

Genesis 12

Study #12ID1338

Alright, let's open our Bibles tonight, Genesis 12, as we continue through our journey through this book of Beginnings and we arrive at Chapter 12, which is really the dividing line of the book. If you ever want to outline Genesis just say one through eleven, twelve through fifty. You're pretty well there.

Chapters 1 through 11 covers two thousand years of history. We've done that pretty well pretty quickly haven't we? But God writes, and I've told you before, and I'll tell you a lot before we're done, that God writes with prejudice. He writes with purpose. He writes with a focus on really two great events, the first coming of His Son to die for the sins of man, and the second coming of His Son to rule and reign forever more. Those are really the two events. And everything in the Bible, if it isn't heading in that direction, you won't get much information. The Lord will fill in the background a bit, but then push you in that direction.

So in the first eleven chapters we have dealt primarily with major events. The formation of man and the universe, the fall of man and his expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the flood that covered the entire earth and lasted for three hundred and seventy one days, and then the fallout of man's rebellion at Babel where God confused the languages and scattered the people. So, formation, fall, flood, fallout.

From Chapter 12 through the end of this book, through Chapter 50, we will turn from major events to people. And God will focus us in the next thirty-nine chapters specifically on four individuals and their families. And rather than two thousand years, we will cover a little less than four hundred years of human history. From Abraham through three generations. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then Joseph. And those four families will dominate the landscape of the rest of this book as God places such importance upon these descendants of Shem.

God says very little by comparison of the nineteen generations that ran from Adam to Abram. Little about the cosmology of creation, although we'd like to know so much more, but He has a lot to say about the genealogies and the descendancy that will bring us ultimately, like I said, to His Son because that's what He's interested in, first and second coming.

Tonight we're going to start the story of Abram. He'll be called Abraham later on. We'll get to that when we get to it. He is referred to in the Scriptures as the father of those who believe, the father of the faithful, the father of the Jews, the father of many nations. And tonight in Chapter 12 we're going to look at two things. We're going to look at his testimony and we're going to look at his testing. So testimony and testing in Chapter 12. No doubt you're aware of the fact that the three major world religions all trace their spiritual heritage back to Abraham. The Jews do. The Christians do. And the Muslims do as well, although if you have read the Quran you know that when it comes to Abraham's children, they take Isaac out of the story entirely, and they replace him with Ishmael as the promised son, and they will actually put Ishmael's name there in Genesis 22 as the son that was almost sacrificed by Abraham.

Abraham's influence for us as Christians continues through the Old Testament and runs us smack dab into the New Testament where in one chapter in Romans and many other places as well God uses Abraham as the prime example of the kind of relationship that we can have with God by faith. That he becomes the linchpin, the living example, the first really primary example that we are given in the

Scriptures of living by faith, being justified by faith, believing God and then God counts it to your account for righteousness. And you'll have two chapters in Galatians that make that same point as well. But he's the example throughout the Bible of trusting God rather than your own works of being justified by faith. In fact, Paul will use Abraham and say, "You know, Abraham was justified with God before the Law ever came," that faith is predominant over the Law. And in Hebrews Chapter 11 Paul will hold Abraham up as that example of faith that pleases God. So Abraham's an important guy. We need to know him because he doesn't go away. Some of these other names come and go, but he doesn't, he stays with us right on through to the New Testament.

Three times in the Bible Abraham is called a friend of God. In 2 Chronicles Chapter 20, in Isaiah 41, James Chapter 2, verse 23. The Arabs call Abraham El-Al Khalil, "The friend of God." For now, he is known to us as Abram, "Exalted father," which is an interesting name for a guy who has no kids. "Exalted father." Now I'm sure it rubbed him the wrong way for a long time. But one day God will change his name to Abraham, "father of many nations." He still won't have any kids, but he'll get a name change.

Verse 1 says this, "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family, from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.'" The context of this verse, we have to go back I think maybe to verse 27, if you will, of the last chapter and kind of read forward. But you remember that Terah (tair'-uh) begot. Terah was Abram's father. He had three sons that we are told of, Abram, Nahor (nay'-hor), and Haran (hair'-uhn). Haran then, one of the boys, had Lot as a son. And you read there in verse 28 that "Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur." And then "Abram and Nahor took wives. Abram's wife was named Sarai. The name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no children, and could bear no child. And Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldees (kal'-deez) to go to the land of Canaan, but they came to Haran and they dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years and Terah died. Now the LORD had said to Abram."

