

The Prominence of Abraham

Genesis

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We return to our survey of the book of Genesis this evening and tonight and next week, at least probably, we're going to come to the man Abraham and he is a crucial figure in the study of the Bible and there are many ways that we could approach this. You nearly despair knowing where to start with someone like Abraham because his significance is found throughout the entire Bible. And one of the things that I like about this Tuesday evening format and the fact that so many of you are so faithful to come out week by week to hear it, is it gives us an opportunity to study in a way that maybe is a little bit different than what we do on Sunday morning. Sunday morning is given more toward preaching verse by verse, Tuesday night gives us the opportunity to do some things that are just a little bit different that I'm not sure that all of us have had the opportunity to see things like what we're going to do tonight. And what I want to do tonight is just kind of give you a sweep through the Bible as we look at the man Abraham. You could do a character study of Abraham and a lot of good men have done that, you can study the Abrahamic covenant and we'll look at that some next week, but what I want you to see, what I'm so eager for us as a church to be able to do is for us to be able to see something of the big picture of the Bible; to go beyond simply wanting something that will help us through our day or help us through our week, but to be able to see the threads that are woven through the entire Bible because once you start to see these big themes, then other pieces start to fall into place. And similarly speaking, when you see your own salvation as being part of a much bigger picture, when it's more than just a personal relationship with Jesus but you realize, if you even want to use that term, I don't like that term but you know what I'm saying, but when you start to see your salvation in the broad sweep of God's plan for the ages, God's broad sweep of his revelation from Genesis to Revelation, then you start to have a deeper appreciation for the magnitude of biblical salvation. We are part of something that is much much bigger than us, something that has been in place since God initiated time, that God has been working out for millennia, that God will continue to work out and bring to a culmination. We're a part of a much much larger picture and sometimes studies like you do tonight, what we're going to do tonight, will help you see that.

So we're going to talk about the prominence of Abraham and we're going to see his significance in four different aspects of biblical revelation and, really, I'm just going to read Scripture passages to you tonight with very brief comments interspersed. There is so

much here to see and when you start to grasp what God did in Abraham, the consequences that flow, when you start to see the way this is woven together in Scripture, it really impresses you with the genius of God and the wonder of salvation and you start to see the harmony of the Bible in a way that perhaps you would otherwise miss. And so that's what we're going to do tonight. It's just a survey of Scripture passages but you'll see how they tie together.

So, first of all tonight, I want to show you the significance of Abraham simply in the book of Genesis. That's our first point for tonight: his significance in the book of Genesis. Now, we've looked at the first 11 chapters of Genesis over the past couple of weeks. We've swept through them really quickly and we've come and we've landed here at Genesis 12 in verses 1 through 3, and here God is calling a man named Abram out of his paganism and he tells this man to go forth from his country to a land which God would show him. And if you look at chapter 12, verse 1 again, you see the magnitude of what is being said and it's absolutely overwhelming. Verse 1,

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you;

Now, let me just stop for just a little bit of a pastoral thing. Those of you who have paid a price in your family for loving Christ, you have lost relationships and loved ones, as I have, of people that were dear to you but now want nothing more from you because of your faith in Christ, find your encouragement right here in verse 1. One of the great characters of Scripture, one of the great men in all of the Bible, God calls him away from his relatives, away from his father's house, and sends him off on the career that God has for him. Understand that this is often the way that it works out for people of faith, that we find ourselves separated from our earthly relationships in order to follow the call of God. This is nothing new. When we see this happening, it is not something that should surprise us, that should shock us. Sure, it saddens us and we grieve because we would have the relationships, but sometimes God simply calls us away from our family in order to follow him. If that has happened to you, take courage. You are in good company.

Now, going on to verse 2. God tells him, "Make a complete departure because I will bless you." Verse 2,

2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Can you imagine? Put yourself in Abram's shoes and God calls you out and you have a barren wife, as I believe we'll see in a little bit. I know you know Sarai was barren anyway, whether we read the Scriptures or not, but the true God calls you out of paganism, calls you away from your family and says, "Through you I am going to bless all the nations of the earth." This is absolutely staggering and the fact that we can read

through this so quickly, you can read through this in just a few short moments, should not cause us to lose sight of the magnitude of what these words are saying.

