | “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.”

**All human flourishing is now going to come through the seed of Abraham.**

All the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham, foremost because the gospel of Christ, Abraham’s descendant, is the Savior of the world. He’s the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29).

Consequently, **Abram would be the channel of blessing for the whole world**. No one would find divine blessing apart from the blessings given through Abram and his seed, because that seed in Christ.<sup>9</sup>

For Abraham, God gives him fertility, fame, and now flourishing to the entire cosmos. Here the promise of blessing not only counteracts the crisis of Sarai’s barrenness (11:30) but brings all blessings to the human race for time and for eternity.<sup>10</sup>

## **A CALL TO OBEY**

Faith is not some nebulous philosophy but radically affects the life through obedience. Abram doesn’t just experience theoretical faith; he works it out in his obedience to Yahweh. Moses here reports the first step of Abram’s obedient faith.<sup>11</sup>

Genesis 12:4-6 | 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. <sup>5</sup> **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. When they came to the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place

<sup>8</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “Genesis,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 264.

<sup>10</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 263.

<sup>11</sup> K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 118.

at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. **At that time the Canaanites were in the land.**

Here we see the parameters of Abram's faith. He's powerless. He's weak. But that's the beautiful backdrop of obedience.

### *The Walk of Obedience*

Genesis 12:4a | So **Abram went**, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him.

Abram **trusts God to give him a new home**. He's called to leave Ur. Now he's in Haran, and he's called to leave Haran. **He leaves everything familiar to him**. He obeys God even though he cannot see what's in front of him. **He completely trusts God, even when life doesn't make sense.**

He leaves his people, his country, and his own family ties to make the **800-mile trek** to a hostile territory. He's **powerless and by obeying God, he makes himself even more powerless**. Even as he travels the 800-mile route he comes near some of the great urban centers of the day. **He could have easily found comfort in any of these cities**, but he presses on and obeys God and **pushes on into the promised land**.<sup>12</sup> He obeys God and **uproots his family** and his people and with Lot treks toward the land of Canaan.

### *The Wait of Obedience*

Genesis 12:4-5a | **Abram was seventy-five years old** when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup> **And Abram took Sarai his wife...**

He trusts God to give him children. He's **powerless to have children**. He's **75 years old with a barren wife**, yet he's told he's going to be a great nation. So faith is glorious in the atmosphere of powerlessness. Paul tells us this is why God chooses the weak and foolish, so that the wise and powerful may be confounded. In his powerlessness for fertility, he trusts God.

### *The Winning of Obedience*

Genesis 12:5 | **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.

**The word "acquired" has the idea of "won"** as in he won them to the faith of Yahweh. Abraham gathers his family and his **new spiritual family**. The wording here point to the fact that Abraham is something of an **evangelist**. Abram's obedience not only entailed his getting out of Haran but speaks of "the **people they acquired**," or better translated, "**won**" in Haran. This seems to refer to Abram's evangelistic practices, telling others of Yahweh. Some scholars would translate this as "**the souls that they had won in Haran**." This translation is better exegetically and in line with rabbinic

<sup>12</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 185.

interpretation. Therefore, **the text likely refers to making proselytes**. Abram had been actively sharing his story and faith in the Lord.<sup>13</sup>

Wherever the Christian is, he should be not just a disciple of Christ, but he should be winning people to Christ, making disciples of all nations. This is maturity. We are **not just to be disciples, but to make disciples** (Mt 28:18-20).

### *The Warfare of Obedience*

Genesis 12:5b-6 | When they came to the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. **At that time the Canaanites were in the land.**

Abram trusts God for a new land and location, but he's called to go to **hostile territory**. Moses mentions that the land was still occupied by the infamous Canaanites. These are the people groups that eventually become hostile to Abraham's descendants. He's **powerless to conquer the Canaanites**, but he **believes and trusts God**.

Many a young believer is **surprised at the spiritual warfare** in the Christian life. The Canaanites live in the land. The believer should expect satanic attack. Our eyes cannot be on others around us, but firmly fixed on Jesus. Persecution will arise. You'll even discover the old nature, though defeated, is very much able to harass and discourage you if you give into it. You'll also find that all Christians have faults and weaknesses. Abram trusted God and fixed his eyes on him, the author and finisher of our faith. What a great joy that we can do the same!

## **A CALL TO ENJOY GOD'S PRESENCE**

**The Canaanites were in the land, but do you know who else was in the land? The Lord!** Our God is omnipresent. **Yahweh appears to Abraham in a theophany** and speaks directly to Abram. He's told by God that he's not going to get to see the glorious conquest of Canaan, but his future ancestors would.