There's a couple of things that we, I think, we need to know about Abram's background that are important. First of all, Terah and his sons, they lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (kal-dee'-uhns) that at least historically places their homeland in the southern ancient Mesopotamian Valley that today would be southern Iraq. So that's where Abram grew up. And it was according to history and a lot of archaeological findings that this place, Ur of the Chaldees, was found to be a tremendous commercial center. It was the capital of the province of Sumer. Sumerians you might have heard the name. But Sumer, it was a highly advanced civilization. It had a university. They uncovered a huge library there that specialized in mathematics and astronomy. But they were most known for their ziggurats, these seventy-foot towers that were built into the heavens that were really there for idol worship. And it was that which certainly they tried to build in Babel. There are some remarkable preserved, well-preserved ziggurats there in Iraq still today. And they found the royal cemetery, I believe, in one of their digs as well. But because they are animists, these folks who lived in this area, they worshiped nature and they ascribed deity to much of the world around them. So our father of the faithful, Abraham, grew up in a country and in a city and amongst a people that worshiped just about everything that moved. Their chief god was the moon god known as Nanna to the Sumerians, Nanna. The Babylonian called the moon god Sin, interesting. And so our founding father Abraham early on was a moonie apparently, or at least his family was. (laughter) That was funnier than that I think....(laughter)

We are told in Joshua Chapter 24 that as Joshua gathered the tribes of Israel together to Shechem (shee'-kem) and he called the elders of Israel together he began to speak to them, "He said 'Your fathers including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the river in old times, and they served other gods.'" So Abram came from a very idolatrous family. There is no indication in the Bible that his dad ever repented of that, or turned away from the gods that he served, but he was raised in a town, Abram, of maybe three hundred thousand people, that it was a leading civilization at the time, advanced in so many things, but they served lots of gods, and his family was involved in that in a big way.

Additionally, according to Chapter 11, verse 28 when Abram was fairly a young man he lost his brother. It was a tragedy in the family like you can only imagine. It would be if you haven't suffered that kind of tragedy. He lost a brother, it was a life-changing event. I'm sure it left a lasting impact. I'm sure he could have told you where he was the day that his brother Haran died and what he died from and how long he had been sick. And for a young guy to be going through that and you live in this place, it shaped his early life and Abram was moved enough to be the one to say, "I'll take Lot in and I'll take care of my brother's child." And he'll become a part of our story. In fact, the Lord will use him in many ways in the weeks to come.

Additionally, verse 30 tells us that Abram had a wife, Sarai, who was barren, unable to have children. So you have a young man in an idolatrous town, amongst a very close-knit family, one of which has been lost fairly young in life, who is married to a wife who is infertile, and he has been named "exalted father." Sarai's bareness will set up much of what we come to in the next several weeks when God miraculously intervenes and gives her a son named "laughter" because everyone seemed to laugh when they heard about it, Isaac. But ancient cultures believed almost unequivocally that women unable to bear children were cursed by the gods. Now God, indeed, from time to time withheld the blessings of having children from His people to minister them. But it isn't the general rule. You can't certainly make a statement that, "Hey, everyone that can't have kids, God must've cursed." But that's unfortunately what religion does. It runs with things and begins to change them. And that you find early on in the writings already amongst religious folks, that that's pretty much, if you were blessed by the gods you could have children. And that superstition finds its way into Judaism very early. Jacob had two wives and Leah and Rachel when Leah found out she was pregnant and we'll read about it here in not too long, she will exclaim, "The LORD has looked upon my affliction." She saw her inability to have children as an affliction. When Rachel, the other wife, was not so fortunate and she prayed, she finally said to the LORD, "You give me children, or I die," because she didn't want to be under the divine curse. Now God never said that that was the reason for her suffering. God has timing and He knows what He's up to, but it stuck in the traditions with the nations, and even in the Jewish faith rabbis would teach that there were seven types of people that were ex-communicated from God. One was a Jew without a wife, and the second was a wife without children. So that kind of perception was something that Abram would have had to live with even as he began to grow and God began to speak to his heart.