So with this kind of start to the career of Abraham, as it's laid out for us in the Scriptures, we should expect to see great consequences coming from it. If God is saying, "I'm going to bless all the families of the earth in you," then we should expect, you would expect from that as you watch the redemptive history unfold, you should expect that there are going to be great consequences to it and that's exactly what you find. God promises him, we'll look at this more next week, he says, "I'm going to show you a land. I'm going to make you a great nation. I will bless you and I will use you to be a blessing to all the families of the earth." Well, what we're going to do tonight is just focus on that thread of blessing to the nations and try to kind of follow through in what God did.

Now look down at verse 7. Chapter 12, verse 7, and we'll kind of get the snowball rolling downhill here a little bit.

7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

So what we see is God's promises are starting to take root. And look over at chapter 13, verse 14 now and you see that the concept of the land, the territory, the geography that God promised was central to the unfolding of his promises to this man. Chapter 13, verse 14,

14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever."

So there's the promise of in perpetuity this land grant and he says, "I'm going to give it to your descendants forever. Verse 16,

16 "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered."

Remember, Abram is childless at this point. He has no heir, and you're going to see that as we look over at chapter 15, verse 1. God repeats these promises to Abram over the course of the chapters in Genesis and in chapter 15, verse 1 he says,

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And

Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."

He's thinking that this man who is not biologically related to him is going to be the recipient of the blessings because he's the heir because he's in Abram's household.

Verse 4,

4 Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir."

Now, step back and we want to keep the context in mind here. God is promising this massive unspeakable blessing to Abram, this massive land grant, this discussion of descendants that cannot be numbered any more than the sands of the sea can be numbered. And here's Abram, a childless man married to a barren woman, and this is supposed to happen?

Two things that we see and that occur to us from that. 1. That the powerless nature of Abram's position, the fact that he was called away from his home, the fact that he had no heirs in his house, shows you that this was a promise that depended not upon the strength of Abram but on the strength of God. And when we see this, you want to know God, right? That's part of the reason why all of you are here. What we see is that there are no restrictions on God's ability to deliver on the promises that he gives. Here is a childless man and God says, "I will make you a father of multitudes." It seemed impossible at the time.

And look at verse 5 now, Genesis 15:5,

5 And [God] took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

And watch what Abram did, verse 6, crucial passage in all the Bible. Before the law, before circumcision, before Abraham had done any good works in order to merit something like this, it says

6 Then he believed in the LORD; and [God] reckoned it to him as righteousness.

This was the moment that Abraham was justified before God. He simply believed God at his word and God saw that belief, God took that belief and on the basis of that belief, declared Abram to be righteous in his sight. He reckoned it to him as righteousness. So God has extended grace to Abraham and reckoned righteousness to him. A pagan had become right with God. This is simply an extension of the grace that we have been seeing over the past few weeks. We talked about the grace that was shown to Adam, the grace

that was shown to Cain, the grace that was shown following the flood, the grace that was shown following the confusion of the languages, found here in the man Abraham.

So you just see this powerful God, this mightily gracious God simply intervening in the lives of men in order to accomplish his will. And what we'll see next time, next week when we see this, we've talked about this in months gone by on Sunday mornings. Remember that we talked about that the whole, in one sense the whole purpose of redemption was for God to bring a people to be a bride to his eternal Son. Well, here you see God working this out in time with human beings. God is moving forward his plan in order to bring about a people who would worship his Son and be a bride for the Lord Jesus Christ and what he does is he establishes a covenant with Abraham to demonstrate his intention to keep his promise.

Look down in chapter 15 at verse 17.

17 It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.

God had split an animal in half and he's walking through to demonstrate his commitment to carry out his promises and this was a reflection of covenant ceremonies that were used in that day. And in verse 18, we see the effect of this. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, he bound himself to a promise saying

18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, [he bound himself to a promise] saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates [and then on it goes].

So God says, "I am going to do this." God manifests this through a covenant ceremony and God makes the covenant with Abraham, "I will keep this promise. I will most certainly do what I have said to you that I would do, to make you a nation, to give you a seed, to bless your, to make you a blessing to all the nations." So we are seeing the foundations of an incredibly important part of biblical history being unfolded for us as you see the life of Abraham being described in these chapters in Genesis, and you can start to understand why the biblical narrative slows down after accelerating through 1,000 years or more of human history. All of a sudden it hits the brakes and starts to focus on this one man. It's because that one man is incredibly important in the whole drama, the unfolding drama of redemption.

