

Genesis 12:1-9

The Call of Abraham

Genesis 11 ³¹ Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. ³² The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

Genesis 12 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;
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.”

⁴ So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. ⁶ Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land. 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. ⁸ Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. ⁹ Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

Note on Genesis 12:1...

Now the Lord *had said* unto Abram (KJV)

The Call of Abraham

Genesis 11:31-12:9

Bob Deffinbaugh

Introduction (Edited)

While the effect of man's sin has become increasingly widespread, the fulfillment of the promise of God in Genesis 3:15 has become more selective. The Redeemer was to come from the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), then from the descendants of Seth, then Noah, and now Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3).

Theologically, Genesis chapter 12 is one of the key Old Testament passages, for it contains what has been called the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant is the thread which ties the rest of the Old Testament together. It is critical to a correct understanding of Bible prophecy.

The Circumstances Surrounding the Call of Abram (Joshua 24:2-3; Acts 7:2-5)

Stephen clarifies the time that Abram was first called of God. It was not in Haran, as a casual reading of Genesis 12 might incline us to believe, but in Ur. As Stephen stood before his unbelieving Jewish brethren, he recounted the history of God's chosen people, beginning with the call of Abraham:

And he said, 'Hear me, brethren and fathers! ***The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran*** and said to him, "Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you" (Acts 7:2-3).

Most scholars agree that Ur of Genesis 11/12 is located in southern Mesopotamia, on what used to be the coast of the Persian Gulf....Ur was justified in its boast of being a highly developed civilization. There are ample evidences of elaborate wealth, skilled craftsmanship, and advanced technology and science. All of this tells us something of the city which Abram was commanded to leave.

In the words of Vos...***Regardless of when Abraham left Ur, he turned his back on a great metropolis, setting out by faith for a land about which he knew little or nothing and which could probably offer him little from a standpoint of material benefits.***

If the city which Abram was told to leave was great, ***the home he left behind seems to have been less than godly***...Joshua gives us helpful insight into the character of Terah in his farewell speech at the end of his life:

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, “From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods” (Joshua 24:2).

Abram’s age was not a factor in favor of leaving Ur for some unknown land. Moses tells us that Abram was 75 when he entered the land of Canaan.

Genesis chapter 11 informs us that man’s longevity was much greater in times past, than in Abram’s day. Abram died at the ripe old age of 175 (25:7-8), a much shorter time than Shem (11:10-11) or Arpachshad (11:12-13)...

All of this should remind us of the objections and obstacles which must have been in the mind of Abram when the call of God came. He left Haran, not because it was the easiest thing to do, but because God intended for him to do it. Abram’s faith was initially very weak. The obstacles were largely overcome by the initiative of God in the early stages of the life of Abram.

The Command of God

The call of Abram is recorded for us in Genesis 12:1: “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.’”

A better rendering of the first sentence of this call is found in the King James Version and in the New International Version, both of which read, “The Lord had said to Abram, ... ”

The difference is important. Without it we are inclined to think that the call of Abram came at Haran, rather than at Ur. ***We know from Stephen’s words that the call came to Abram at Ur (Acts 7:2).*** The pluperfect tense (had said) is both grammatically legitimate and exegetically necessary...

In one sense, the command of God to Abram was very specific. Abram was told in detail what he must leave behind. He must leave his country, his relatives, and his father’s house. God was going to make a new nation, not merely revise an existing one...

On the other hand, God's command was deliberately vague. While what was to be left behind was crystal clear, what lay ahead was distressingly devoid of detail: "... to the land which I will show you."

Abram did not even know where he would settle. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, "... he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8)...