The Center for Disease Control as of last year tells us that for women from fifteen to forty-four impaired fecundity, or the ability to have children, is almost twelve percent of the population and that women who are declared infertile are another seven and a half percent. So there's roughly eleven million women of childbearing age in our culture today that are facing the inability to have children. Now there's lots of other ways to have children. You can adopt kids. Man, we need a generation of kids raised in the Lord, don't we? But that's a distraction to those who believe that somehow they want to have their own kids, and that means something more than what God might want for you. So you can put yourself in his shoes, that's Abram as we get to Chapter 12.

Now I want you to notice in verse 1 the words, "God **had** said to Abram," because God had spoken to him much earlier than Chapter 12. When? We don't know, but we know He didn't speak to him in Haran. Remember, they lived in Ur. When Haran, his brother, died they moved to a city called Haran. Now it could be that it was named after his brother. That's the way most cities were developed, but whether it was or whether it wasn't, dad moved there, but notice as we read a little earlier, they were headed for, verse 31 of the last chapter, to the land of Canaan, but they stopped before they hit the desert. They stopped before they hit no man's land. They stopped still in Ur of the Chaldees' general province. They lived on the border. And they lived there for years it would appear until Abram's father died.

Now from Ur if you go on a map directly to Canaan where God had desired to lead Abram, it's about six hundred miles. If you look at a map to see where Haran is, Abram would've gone northwest to Haran some six hundred and ten miles away, but it still left him four hundred miles away from the land of promise. And verse 32 of the last chapter said that Abram stayed with his dad until he died. We get some additional bits of information, and again the Bible is the best teacher for the Bible. But when the Holy Spirit falls upon Stephen there in Acts Chapter 7, he's giving that sermon before the Sanhedrin (san-hee'-druhn), Stephen, the deacon who had been raised up to be a preacher who now stands before the Jewish Sanhedrin, to give his message, and they will stone him for what he says, and kill him. But here's what Stephen says early on in verse 2 of Chapter 7 of Acts, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country, away from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' And 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."

So Stephen gives us further information about Abram's kind of journey of faith, if you will, and he speaks in front of the Jewish Sanhedrin, a group you don't want to mistake history with. These are guys you want to be very exacting as you speak to them. So here's the conclusion, Abram when he was called by the LORD before he moved with his father to the border town, didn't immediately respond to the LORD's calling. The LORD was very specific. Leave the land. Leave your family. Come to the land that I will show you. Those were pretty much the three callings of the LORD. We're not told anywhere else how he heard from the LORD, how God spoke to him, when He did, except we know that He spoke to him before he made this move with his father and family to the border.

So Abraham was the father of the faithful, but he's still learning to walk by faith, and I think that gives me some hope. I am glad that God uses imperfect people. There is, by the way, no place in the New Testament where Abraham's weak faith is mentioned other than in the sermon of Stephen. If you go to Hebrews 11, God just talks about the good stuff, stuff he did by faith. The other stuff, that fleshed out, just buried, under the blood. So that's good to know.

But we often, I think, try to excuse ourselves from the callings of God by claiming our inability, we can't, I don't know how to speak, I don't know how to write, I certainly don't know how to go. And Abram was also, it seems to me, far from capable though by the time we get to Chapter 12 he's going to be on the move again as a yielded vessel.

A couple other things you might want to know. Haran means "dry" or "parched." And Terah, the name of Abram's father, means "to delay." So interestingly enough Abraham's dad kind of delayed him on the border from all that God wanted to do. God had spoken. God had called. God had invited, come on

with me, Abram. Abram had been convinced it was a God beyond these gods of the animists. And he heard His voice, but he didn't quite move yet, not from his father, not from his family. In fact, he'll drag Lot along, and you might say from a social standpoint, from a familial standpoint there's a responsibility there, but maybe not. How old was Lot? Could he have been on his own? God said get away. Lot won't be much of a blessing to Abram, certainly. And God's greatest blessing will come when Lot takes a hike. So remember what God said to Abram here at the beginning in his calling, but also the background because it has been a dry, delayed bunch of years for what now turns out in Chapter 12, verse 1 to be a seventy-five-year-old man. Now he'll live another century, about another hundred years, but he would restart his walk by faith away from his land, his father had died, away from the idolatry, and having suffered the loss of his brother and having to deal with the infertility of his wife, and having a nephew under his arm that he may have to take care of, he now is determined to begin again to walk with God. So these words in verse 1, "The LORD **had** said to Abram," really are important to us because it tells us in all that we read, there was some delay there.