Genesis 12:7a | Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

Abram arrived in the land in the city of Shechem and **God himself, appearing to Abram in a theophany**, showed the promised land to him. This **theophany reassured Abram of the Lord's presence**, and makes him the heir of the promised land, giving it to his descendants.<sup>14</sup> God ruled Canaan, and he was promising Abram **that his descendants should possess it, not by Abram's strength or manipulation, but by divine power**.<sup>15</sup>

This great land would be given to his offspring, not to Abram. Indeed, when Abram died his only real estate was **a cave south of Jerusalem near Hebron** which he had bought for his family's burials (23:17-20).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah* (Israel: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1961), 320-21.

<sup>14</sup> K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, vol. 1B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 119.

<sup>15</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 468.

<sup>16</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 47.

## SCRIPTURE ALONE

**Abram received direct revelation**, an appearance of the Lord who spoke to him, in the confirmation of the promised land.

What may the modern believer expect as a confirmation of the promises of God?<sup>17</sup> The believer must **not look for appearances of God** in a theophany like Abraham experienced. The New Testament believer has the sure and sufficient **word of God “is breathed out by God and profitable”** to meet the believer’s every spiritual need (2 Tim 3:16).

## LAND PROMISES FOR THE BELIEVER?

What land is the believer to inhabit? Of course, the meek shall inherit the earth. We are heirs of God and join-heirs with Christ. Our land promise is infinitely more than Palestine, though we will certainly inhabit that. Upon Jesus’ return, he will enter the eastern gate of Jerusalem. We will have all the land promises fulfilled and more than fulfilled. We are **heirs to the cosmos** (Rom 4:13)!

*Galatians 3:29* | If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

What promise? The promise of Genesis 12:1-7. There is another country and another family that we ought to live for. The believer’s ultimate inheritance is not mere land. Yes, we are heirs of the world, but the great promise to the believer is **the presence of God**.

Let me remind you that the land is secondary. It’s a gift from God. But the true gift is God’s presence. God reminds us in Genesis and Revelation, **“I will be your God and you will be my people”** (Exo 6:7; cf Rev 21:7). He tells Abraham, **“I am your exceeding great reward”** (15:1).

## A CALL TO WORSHIP

God’s gracious promise prompted Abram to glorious worship, so he built an altar to Yahweh and sacrificed to him.<sup>18</sup>

*Genesis 12:7b-9* | So he **built there an altar to the LORD**, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and **called upon the name of the LORD**. <sup>9</sup>And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Abraham is now in the promised land. **He builds two altars, one in Shechem and one in Bethel**. Abraham is **already beginning to conquer the promised land, not by might, nor by power, but by God’s Spirit** (cf Zech 4:6).

## CONQUER BY WORSHIP

Remember when Joshua later conquers that **first Canaanite city of Jericho**, they do not need swords and chariots. They walked around the walls with trumpets and

<sup>17</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 266.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 70.



worshipped the Lord. As they all shouted to God in worship together, the walls fell down (Josh 6:8-27).

We are not to think that our possession of this world for Christ's sake is to be with "swords loud clashing or roll of stirring drums," as the hymn states.<sup>19</sup> Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight**" (Jn 18:36).

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## 2. THE TEST OF FAITH (12:10-20)

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Two millennia before Christ, as Abram dwelt in the moon-worshipping context of the storied city of Ur, he heard the voice of Yahweh call him to an unspecified land where he would bless him, and through him bless the whole world. And Abram believed God, ultimately leaving Ur and Haran "not knowing where he was going" (Heb 11:8).<sup>20</sup> And yet when he gets there, he is faced with a deep disappointment. There is a famine in the land.

### THE DISAPPOINTMENT

Abraham sets out in **wonderful, abounding, abiding faith in Yahweh**. But his faith was about to be tested. He gets to the promised land, and it is **not a land flowing with milk and honey, but of drought and dryness**.

Genesis 12:10 | Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

**"There was a famine in the land"** (12:10). There was a famine. The clouds vanished. The rain stopped. The grass shriveled. The crops failed. Abraham's flocks likely grew sick with no pasture and no water. It says in verse 11 that the famine was **so "severe in the land"** that Abraham was forced to journey to Egypt. **Egypt at this time was well watered**, and even compared **Eden** (cf 13:10).<sup>21</sup>

Remember God didn't just say "I'll give you a successful life. I'll bless your crops. I'll give you a child." God's promise was super abundant beyond anyone's wildest possible imagination. **He didn't say to Abram, "I'll give you a child."** He said, **"I'll make you a great nation" and through you "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** So you can imagine the expectation of surrender and faith. He likely expected an immediate fulfillment to the promise. Abram was promised a bountiful land and a great nation. **What he got was a severe famine**. That was part of God's plan. Not long after his arrival in Canaan, Abraham found himself in a foreign land that could produce no food.