Now, God continues to rehearse these promises with Abram. Look at chapter 17, verse 1, and we're skipping over very important parts of the story just to accommodate the hour. Chapter 17, verse 1,

1 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be

blameless. 2 I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. 7 I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."

He just doesn't stop. Verse 8,

8 "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

And now as it continues to unfold, God specifies exactly which descendant would carry the blessing. Look at verse 19 as you can start to see this come into more focus. Actually, go up to verse 15 of chapter 17.

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!"

Ishmael, of course, was his son by Hagar, Sarah's maid, and Abraham is saying, "I don't see how this is possible. Let Ishmael be the one that you bless." And in verse 19,

19 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."

So God is saying, "The promise that I have made to you is going to be fulfilled through the line of Isaac," and that clarifies exactly where the blessing is going to come from. And God gives him a son, even though Abraham and Sarah were past child-bearing age. The impossibility of this is what you should start to see. The impossibility of a man coming out of a pagan environment in order to be a true Son of God, the impossibility of a childless man being the father of nations, the impossibility of a barren woman with a 100 year old man producing a son, and for all of this to happen is simply a manifestation of the power of God to deliver on the promise of God.

And we see the biblical narrative continue to unfold. Look over, again I apologize, we're just skipping over so much. But go to Genesis 26 and, again, the whole thing here tonight is to just see the thread, to see the theme that develops, to see the big picture from a satellite view and then we are better able to deal with some of the details closer on the contours of the land. Genesis 26.

1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2 The LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you."

Again, he's speaking to Isaac. Now watch how he repeats the promises that are consistent with what he was saying to Abraham.

3 "Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."

So God is building on with Isaac the prior promises that he had given to Abraham. There is a perfect consistency here and the biblical narrative is intended for you to follow this thread and to watch it unfold. So as you continue to read on, you see these promises, the covenant confirmed to the line of Isaac's son, Jacob.

Turn to Genesis 28:10. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. God chose Jacob and rejected Esau and in verse 10,

10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. 12 He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Now, we're going through rapidly decades of history. Abraham was born in about 2166 BC. Isaac was born 2066 BC. Jacob was born 2006 BC. So by the time you get to these promises to Jacob, nearly 200 years had already elapsed, you know, somewhere between

150-200. I didn't take time to do the math before I came in, but here you see that over this broad stretch of time, you see these promises being kept and unfolding. And Genesis, the book of Genesis ends with Jacob's son, Joseph, rehearsing and repeating these promises.

Go to the end of Genesis 50, and I'm assuming you know a lot about the life of Joseph and all of that, and how they came to Egypt and there were 70 of them and they began to flourish there in Egypt. This was the place of God's provision for them and in Genesis 50:22,

22 Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. 23 Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. 24 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land [here it is] to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." 26 So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Now, realizing that we've done a rocket-blast through so much biblical material, here's what I want you to see, here's all I want you to see for right now: that as you read the 50 chapters of Genesis, you see this promise, these promises that God made to Abraham being the hinge upon which every page seems to turn. Every generation is turning. Abraham, his life turns on the promises that God made to him in chapters 12, 15 and 17. You get to his son and his life is pivoting on the promises that God made to Abraham. Jacob pivoting on Abraham. Joseph pivoting on Abraham. So over a course of four generations in the book of Genesis, you see the prominence of these promises that God gave to Abraham.

You're not supposed to miss this and as you come to the end of the book of Genesis, it's very interesting. Go back to verse 24, chapter 50, verse 24. I want you to see and to recognize how even this verse, the end of Genesis, is like a door hinge between the past and the future that pivots on the promises to Abraham. On the one hand, Joseph is talking to his brothers and reminds them of the promises that God made over the prior two centuries to his ancestors. He says, "God promised this land to us on oath, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." So in one sense as you end Genesis, you're looking back and remembering what God had done in the lives of those three patriarchs. At the same time, Joseph propels the nation forward to look forward to the fulfillment of the promise that God had made. So based on the promises that had been made in the past, Joseph is able to tell his people at his earthly departure, at the time of his death, "God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land."