Well, here's the application for you and me. I know we're still in verse 1, but we'll be alright. (laughter) It really doesn't matter what your past or your past circumstances are. No matter what defines you, whether it's your heritage, or your ethnicity, or your past experience, or your family or lack thereof, whether you had a good home or not such a good home, whether you suffered much or you suffered little. Whatever has shaped you, those things can either become a hitching post in your life that delays your life from going forward, or they can be a signpost to guide you back to the Lord. You can look at all that's going on, cause he had a lot of stuff going on, he could have just said, "I quit. Now my dad dies, first my brother, now my dad, now I gotta take care of Lot and boy he eats so much. Sarai, she's not having a kid, we've tried, I don't know what's going on with her. It can't be me. It's gotta be her. I don't know what's going on." He moves forward. "Get out of your country, from your family, from your father's house to the land," verse 1, "that I will show you."

And here's what the LORD continues to say, "And I will make you a great nation; I will bless you. I will make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed." Don't you love when God starts to talk with terms, when He starts saying "I will." I like when God says, "I will." Not "I might" or "I'm thinking about it," or "I'm mulling it over." "I will." So often as a pastor, and you hear it from pastors a lot, some pastors are convinced that their job is to tell people what they're supposed to do for the Lord. I'm absolutely against it. I was taught early by Pastor Chuck sitting at ministry school, and ministry school Costa Mesa when I went lasted five days. It was a five-day school. I graduated. There you go, a whole week. (laughter) I stuck with it to the very end. But one of the things that Chuck used to say to us was, "Look, your job is not to tell people what they need to do for the Lord. Your job is to teach them who God is and what He's done for them. Everything else will be easy. If people love the Lord, you won't have to beat 'em into signing up to serve. They'll just show up to serve. If you need to be financed and there's needs to be met, God'll move on hearts. You don't need to ask because people just need to love Jesus. We love Him because He first loved us. You just teach 'em about the He first loved us." And to me that is so cool because Abram, he's got a lot of stuff going on in his life and he hasn't really moved, and I don't know how long he sat, some commentators believe he sat twenty five years on the border. Don't know if that's true. Don't really know how you can biblically prove it to be honest with you. But he was there for awhile. And to have the LORD come to him after all of that time of delay and speak to him and just say, "Look, here's the promise." He told him once, He'll tell him again. God's real good at just waiting. And then He wants to tell him what He's going to do for him. I remember that speech years ago that Kennedy made, that famous line, "Ask not what your country can

do for you." It doesn't work in the church. "Ask not what the church can do for you." No, no, no. You just ask the Lord. You just love Him.

I love that the LORD comes up and says, "Hi Abraham. I understand you're a pagan idolater and you've had plenty of family tragedy, and your wife can't conceive. I will, I will, I will, I will, I will." Right? All of that stuff, "I will. I will." I love it. What you cannot do, I will do. And look at the promises, "I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you." That's almost a humorous thing to say to a seventy-five-year-old guy with a sixty-five-year-old wife who's infertile. Isn't it? And by the way I'll just let you in on what her name is. Sarai means "argumentative." (laughter) "Contentious." Probably "diabolical," although I couldn't find that word anywhere in the.....

"I will bless you and make a great nation." And it happened, didn't it? Isaac came and then Jacob and the patriarchs and four hundred years of growing in Egypt and then God brought them into Canaan. And then there was the judges and then the monarchs, and Saul, and David, and Solomon, and two thousand years after Jesus died and rose the nation survives without a homeland, and today there are almost six million Jews living in Israel, nearly fifty percent of the world's population of Jews. God has made them a great nation. Israel's yearly budget last year? Seventy billion dollars. They're ranked twenty-fourth in the world in the economy. They're a leader in high-tech development. They're fourth in the world in citrus exports. They are third in the world in exporting flowers. They are in the top six nations of the world in longevity of life expectancy. Great nation. Who did that? God did that, with a seventy-five-year-old guy who's not coming quickly, he's just, "Well, I'm coming, I'm going. Dad! Here we go!" Then they got to the border, "Here we stay." "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great." Isn't that wonderful?