The relationship between the command of God to Abram in verse 1 and the incident at Babel in chapter 11 should not be overlooked. At Babel men chose to disregard the command of God to disperse and populate the earth. They strove to find security and renown by banding together and building a great city (11:3-4). ***They sought blessing in the product of their own labors, rather than in the promise of God.***

The command of God to Abram is, in effect, a reversal of what man attempted at Babel. Abram was secure and comfortable in Ur, a great city...and God called him to leave that city ...God promised Abram a great name (what the people of Babel sought, 11:4) as a result of leaving Ur, leaving the security of his relatives, and trusting only in God. How unlike man's ways are from God's.

The Covenant with Abram (12:2-3)

Technically, the covenant with Abram is not found in chapter 12, but in chapters 15 (verse 18) and 17 (verses 2,4,7,9,10,11,13,14,19,21) where the word covenant appears. It is there that the specific details of the covenant are spelled out. ***Here in chapter 12 the general features of the covenant are introduced.***

Three major promises are contained in verses 2 and 3: a land; a seed; and a blessing...

- ***The land is implied in verse 1. At the time of the call, Abram did not know where this land was.*** At Shechem, God promised to give 'this land' to Abram (12:7). ***It was not until chapter 15 that a full description of the land was given:***

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: ...' (Genesis 15:18).

This land never belonged to Abram in his lifetime, even as God had said (15:13-16).

When Sarah died, he had to buy a portion of the land for a burial site (23:3ff.). ***Those who first read the book of Genesis were about to take possession of the land which was promised Abram.*** What a thrill that must have been for the people of Moses' day to read this promise and realize that the time for possession had come.

- **The second promise of the Abrahamic Covenant was that of a great nation coming from Abram...*Abraham's blessing was largely to be seen in his descendants.*** Here was the basis for the 'great name' that God would give to Abram.

This promise demanded faith on the part of Abram, for it was obvious that he was already aged, and that Sarai, his wife, was incapable of having children (11:30). It would be many years before Abram would fully grasp that this heir that God had promised would come from the union of he and Sarai.

- **The final promise was that of blessing—blessing for him, and blessing through him.** Much of Abram's blessing was to come in the form of his offspring, but ***the greatest blessing would come in the form of the Messiah, who would bring salvation to God's people.*** To this hope our Lord, the Messiah, spoke, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56).

Beyond this, ***Abram was destined to become a blessing to men of every nation.*** ..Ultimately, the whole world was blessed by the coming of the Messiah, who came to save men of every nation, not just the Jews:

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer (Galatians 3:7-9)

The Compliance of Abram (11:31-32, 12:4-9)

The heroes of the Bible are men with 'like passions' (James 5:17) and feet of clay...Abram was a man like you and me. Moses' account of Abram's initial steps of faith makes it evident that much was to be desired, and to be developed in him...

Abraham was indeed a man of great faith...after years of testing by God. But at the point of Abram's call, he was a man whose faith was meager; real, but meager.

If we are honest with ourselves, that is just about where most of us are. In our best moments, our faith is vibrant and vital, but in the moments of testing, it is weak and wanting.

Conclusion: Characteristics of the Life of Faith

From these events in the early stages of Abram's growth in grace several principles are found which depict the walk of faith in every age, and certainly in our own.

(1) Abram's faith was commenced at the initiative of God. *The sovereignty of God in salvation is beautifully illustrated in the call of Abram. Abram came from a pagan home...* God, in His electing grace, chose Abram to follow Him, while he was going his own way. Abram, like Paul, and true believers of every age, would acknowledge that it was God Who sought him out and saved him, on the basis of divine grace.

(2) Abram's spiritual life continued through the sovereign work of God. *God is not only sovereign in salvation, but sovereign in the process of sanctification.* Had Abram's spiritual life depended solely upon his faithfulness, the story of Abram would have ended very quickly. ***Having called Abram, it was God Who providentially brought Abram to the point of leaving home and homeland and entering Canaan.*** Thank God our spiritual lives are ultimately dependent upon His faithfulness and not ours.

(3) The Christian's walk is a pilgrimage. *Abraham lived as a pilgrim, looking for the city of God:*

“By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the some promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:9-10).