Now, a little pastoral pause here, something that I've had to kind of work through and I wouldn't claim that I've worked all the way through it on my own life yet and it's something that I've taught on in the past out of John 21, but there is something really key

to the way that you live your life that's found here, especially for those of you who are parents, perhaps parents that I know some of you have difficulties in your relationship with your adult children and all of that. Let me say a word to you pastorally from this text here that I mean to encourage you and to help you. For a Christian parent, I don't know that there's anything that's more difficult than the prospect of having to leave your children behind. You realize that death is coming and you're going to say goodbye to your family, to your loved ones, to everything that's been important to you, and the time of death is approaching and you're aware of that and you've lost control over it. You're about to exit life.

Well, here's the way that you're supposed to deal with that. Joseph illustrates it beautifully for us. Here's your mindset. This is the way that you should be thinking when your own life is threatened, when you see your children going a different direction and you don't know what to do. You should be so confident of the power and the faithfulness of God that you're able to look at that situation and look at verse 24 with me here, Genesis 50:24, Joseph says, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you." When the time for your earthly departure comes, beloved, and you're looking out at the family and the things that you're leaving behind, your mindset is not one of regret, your mindset is not one of fear, you simply have it settled in your heart that God is able to care for them whether I'm here or not. And one of the things that you leave behind to your children when it comes time for you to leave, if God gives you the opportunity in your dying days to be able to think this way and to be able to express it. Sometimes your family, "What are we going to do without you?" You gather up your strength, you gather up everything, all of the faithful promises of God that you've known from Scriptures over the course of your Christian life, you gather up the way that he has been faithful to you in your life and you look those loved ones in the eyes and you tell them, "God will surely take care of you," and you let that be the parting words that you leave in the echoing years of your loved ones. "God will take care of you."

This is what Jonathan Edwards said to his family when he was about to die. He told them, he said, "Trust in Christ and all will be well." And this gives us a sense of how comprehensive our trust in Christ is supposed to be. This gives us a sense of how thorough-going our confidence in him is meant to be. So much so that we can step off of the stage of life and say, "It is going to be well with you. God will take care of you. I am leaving, I am departing in peace, and you can say goodbye to me in peace as well because God will take care of you. Simply trust in Christ and all will be well."

And beloved, what I want you to see is that when God called you to himself in Christ, when God claimed you as his own, as we'll see in Ephesians 2 this Sunday, when God made you alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved, he laid a claim on your heart affections, he laid a claim on your heart confidence, he laid a claim on the totality of the way that you view life, so much that you trust him – oh, please listen to me as I say this – you trust him not only for your own salvation, we trust God not only for our own salvation but we trust him for the totality of how he deals with everyone that we love and care about. Our confidence in Christ, our confidence in our sovereign, faithful, loving, gracious, merciful, loving God is so great that we trust him for everything without

clinging to anxieties about, "Well, what about my children? What about my unsaved loved ones?" We pray for them, we love them, we're burdened by that but at the end of the day, at the end of life, we come back and we say, "God, I trust you even for that." That's what you have to say.

Here's Joseph departing from his earthly life, having entered the world with nothing, he's leaving with nothing, so to speak, except what he has to give to those that are left behind, is to point them to his God. In the Christian era here in the New Testament age, we point them to Christ and say, "You look to him. You trust in him. He will surely take care of you." And you see the comprehensive power of this. We're meant to love God more than we love our families. We're meant to trust him so much that we rest in him even with our loved ones. Even as we are saying that goodbye, your heart is settled in trust and whatever strength you have that God gives you at that time, you tell them, "You trust God too. I'm trusting God, you trust God." That's how we exit this life. So Joseph illustrates that for us and so you see the significance of Abraham. In Genesis, you see how the theme of the promises to Abraham are carried out through the book of Genesis.

Now, just briefly, I want to take you to a second point and show you the significance of the promises to Abraham in the rest of the Torah, Exodus through Deuteronomy, and we're just going to kind of hit the beginning and the end to kind of make the point here. But 400 years go by and when God is ready to call Israel out of Egypt to be a nation and to lead them through the wilderness and ultimately to deliver them to that land that he promised to Abraham, the call to Israel, the call to the nation through Moses their leader, was rooted in the promise that God made to Abraham.

Look at Exodus 6.

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land."