Well, thirteen million Jews in the world, ten million of them live in either Israel or in the United States. Thirteen million out of a seven billion population is fractional. Yet thirteen million Jews, seven billion people upon the planet. When we go to Israel and we take groups, and I hope that you'll be able to make our next trip, and I say to Daniel our tour guide, he's been with us for twenty years, I'll say, "Hey Daniel. What's that word in Hebrew?" And he goes, "You don't want to learn Hebrew." I'll say, "Why not?" He goes, "Well, there's only like thirteen million that speak it. Learn something else. Learn Spanish. Learn German. A lot of folks speak that." So seven billion, thirteen million people, but twenty-five percent of all the Nobel Peace prizes ever given out have been given to Jews. It's interesting, right? "And I will give you a name that is great." Their contributions to technology to the court system to national defense, even ours, is immeasurable.

"I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing," and the end of verse 3, "in you all of the nations of the earth will be blessed." Look, without the Jews we don't have a Bible, we don't have the Ten Commandments, we don't have a Savior, we don't have a Messiah. Paul spends an inordinate amount of time in Romans Chapter 9 saying to the Roman Christians, "Look, the greatest blessings you've gotten God has brought, have come to you through that nation of Israel that He has chosen. There wouldn't be any Christianity without the Jews." So ultimately obviously the promise here is that all nations and families of the earth can find in Christ Jesus eternal life. Their sins forgiven. He is of the Seed of Abraham, Jesus our Lord. "You shall be a blessing. In you the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

Verse 3, "I will bless those who bless you." I'm always amused by the, we get a lot of mail here, from organizations that are raising money to help Israel, and it always says, "Israel needs your support." And they'll argue that by saying, "You know they're surrounded by enemies bent on their destruction. They

are opposed by a group that has inordinate influence in the U.N., friends like Russia and China and Iran." But what this verse says to me is, Israel doesn't need our help, we need theirs. Isn't that what it says? "I will bless those who bless you." They don't need our help. We need theirs. And every nation in history, go back and look it up on your own, that has sought to curse the descendants of Abram, have found themselves facing the curse of God. Whether it is Spain at the time of the Great Inquisitions, whether it was the Romans, whether it was the Greeks. And one part of the reason I believe that God has blessed our country over the years is that we have, for many years, had staunch support for the nation. That's what God promised to Abram.

"So Abram," verse 4, "departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him." There's the problem. "And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all of their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran," that's the problem too, "and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. And they came to the land of Canaan." Abram, who had the word of God and the calling of God for years, now steps out in faith, right? Hebrews Chapter 11, verse 8 says, "By faith Abram obeyed when he was called to go to a place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went, not knowing where he went. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise, waiting for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

So this was a big deal. He left with his family and everyone in tow, servants, livestock, four hundred and ten miles across a wilderness. "Where are you going?" "I don't know." "Where are all these people going?" "They don't know either. They're with me. We don't know where we're going." I wonder how many in this large family of servants and all would've thought that this was a sound move. Abram was a prosperous guy in Ur apparently. He would send three hundred and eighteen people of his own house after Lot to fight a bunch of kings. But he now is willing to act upon the word of God. And notice verse 1, God had said, waited a long time, but at some point, dad dead, now he makes the decision, "We're going to go for it." And God calls it faith. He uses it as the example. He will, as well, when he believes God about the promise of his child to come, even at an old age, but Hebrews records this is an act of faith that God is pleased with.

A good question that you might ask yourself in light of watching Abram balking for such a long time, and then moving forward is, "What do **you** do with the promises of God?" Abram had them here, verse 1, 2, and 3. Those are pretty good promises, right? Amazing stuff. What did he do? For a lot of years he put 'em in his pocket and sat down on them. He didn't move. Maybe he was afraid. I don't know. Whatever the reason, he didn't move. What do you do with the promises of God? Do you just read them? Do you underline them in your Bible? Do you take a step beyond that? Do you memorize them? Or are you willing to take them and live by them, allow them to guide your steps and form your hopes and drive your ambition? In other words, is your head filled with God's promises, or is your life governed by God's promises?

I heard a story years ago of a fella who had been travelling the U.S. for quite some time at a time when there were no bridges yet, and he came to the frozen Mississippi River and he was unsure of how thick the ice was, so he crawled out on all fours trying to spread the weight. It's not really a brilliant move, actually a good way to die, but this was his idea of, "I'll just kind of test it and spread out the weight as best as I can." And as he was out in the middle of the river trying to move a little bit at a time this local guy with a horse and buggy came riding by, just flew by him, he knew exactly how thick it was, never did stop, just "whoosh." And you look at this guy on all fours and go, "That guy's kinda foolish-looking now."