As to whether Abram was surprised at this, we cannot know. **Famine is always a possibility** for those who live close to the earth. But certainly, this is not what we would expect after such a protracted and stellar display of faith. **We would expect some tangible rewards**, or at least a pleasant respite. In Genesis 12, we learn that **faith is regularly followed by famine**, even severe trial. That is God's way.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 468–469.

<sup>20</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 189.

<sup>21</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*, ed. Jonathan G. Kline (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 57.

<sup>22</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*, 190.

Abraham's faith is tested during a famine in Canaan, and he is forced to go to Egypt, where he is consumed with fear for Pharaoh instead of God.

Have you ever been really afraid of life's circumstances? What should you do when you're afraid? I know what I'm prone to do. How we need to pray for each other. We have two choices when life squeezes us. **Fear or faith!** I'm glad we have Abraham, who was at times frail in his faith, and yet he was a friend of God.

## THE DECEPTION

**Instead of trusting God, Abraham feared man.** He was afraid he would be killed, and Sarai would become a permanent part of the Pharaoh's harem. Was it possible in God's plan for Abraham to die? There was truly no danger for Abraham since God does not break his promises. God cannot do that. Abraham was in no danger. Yet **he acted in fear instead of faith.**

**Genesis 12:11-16** | When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance,<sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.<sup>13</sup> Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."<sup>14</sup> When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.<sup>15</sup> And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.<sup>16</sup> And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

Because of massive temptation with fear, Abram was willing to manipulate and lie in order to protect himself. Abram turned to an ungodly practice. Was Sarai Abram's sister? Yes. She was his half-sister. But not telling the whole truth is a complete lie. But why did Abram lie? He submitted **to the old taskmaster of fear.** We must not have any Lord but Jesus Christ. The believer cannot serve two masters.

We are not different than Abram. Fear can motivate you to break your fellowship with God. If you give in to the taskmaster of fear, you can be enslaved to a lot of behaviors that are detrimental to your Christian growth and happiness.

Notice **Abram was blessed by Pharaoh, and by God, even though he's sinning against God** and against **Sarai**. God is not merely working on behalf of his servant Abram (and all his people), but **God is working in covenant with his Son and the Spirit**. Abraham's story is essentially about the threat to the Sarai who would bear the promised son Isaac. This is an attack on God's promise in Genesis 3. There's a Messiah coming into the world who will crush the serpent's head. This is really a threat to the fulfillment of God's promises to Abram and to the world in 12:1-3. It simply traces how God keeps his promises despite our weaknesses and sins.<sup>23</sup> If salvation and sanctification were up to us, not one promise could be kept. But **God intervenes and is true to everything he promises.**

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<sup>23</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 270.

## THE DIVINE INTERVENTION

If it were up to Abram, even his best efforts to save his wife would get him killed. But God intervenes.

Genesis 12:17 | But **the LORD afflicted Pharaoh** and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Literally, Yahweh inflicted great plagues on Pharaoh and his household. The **Hebrew construction stresses the severity** of the plagues; so we understand that Pharaoh's household was overwhelmed by them. But **Sarai was untouched**. The word translated "**plagues**" **often refers to skin diseases**. So possibly the Egyptian court suffered from something akin to a plague of boils as in the **later plagues of Egypt under Moses** (Exo 9:9).<sup>24</sup> God takes care of his own, not because we are more righteous, but because like little children, though we have sinned, **we find our trust in him**.

**If God had not intervened, we'd still be dead in sins**. And if God does not bring us to sanctification by his Spirit, we would quickly fall away. **Praise God that we are in his grip and under his guidance**.

## THE DISMAY OF PHARAOH

Genesis 12:18-19a | So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, **here is your wife**; take her, and go."

### SARAI UNHARMED

Did Pharaoh take Sarai as a wife? The statement "**Here is your wife**" **strongly suggests that she was returned unharmed**, as his wife.<sup>25</sup> In other words, "I haven't touched her. I haven't violated her."

Abram failed to tell Pharaoh about Yahweh, so apparently **Yahweh spoke to Pharaoh** and told him that Sarai did not belong to Pharaoh but Abram.

**God is sovereign even in our failure**—especially in our failure. Your position in God's family is not based on your performance, but on the free grace and mercy given to you in Christ Jesus.

## THE DELIVERANCE

Genesis 12:20 | And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

Divine intervention brought escape from the predicament (*cf* Psa 105:14, 15).