Once again, the power of God to deliver on his promises is absolutely unhindered. Here they are under the slavery and the rule of the greatest nation, the strongest nation on earth at that time, a totally subjugated people, and God has the power to deliver them. God has, beloved, God has the power to do what he has promised to do and earthly circumstances and human opposition and human obstacles are no barrier to the accomplishment of his will. We really need to have bigger thoughts about God and a bigger trust in him and not be so driven by the circumstances of what we see around us. As you read the unfolding biblical narrative and you realize the utter human impossibility of what God has done following his promises to Abraham, it is overwhelming to see the greatness of who he is and the greatness of his power. When we say he is omnipotent, we mean that he has the absolute power and freedom to accomplish everything that he desires. That's how great, that's how high, that's how lofty he is.

Now, Exodus 6:2,

2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD [watch this]; 3 and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them. 4 I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned."

This is over 400 years later and here God is acting upon his promise, being faithful to what he promised centuries ago, now becomes the basis upon which he acts in order to bring a nation out of slavery and to establish them in their own land.

Verse 5,

5 "Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant."

"I have remembered. I'm going to act upon it now."

6 "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'"

And so, you know what happens. By a series of miracles and by his mighty outstretched power, God delivers them out of Egypt. He said before it happened that he is doing this because of the covenant that he established with Abraham. This nation is being born centuries and centuries later because God was keeping his covenant, God was keeping his promise to Abraham that, "I will make a great nation out of you." Now he is starting to act upon that in real time. So what you see in Exodus, what you see as the nation of Israel is being born, is simply a manifestation of God's faithfulness to this gracious promise that he made to Abraham.

Now, you go through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, 40 years go by, things don't go so hot for the Israelites because of their sin and a whole generation of them dies in the wilderness and Moses is about to send them on into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Turn to the end of the book of Deuteronomy 34 and just see the bookends here. This is what I want you to see. This is what excites me about Scripture is to see these themes and I hope that it excites you also. If it doesn't, then you're not going to be excited, I guess. I don't know, but I'm excited to just see these things, these things that you miss. I know that you miss them. You overlook them. Some of you maybe haven't even read these portions of Scripture, if so, maybe this will encourage you to do that. When we're just reading through Scripture, you know,

according to a Bible plan, you miss these great themes upon which everything else is built.

So at the beginning of Exodus we saw the promise of God setting forth, setting these things into motion. You go through that whole sweep of the intervening years and look at Deuteronomy 34:4. The Lord has taken Moses up to a high place and shown him the land. Moses is not going to enter the land himself because of his own sin during his leadership and in Deuteronomy 34:4,

4 Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." 5 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. 6 And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab,

Here's what I want you to see, big picture: God makes a promise in Genesis 12 to an individual, he says, "I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to give you this great land. I'm going to multiply your descendants." Isaac and Jacob, his son and his grandson, have the promises renewed to him. Joseph calls on those promises as he's leaving this earth to remind the people gathered around him, his descendants, his relatives gathered around him, "Remember the promise of God." Four hundred years go by. God calls Moses and says, "I'm going to deliver this nation. I'm going to redeem this nation because of the promise that I made to Abraham back here centuries ago." And at the end of Moses' career, you see it being wrapped up. They're ready to move into the Promised Land and God says as the seal, the final closing words on the whole Pentateuch, he says, "This is what I promised," and now they're going to go in and receive it.

So we see this greatness of the promise. Israel is born out of a promise that God made to Abraham so many centuries earlier. This is how the Pentateuch ends. It's the bookends of the Pentateuch. It's incredible to see this, to see the promise, the unilateral promises that God made that, "I want to do this. I'm going to be gracious to you, Abraham, and through you I'm going to be gracious to all the nations in the earth." Wow. We're starting to see the reason that God does everything that he does in redemptive history.

Now, point 3. We've seen the significance of Abraham in Genesis, we've seen it in the Pentateuch every so briefly, I want to give you a flavor of his significance in the Old Testament now. His significance in the Old Testament because as you read through the historical books and the poetical books and the prophetic books of the Bible, you keep seeing them repeatedly pointing back to these same promises that God made to Abraham. This was their reason for existence. This was their hope for the future. It was not in themselves but in the promises that God had made.