And so he stood up and walked across. We had this old hymn in the church, "Standing on the Promises of God." I don't remember if you ever remember singing that song. But it's not "creeping" on the promises of God. And it isn't "sitting" on the promises, or sitting on the promises, sometimes, that's not even promises, you're just in the building, (singing) "Sitting on the promises," that's maybe all you got.

But look, Abram went from creeping to walking by faith. He moved out. And you have to ask yourself, if you want to please the Lord with faith, "What am I doing with God's promises?" You've got a lot of them. "He'll meet your every need." What're you doing with that one? "He'll never leave you, nor will He forsake you." What're you doing with that one? "You don't need to worry about anything, but you can just pray and with all prayer and supplication let God know your requests." What're you doing with that one? Sitting on the promises, creeping on the promises, or standing, walking in, running across. So important, because Abram delayed a long time what might very well have become for him years earlier, the joy of what God wanted to do in his life. But he waited.

Verse 6 tells us that "Abram passed through the land of Canaan to a place called Shechem, as far as a terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land." Shechem is in the middle of Canaan today, or in Israel. It is a place today called Nablus (nab'-luhs). Nablus means "shoulder" or "strength." Moreh means "wisdom" or "instruction." So Abram goes from "delayed" there in Haran, "dry and parched," to the land of promise where he arrives at a city called "strength" near a place called "wisdom." And he was able to see there were occupiers. In this land of promise lived the opposition, the Canaanites, whom God would eventually judge. It would be here, at this place Shechem, later, years later, that Jacob would buy a piece of land, that he would dig a well, and in the New Testament it would be called Sychar (sigh'-kahr) in Samaria. It would be that woman that sat at Jacob's well in John Chapter 4. So here Abram is really the first place of mention where Abram comes.

The Lord then, for the second time, appeared to Abram, there in verse 7 and said, "'To your descendants I will give this land.' And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel. He pitched his tent with Bethel on the west, Ai on the east; he built an altar to the LORD. He called upon the name of the LORD." So God calls Abram. Now like we said, we don't know how many years he waited, but God doesn't repeat anything to Abram until he begins to move, right? Do what you know, you'll get more. Sit on your backside, you'll just get nothing. So as he began go move, and now he's at the place of promise, we find here in verse 7 and 8 the second of seven recorded meetings between God and Abram. And each is designed to encourage his walk of faith now that Abram had come this far. And notice that God reaffirms His promise to him, guiding him one step at a time. There is very rarely a place in the Bible where you'll see the Lord saying to His servants, like us, "Here's what I'm going to do the next ten years." It is usually what you get with Philip, for example, who is in the midst of a tremendous revival in Samaria, and God wants him to go to Gaza, and He doesn't say, "Hey, Philip, leave the revival. Come out to the middle of nowhere cause I got a guy who's leaving Jerusalem all upset cause he thought he could find life there in the sacrifices and the feast days, and he's real bummed out. He's still reading his Bible, but he's pretty upset. He didn't find anything. He's come a long way. I want you to talk to him." That would've been great. Philip would've went, "I'm there." Here's what the Lord said, "Go to Gaza and I'll show you where." That's it? That's it. And so it wasn't until he got to Gaza there at the corner of nowhere and nothing that the Lord said, "Hey, see that chariot coming our way? Go join yourself to the chariot." It took one step at a time. And it's important because usually when you have kids you do that with them. You don't tell them the whole deal cause they can't remember. Just, "Here, do this next. You got that? Okay. Now, here's the next part." The Lord does the same thing with us. If you're willing to go one step, He'll take you too.

Abram finally shows up in the land of promise. He shows up to a place of strength and wisdom where he might find the LORD's hand upon him. And the LORD reaffirms His promises to him, and he begins to build altars of worship, this man of faith, who came to the LORD like Abel, worshiping. And he lives between Bethel, which means "house of God" and Ai, which means "heap of ruins." Which is kind of your life too. You're right in the middle between the world and heaven, aren't you? You're living in glory, but you're living in this world. If you've been watching the news, it's getting to be a heap of ruins. And here we are, headed for glory and honor and blessing and joy. So our walk is with the LORD.

Well that's the testimony of Abram, and it'll be repeated time and time again as we continue through the Scriptures as God points us back to this beginning, not of major events, the first eleven chapters, but now the people that will lead through the nations to His Son. So Abram, his testimony.