Our permanent home is not to be found in this world, but in the one that is to come, in the presence of our Lord (cf. John 14:1-3). That is the message of the New Testament (cf. Ephesians 2:19, I Peter 1:17, 2:11).

The tent is thus the symbol of the pilgrim. He does not invest heavily in that which will not last. He dare not become too attached to that which he cannot take with him. ***In this life we cannot expect to fully possess what lies in the future, but only to survey it.***

The Christian life is not knowing exactly what the future holds, but knowing Him Who holds the future.

(4) The Christian walk is rooted in the reliability of the Word of God. *Abram had no concrete, tangible proof that a life of blessing lay ahead, outside of Ur, away from his family. All he had to rely upon was God, Who had revealed Himself to him.*

In the final analysis, that is all anyone can have. There are, of course, evidences for the reasonableness of faith, but ***at the bottom line we simply must believe what God has said to us in His Word.*** If His ‘Word is not true and reliable, then we, of all men, are most miserable.’ **But isn’t that enough? What more should we require than God’s Word? The Word of God is sufficient for man’s faith.**

(5) The Christian walk is simply doing what God has told us to do and believing that He is leading us as we do so. *God told Abram to leave without knowing where the path of obedience would lead, but believing that God was leading as he went.* We cannot expect that God will indicate each turn in the road with a clearly marked sign. ***Faith is not developed by living life by some kind of map, but by using God’s Word as a compass, pointing us in the right direction, but challenging us to walk by faith and not by sight.***

As Abram went from place to place, the will of God must have seemed like a riddle. But as we look back upon it, we can see that God was leading all the way. No stop along the path was irrelevant or without purpose. Such will be the case as we can look back upon our lives from the vantage point of time.

(6) The Christian walk is a process of growth in grace. We often read of Abraham, the man of faith, supposing that he was always that kind of man...Do you realize that it was probably years from the time Abram was called in Ur until he ended up in Canaan. Do you know that after Abram entered the land of Canaan it was another 25 years until he had his son, Isaac? Can you fathom the fact that after leaving Haran for Canaan, God worked in Abram’s life for one hundred years?

Christian faith grows. It grows through time and through testing. Such was true in Abram’s life. Such is the case with every believer.

May God enable us to grow in grace as we walk the path which He has ordained, and as we continue to study the growth of the faith of Abram over many years.

The Abrahamic Covenant...An Overview (Edited)

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Abrahamic-covenant.html>

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. There are two basic types of covenants: conditional and unconditional.

A conditional or bilateral covenant is an agreement that is binding on both parties for its fulfillment. Both parties agree to fulfill certain conditions. If either party fails to meet their responsibilities, the covenant is broken and neither party has to fulfill the expectations of the covenant. ***An unconditional or unilateral covenant is an agreement between two parties, but only one of the two parties has to do something. Nothing is required of the other party.***

The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. The actual covenant is found in Genesis 12:1–3. The ceremony recorded in Genesis 15 indicates the unconditional nature of the covenant. When a covenant was dependent upon both parties keeping commitments, then both parties would pass between the pieces of animals. In Genesis 15, God alone moves between the halves of the animals. Abraham was in a deep sleep. God's solitary action indicates that the covenant is principally His promise. He binds Himself to the covenant.

Later, God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision as the specific sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 17:9–14). All males in Abraham's line were to be circumcised and thus carry with them a lifelong mark in their flesh that they were part of God's physical blessing in the world. Any descendant of Abraham who refused circumcision was declaring himself to be outside of God's covenant; this explains why God was angry with Moses when Moses failed to circumcise his son (Exodus 4:24–26).

God determined to call out a special people for Himself, and through that special people He would bless the whole world.

The Lord tells Abram,
“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2–3).