Turn to 1 Chronicles 16. Here we're going to parachute into the reign of David. 1 Chronicles 16 and David here is expressing praise to God. 1 Chronicles 16, he's calling upon the nation to remember their God. In verse 11, let's say, he says to them,

11 Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. 12 Remember His wonderful deeds which He has done, His marvels and the judgments from His mouth, 13 O seed of Israel His servant, Sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! 14 He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. [Israel, here's what I want you to do.] 15 Remember His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations, 16 The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac. 17 He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant,

A thousand years later David is still reminding them of the promises of God which gave birth to them as a nation. He calls them to faithfulness. God has promised this. God will deliver us. Therefore you be faithful to God. You remember who he is. You remember what he promised and you obey and you trust and you honor and you glorify him.

Turn over to Psalm 105. You see it in the Psalms and we're just picking things, choosing things. You see a similar sentiment. This Psalm is not attributed to any particular author. We'll get to it eventually on Tuesday nights. Psalm 105, that's probably in like 2019. I don't know. You'll want to mark that on your calendar and make sure that you're here. Psalm 105 and I'll give a dollar to every person that's here when I start Psalm 105 and say, "I was there back in 2014 when you said this. I want my dollar now." I'll give it to you.

Psalm 105:4,

4 Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. 5 Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth,

Remember. Remember. Go back to the promises of God. Go back to the promises of God. Verse 6,

6 O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! 7 He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. 8 He has remembered His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations, 9 The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac. 10 Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant, 11 Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan As the portion of your inheritance," 12 When they were only a few men in number, Very few, and strangers in it.

Saying, "Israel, remember. Go back to the promises. Go back to what God has said and done." And when the nation, as you know, when they wandered into disobedience, when they were setting themselves up for judgment which eventually came in the form of exile

from the land which God had promised to them, God showed mercy to them because of his covenant with Abraham.

Turn back to 2 Kings 13 and I realize how quickly all of this material is coming at you. The real point of this, in one sense, if you take nothing out of this tonight other than just the fact that, wow, Abraham is woven throughout the whole Bible, you will have gotten the point. 2 Kings 13:22,

22 Now Hazael king of Aram had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. 23 But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them or cast them from His presence until now.

Centuries after David, God is still being gracious to the nation of Israel because of the promises that he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You see, here's what I want you to see: that as you're reading the unfolding of the history of Israel in the Old Testament, you're seeing an unfolding of God carrying out and acting in accordance with the promises that he made to the people, better stated, the promises that he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was the basis of his whole dealings with the nation.

And prophets promised restoration when they sinned based on these same promises. Turn to Jeremiah 33. This is somewhere in the sixth century. Now we're talking 1,400 years after the time of Abraham, 1,400 years, and in chapter 33, verse 23,

23 And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, 24 "Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, 'The two families which the LORD chose, He has rejected them'? Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight. 25 Thus says the LORD, 'If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, 26 then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.'"

Here they are in the midst of a time of terrible national decline, under the severe oppression of foreign nations, and God is calling to mind even then, calling to mind Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and saying, "On the basis of that covenant, I will be faithful to them." And he says, "If you see the stars continuing in their orbit, you will know that I am still being faithful to Israel." Do you know what? We're still seeing the stars being faithful in their orbit today. God still has intentions for the nation of Israel today. The stars haven't stopped, God's promise to his people hasn't stopped either.

Go to the book of Micah in the middle of what we call the Minor Prophets. Micah 7, the closing verses of Micah 7 where it says, chapter 7, verse 18,

18 Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love.

You'd better believe he does. Here it is 1,500 years after the fact,

19 He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. 20 You will give truth to Jacob And unchanging love to Abraham, Which You swore to our forefathers From the days of old.

The prophet encourages and exhorts the people, "There will be restoration coming after this time of judgment. You can rest assured because God swore it to Abraham and his promise cannot fail." And so you see the significance woven throughout the Old Testament. These promises to Abraham are not incidental. God's whole dealings with Israel are rooted right here.

Well, you say, "but we're in the New Testament. What does this have to do with us? We're not Jews in here, most of us. What does this have anything to do with us?" Well, let's look at the significance of Abraham as seen from the perspective of the New Testament and we'll close with this, this evening. So we've seen the significance in Genesis, the Pentateuch, the Old Testament and now we're going to look at the New Testament, just doing a broad survey of things in Scripture.