Beginning in verse 9 we then are given the testing of Abram. Now remember, he's just gotten to the land. Verse 9, "So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South. And there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, 'Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, "This is his wife"; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you're my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I might live because of you.'"

Notice, verse 9, that Abram was journeying south into the Negev (neh'-gev) desert, and so far we've seen Abram fail in faith and not moving for many years, then succeeding with great faith where God again comes to confirm and reaffirm His blessing to him, finding in the land strength and wisdom, between house of God and heap of ruins, he's worshiping God, he's seeking God, he's calling upon His name. But he keeps moving south. And here's the second trial of faith, and he's going to fail again. Again, I'm so encouraged that God uses the likes of us. I thank Abram for teaching me God can use my life, because he, again, falls here. Look, you and I are going to face trials for our faith. The interesting thing is we don't have to panic and wonder if God loves us, have we done something awful, is this going to be our plight? Abram had just showed up. It was only a test of his faith to make him strong, to have him learn that God is more than sufficient, God is able to provide every need. That was God's purpose. It would be His purpose when he'd come back from this trial. It had nothing to do with anything other than faith needs to grow, and it's like a muscle, you have to put it under pressure. So look, when you have trials, you should get used to them. Quit fighting with it all the time, just grow by them. Praise the Lord, another opportunity to trust God.

Notice verse 10, I want you to notice because it's interesting, it says, "There was famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land." Look it, in the land of promise there's a problem. He just got here. "This is what I'm going to give you and your descendants after you!" And then, no rain, famine, no food. "Thanks a lot. I came four hundred miles after burying my daddy, to your great promise. Famine. Fear. And Canaanites. They're everywhere." What did Abram do? What should he have done? "Was this such a good idea Abram," says Sarai, "to come down here?" Cause she was contentious, that's her name. "Thanks for bringing me here." Abram goes down to Egypt to dwell there for the famine was severe in the land. Abram turned to what he was used to. Abram lived in Ur of the Chaldees, he lived in the delta, the Mesopotamian plains between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, there was never famine there, that's a delta. If you go to Egypt, Nile plain is the same way, there's never a famine there. There's always food. Well, there will be a famine one day, but that'll be the Lord's doing.

So Abram turns to what he's used to. And when he gets near the border he begins to sweet talk his wife. By the way, verse 11, you men, if you talk to your wife like this, you'll never fail. "You're a beautiful woman." But he has an ulterior motive, and he tells us about that in verse 12 and 13. So this man of faith, this hero of the New Testament, this father of all who believe in the New Testament, he's not off to a good start. His plan initially is just to lie. "Hi honey. Can we just lie together?" Well, it's actually half a lie. He and his wife did have the same father, they had different mothers. But he's going to lie. That's his act of faith. Not doing so well yet, right? But he's coming along. And what interests me more maybe is, she's sixty-five years old. He's worried about someone stealing his sixty-five-year-old woman way from him. (laughter) Really? How good could she have looked at sixty-five? (laughter) She must have been quite the handsome woman. (whistle) "Hey baby!" You know what I'm saying? (laughter) And Abram, he's like seventy-five, "I don't want to lose you." Interesting picture of the man of faith.

So it was, verse 14, and I love the fact God in the Old Testament tells you the whole story, warts and all. And then by the time you get to the New Testament and grace, none of this comes up. That's the same way for your life. If we told the whole story of your life, it'd be like this wouldn't it? And then you get to grace, and "Oh, you look really good all cleaned up and washed and hair combed." By the grace of God. "So it was," verse 14, "when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman," and notice, "[ooOOoo] beautiful. And the princes of Pharaoh also saw her and they commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. And he treated Abram well because of her. He had sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants, and female donkeys, and camels." Man, Abram started raking in the dough. It looked like this was going to work. This plan looked good. It was pragmatic after all. He had mouths to feed and hundreds of people to take care of, and he had a lot of stuff, and we're all going to die if we don't get out of this blessed land of promise. And so he gets to this place and things go perfectly well, and in his mind I'm sure he's saying, "God is blessing me. This is exactly....I made a good move this time. Moved right on it." Yet God never said, "Go to the land of Haran." God never said, "Go to the land of Egypt." He brought them to the land of promise, to the place I will show you. But just wait, because God blesses goodness and obedience. God never blesses sin. And God never blesses deception.