### POINTING TO THE EXODUS OF MOSES

<sup>24</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 193.

<sup>25</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 194.

This deliverance of Abraham, spoiling the riches of Pharaoh is the **pointing forward to the exodus of God's people from Egypt under Moses.**<sup>26</sup>

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### 3. THE RETURN TO FAITH (13:1-4)

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We read that the one who **“began a good work in you will complete it** at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). We may fail as believers, but we will never fall away. Abraham's secret was not some righteousness by the law, but **the righteousness that comes by trusting in God by faith.**

*Romans 4:13* | For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

Abraham's faith was not perfect, but it was being perfected. Where Abraham failed, God did not. **Abraham's standing with God did not come from the righteousness of the law**, for he clearly **failed** there. He **pimped out his wife Sarai**. He failed. No it was the righteousness that he had that was a gift from God.

Whether Old or New Testament, God promises to sanctify his own people.

*1 Thessalonians 5:23-24* | Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

#### A RETURN TO GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

Certain Old Testament people were characterized by special designations. Moses was consistently called “the man of God.” David was called, “a man after God's own heart”. Abraham, the second most important character the entire Old Testament, is called **“the friend of God.”**

*Isaiah 41:8* | God refers to Abraham as: **“Abraham, my friend.”**

*James 2:23* | The Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and **he was called a friend of God.**

Abraham may have failed, but God pursued him. That's the way God's *hesed* is. God's love is unrelenting. Abraham was failing regularly, but God was right there growing and testing Abraham's faith, **growing his relationship deeper** and deeper.

#### A RETURN TO SEPARATION

Despite the fact that he had descended to such self-serving deception, **Abram was yet a man of faith.** Abram's faith was not window dressing or a rabbit's foot or fire insurance. It was the real thing, but in temporary retreat.<sup>27</sup> He now returns a Spirit-directed man to the land of Canaan, which is future Israel.

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<sup>26</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*, ed. Jonathan G. Kline (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 57.

<sup>27</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 197.

**Genesis 13:1** | So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.

Chastened by his experiences in Egypt, **Abram returned to Bethel, where he had met God before**. He couldn't get back to the promised land fast enough.<sup>28</sup> A true follower of the Lord can never be comfortable in the world and in sin. **Everything God does is to bring us closer in relationship to him.**

#### APOSTLE PETER: GOD ALWAYS BRINGS US BACK

You see it with the apostle Peter. He gave up after his sin. He went back to fishing. He had the spiritual wind knocked out of him by his own denial of Christ—three times, before a little girl! But the Lord always restores his own. He will complete what he begins. He will bring it to pass.

### A RETURN TO SANCTIFICATION

This chapter begins with a return to the land and a return to worship. The experience in Egypt was now behind the patriarch. God was **making a new beginning for Abram**.<sup>29</sup> Wherever there is failure, God “has **made all things beautiful in his time**” (Ecc 3:11). He will make use of your worst days and your worst sins to keep you in the future from sinning.

**Genesis 13:2-4** | Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.<sup>3</sup> And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,<sup>4</sup> to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD.

In Abraham's return to Canaan, Israel's future acquisition of the promised land was foreshadowed. Though his entry was not by conquest, at the Bethel altar Abraham reasserted the Lord's claim on the land. He worships the Lord and calls on him in prayer! He demonstrates the evidence that he has received the gift of faith and repentance. He would never have come back in his own power. It is a gift of covenant promise.<sup>30</sup>

#### Conclusion

Aren't you glad that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? And it's to the glory of God alone! It's a free gift. We cannot earn it. It's not by performance as we can see by the failure of Abraham. He doesn't deserve salvation. It's a free gift for him, and it's a free gift for you!

**Have any of you ever seen the Sears (or Willis) Tower?** Many people have only seen it from a distance. It's a whole lot different when you get inside it. I can remember going up to the sky deck where people looked like ants on the sidewalk below. There's a big difference between seeing the Sears Tower up close and just seeing it from a distance. Most of us have seen God's love for us from a distance. We know it's there; we understand

<sup>28</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 70.

<sup>29</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 284.

<sup>30</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*, ed. Jonathan G. Kline (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 57–58.

that God is love—that he loves sinners, but in Genesis 12 we have seen it up close and we’ve been awed by it. No condemnation. A promise to never leave or forsake you. You have no earthly friends like this. But you like Abraham, can be called “a friend of God” because of Jesus Christ. In order to see the brightness of God’s love, we have needed to see the darkness and brokenness of the human condition. But there is no brokenness from where God will not redeem us. God promised Abraham, and he promises us. **He’ll never let you go!**

## Benediction

*Numbers 6:24-26 - The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*