One source says that there are 83 references to Abraham in 11 different books of the New Testament and as we saw last time, the New Testament opens by connecting Jesus Christ to the promise made to Abraham. Let's go back there for just a moment just to rehearse this. Matthew 1:1. We love Jesus Christ, we proclaim him as the only Savior of sinners, the only Savior of the world. Matthew 1:1,

1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

The New Testament uses Abraham to illustrate the nature of saving faith.

Look over at Romans 4 for a moment. Romans 4 as Paul is giving a systematic exposition of the Gospel in the book of Romans and declaring that justification comes by faith alone, in Christ alone, he calls upon the example of Abraham to illustrate his point. The faith that saved Abraham is the same quality of faith that saves us today. Chapter 4, Romans 4:1,

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a

favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

The faith that saves us is a faith that is exercised when we have nothing to offer to God. When we are convicted of our ungodliness, when we realize that we are lost sinners, it is then and only then that we are able to exercise saving faith. It is not by what we have done. We simply believe the promise of God as it is revealed in the Gospel of Christ and on the basis of that faith, God grounded in the righteousness of Christ, accepts us as righteous in his sight and Paul says that's just what happened in Abraham. So here's Paul writing 2,000 years after Abraham and here we are reading it 2,000 more years later, you still see the theme of Abraham being brought to our attention.

Look over at Galatians 3 where Paul is, again, defending the doctrine of justification by faith. And in Galatians 3:6 he uses Abraham as his crowning illustration.

6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God [you're in this verse, you and I are in this verse] would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Look at verse 16.

16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Verse 29,

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

And so, beloved, here we are 4,000 years after Abraham, having seen a little snapshot of God saying in Genesis 12, "In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed," biblical history unfolds, Christ of the seed of Abraham comes, Christ the seed of Abraham comes, offers his life on the cross, is resurrected, the Gospel goes forth proclaiming forgiveness of sins based on the work of Christ, people are saved and throughout the generations that message is repeated over and over and over and over through the centuries. You and I who are Christians here tonight find ourselves as being part of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. We have been blessed by God through the seed of Abraham. We have been blessed by God through a descendant of Abraham, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been blessed through the Scriptures that were delivered through the Jews by the descendants of Abraham. We received the Scriptures from the loins of Abraham, so to speak, through his descendants. We received the Messiah through his descendants.

We have been blessed because of this promise that God made to Abraham 4,000 years ago. It's incredible. That's exactly what Paul says. The Gospel brings the blessing of Abraham to Gentiles.

Look at chapter 3, verse 13 here in Galatians. It states it so plainly. How are we ever supposed to understand this passage if we don't know something about the history and the career of Abraham? Galatians 3:13,

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"-- 14 in order that [for this purpose, toward this result] in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The Gospel is the ultimate fulfillment of that promise made to Abraham to be a blessing to all the nations. What could be a greater blessing than eternal redemption? And God provided that through the descendant of Abraham, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. Now here we are, believers in Christ, possessors of eternal life, on the road that leads to eternal glory, and what Scripture tells us as we glorify Christ, we realize that Christ was the fulfillment of promises that God made millennia ago.

Do you see it, beloved? We are part of something that is so transcendent, something that is so magnificent, something so greatly eternal, something delivered by the great power and foreknowledge of God. God worked out the whole course of human history to fulfill his promise to Abraham which was the means by which he keeps his promise to Christ from before the beginning of time that he would give his Son a redeemed people that would love him throughout all of eternity. The promises to Abraham become the track upon which the train of redemption runs and it runs right through the Lord Jesus Christ and somewhere along the way the train stopped and we got on at the depot of our conversion, and we look back and we see that long line of track going all the way back to the promises that God made to Abraham. That's how we're supposed to understand it. The Gospel came to the Gentiles. Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham, came to the Gentiles so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. People of every tongue and nation gathering around the throne of God, all the nations of the earth being blessed through that covenant, that promise that God made to Abraham.

You see, beloved, as we read the Scriptures, we're supposed to see the big picture. It's so much more, your salvation is so much more than your individual conversion, so much more than your individual salvation. It's certainly so much more than what God can do to help you through this or that problem or this or that day. So much more than the problems over which we pray. It's so much more than that. It's okay, I mean, that's part of it but it's so much more. When we gather together as the redeemed people of God, when we open the Scriptures, when we enjoy our salvation, there should be echoing in the back of our minds, "Part of what my conversion manifests is the faithfulness of God to promises that he made 4,000 years ago"; that salvation found its fountain back in the book of Genesis and the unfolding of the ages that followed were designed in part so that the blessing that

God promised to Abraham would certainly be delivered to the Gentiles and you and I as Gentiles find ourselves as part of that.