So we don't know how long he was there, but verse 17 says, "The LORD began to plague Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram and he said, 'What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, "She's my sister"? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here's your wife; take her and go your way.' And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had." God begins to plague Pharaoh and his house with tremendous suffering, so much so that an unbelieving, idolater puts two and two together in his head and says, "I don't know who this is, but I know this has to do with you and her, cause I never suffer like this." And God was leaning on him.

By the way, there is never a mention in Abram in Egypt praying or building an altar or worshiping God or calling upon His name, not in Egypt, not in Haran (huh-rah'n'), as you would say it in Hebrew, or in Haran (hair'-uhn). He will when he returns to the land in Chapter 13. He'll be all on his face again before the LORD. But not here. I think you're better off with a famine in the house of the Lord than food in Egypt. But that's not a lesson you learn quickly. And some of us, we will sacrifice our spiritual well-being for carnal gain here. Bigger house, more money, bigger car, more stuff. We will sacrifice our spiritual well-being for the sake of the things that are in Egypt. And until you learn that that's not the trade-off,

eternal life and all that God brings with it is far greater. Better a doorkeeper in the house of the LORD, than to be in Egypt.

So without prayer Abram ends up in Egypt. By the way, this is the first mention, and obviously in Genesis you get a lot of first mentions, but the Bible hermeneutical principles of interpretation would say that whenever you find something introduced in the Bible for the first time, let that be the primary definition for that term. And it holds consistent in everything you find. You can use it yourself. You just find the first place that the words are used, or the name is used, and then watch and see as God develops it, that the primary definition is found at the beginning. So Egypt, this is mentioned for the first time, and it's a place where you live your flesh, where you're allied with the world, where you look for help other than for God's help. It becomes a typological kind of word later on for your life before you got saved, when you were in the world. Now, you get saved, you come out of the world. But your Egypt becomes that life back in the world, that you don't really want to go back to.

So that's the definition of Egypt. And one thing you learn here almost immediately is lying and disobedience are not victimless crimes. They always involve other people. Here, all of Abram's family and servants and all that are with him are expelled from a country, and Abram, the father of the faith, is rebuked by some wicked, heathen king. How good is that? What kind of impression is he leaving so far? Later, Achan (ay'-kin) will die because he will lie, and his entire family will die as well. Years later, David will seek to number the people, and a plague will come and kill seventy thousand people because of the lie of David. Jonah will run from God and endanger an entire ship. You can't really sin and just say, "Well, it's just hurting me." It never just hurts you. You run from God, everybody suffers. So Abram, "Get out of here. Take your family with you."

I heard a story a little while ago of a man who was in the mall shopping with his wife when this beautiful girl walked in front of them, and he looked at her way too long. And the wife put down the item she was looking at and without even looking up simply whispered to him, "Was it worth the trouble you're in now?" (laughter) And I thought, I wonder if the Lord doesn't whisper that to Abram. "Was it worth the trouble you're in now?" "Oh.....no, LORD, it's not."

God had said Abram was to be a blessing, but so far all he'd been is a curse, right? "You will be a blessing." Not so far he hasn't been. One thing for sure though, people watch you, don't they? And you will have a testimony whether you like it or not. And the testimony that people remember the most is the life that you live when you're under pressure. How you handle the pressure.

Abram fails here. Well, we fail, but God's not finished with the father of the faithful. He's just off to a slow start.

Verse 1 of Chapter 13 says this, "Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South." Now they were actually heading north, but it would be the south of the country. "And Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold." Where did that come from? Egypt, for the most part. And you should remember that for next week. "And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been, back to the beginning, between Bethel," house of God, "and Ai," heap of ruins, "to the place of the altar."

So Abram comes back from Egypt, and you go, "Well, no harm, no foul." Wait a minute, he brings back a ton of stuff that he didn't have before from Egypt. It's going to be a big problem between he and Lot. Lot brought back the heart for Egypt because when he gets to choose later on where he's going to stay,

he looked to the plains of Sodom that looked much like, and you will read the words, "Egypt." And they picked up a servant in Egypt, a woman named Hagar (hay'-gahr). So things aren't always what they seem. You can be forgiven, but man, consequences, they'll follow you a long time along.

So next week we will pick up Chapter 13. I think we will probably only do one chapter next week. But you never know. Cool book we're studying, isn't it?

End of message