And the wonder and the blessing of it is, you're still in Galatians, let me take you back to chapter 2, verse 20 of Galatians. It transcends us and yet it involves us by name. Paul says in chapter 2, verse 20,

20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

You just get lost in the majesty of salvation. You get lost in the majesty of the Gospel. God carried out promises over thousands of years and now we enjoy the fruit of that and it transcends us so greatly and yet Scripture says that when Christ died on the cross for sinners, beloved, fellow brother and sister in Christ, he was not only dying for people, he was dying for them individually by name. He was dying for you, first person singular. "He loved me and He gave Himself up for me," and so it transcends history and yet it's intensely personal, dying for you by name, not just for a general mass of humanity. That's one of the beauties of the doctrine of particular redemption which we've taught about in the past.

So as we've taken this jet tour of the career of Abraham, what I want you to see is this: ultimately, in one sense it's not about Abraham but it's how God has honored the promises that he made to Abraham going all the way back to Genesis 12. Christ came from the loins of Abraham. We have received the Scriptures through the loins of Abraham. We've received the Gospel in furtherance of promises that God made to Abraham. Abraham shows us what saving faith is like. Abraham shows us what obedient faith is like. And as we see that broad panorama, it should lead us to a deeper appreciation from what we could casually say with our lips. God is very faithful to his promises. God is very good to his people. The blessings that we have as Christians are rooted in promises that God has been keeping continuously for 4,000 years.

Brother and sister in Christ, as you're going through the difficulties of life and you belong to Christ, you belong to God, his Spirit dwells within you, Christ has covered you with his righteousness and with his blood, look at this career of Abraham that we've seen in broad outline form, look at the thousands of years of God continuing his promises and seeing it repeated at key points throughout the course of redemptive history and the point of everything tonight is to be able to say this: put yourself in that context. If God has kept promises for 4,000 years, he's not suddenly going to stumble over you. He's not suddenly going to drop the ball in his faithfulness when it comes to your life. His faithfulness has conquered nations. His faithfulness has conquered your sins. His faithfulness will keep you to the end.

And that's no empty word. That's no platitude that we make. That's grounded on the authority of God's word, on thousands of years of God's faithfulness. We stand convinced, we stand confident that our faith is well-founded; that our faith in Christ can

never fail. Christ could never fail us, never abandon us. Our salvation could never be lost. Ever. Ever. Ever. Ever, because God is faithful to his promise. He's shown it for the centuries. He's going to do it in the future as well. And for that, we have hope. For that, we're confident. For that, we're joyous and we give him thanks.

Next week we'll look at this covenant with Abraham in more detail. For now, please bow with me in prayer.

Father, we are your people and we love your word. I pray that this quick survey of your faithfulness to Abraham would deepen our confidence in your intentions to be faithful to us as well. Father, we honor you for the power that enables you to see the future and to keep it and to implement it. We thank you, Father, for your faithfulness never to forget your promises. O Lord, we sometimes skip out on our word and don't always do what we say. You're not like that. You keep your promises and you've promised never to leave us or never ever to forsake us and, Father, there is a track record of history with you being faithful that we realize it could never do anything but come out well for us in the end. You are good to us. You have been good to us. Father, we thank you tonight because we know you will be good to us because you're always faithful to your promises.

Father, I pray tonight. We touched on some sensitive matters, knowing of family situations and heartaches that are in the room and just thinking briefly about how to trust you in that. I pray, Father, for those that are gathered here this evening, Father, with those kinds of burdens on their heart. I pray that you would bless them and help them and encourage them through those discouraging times as some look and see loved ones not walking with the Lord. Father, give us confidence that you know all things and that we can trust you for all things. And we ask you, Father, even for the turning of those rebellious hearts toward you. We love you, Lord. We're so grateful that we have a faithful God that we can lean on in the sorrows and difficulties of life. And the promises that you've kept to Abraham, give us assurance that you will keep your promises to us as well for it depends not on us but on you and you can never fail. We honor you and we praise you and we give this evening to you. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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