Based on this promise, God later changed Abram's name from Abram ("high father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude") in Genesis 17:5. ***The Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional. It should also be taken literally. There is no need to spiritualize the promise to Abraham. God's promises to Abraham's descendants will be fulfilled literally.***

The Abrahamic Covenant included the promise of land (Genesis 12:1). It was a specific land, an actual property, with dimensions specified in Genesis 15:18–21. In Genesis 13:15, God gives Abraham all the land that he can see, and the gift is declared to be "forever." God was not going to renege on His promise. The territory given as part of the Abrahamic Covenant is expanded in Deuteronomy 30:1–10, often called the Palestinian Covenant.

Centuries after Abraham died, the children of Israel took possession of the land under Joshua's leadership (Joshua 21:43). ***At no point in history, though, has Israel controlled all of the land God had specified. There remains, therefore, a final fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant that will see Israel occupying their God-given homeland to the fullest extent. The fulfillment will be more than a matter of geography; it will also be a time of holiness and restoration (see Ezekiel 20:40–44 and 36:1–37:28).***

The Abrahamic Covenant also promised many descendants (Genesis 12:2). God promised that the number of Abraham's children would rival that of "the dust of the earth" (Genesis 15:16). Nations and kings would proceed from him (Genesis 17:6). ***It is significant that the promise was given to an aged, childless couple. But Abraham "did not waver through unbelief" (Romans 4:20), and his wife Sarah "considered him faithful who had made the promise" (Hebrews 11:11). Abraham was justified by his faith (Genesis 15:6), and he and his wife welcomed Isaac, the son of promise, into their home when they were 100 and 90 years old, respectively (Genesis 21:5).***

God reiterates the Abrahamic Covenant to Isaac and to his son Jacob, whose name God changes to Israel. The great nation is eventually established in the land where Abraham had dwelled. King David, one of Abraham's many descendants, is given the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:12–16), promising a "son of David" who would one day rule over the Jewish nation—and all nations—from Jerusalem. Many other Old Testament prophecies point to the blessed, future fulfillment of that promise (e.g., Isaiah 11; Micah 4; Zechariah 8).

The Abrahamic Covenant also included a promise of blessing and redemption (Genesis 12:3). All the earth would be blessed through Abraham. This promise finds its fulfillment in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34; cf. Luke 22:20), which was ratified by Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham and Redeemer who will one day “restore everything” (Acts 3:21).

Five times in Genesis 12, as God is giving the Abrahamic Covenant, He says, “I will.” Clearly, God takes the onus of keeping the covenant upon Himself. The covenant is unconditional. One day, Israel will repent, be forgiven, and be restored to God’s favor (Zechariah 12:10–14; Romans 11:25–27). One day, the nation of Israel will possess the entire territory promised to them. One day, the Messiah will return to set up His throne, and through His righteous rule the whole world will be blessed with an abundance of peace, pleasure, and prosperity.

The Root of Every Blessing: The Abrahamic Covenant (Excerpts)

William L. Krewson, Israel My Glory

The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant...

- **In the Nation of Israel**

The three components of the covenant can be traced through the Scriptures.

Land. The land promised to Abraham formed the basis for the Exodus from Egypt: “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:24). Moses led Abraham’s descendants out of Egypt; and Joshua led them into the Promised Land: “And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers, and they possessed it, and dwelt in it” (Josh. 21:43).

Under the reign of Solomon, the land was extended to the largest area possessed in ancient times (1 Ki. 4:21–24). Even though the Babylonian exile forced the Israelites from their land, they returned because of God’s promise to Abraham (Neh. 9:8). And though they were exiled again by Rome, the nation of Israel was reborn in 1948 and now inhabits part of its ancient homeland.

A brighter day is coming for that land of turmoil. The prophets foretold that Israel will be restored like the Garden of Eden (Ezek. 36:35) with fertility and peace (Amos 9:13–15).

Descendants. God’s promise of descendants from Abraham was realized in the Israelites who came out of Egypt (Ex. 32:13). The next generation entered the land; became a nation; and, by Solomon’s time, were “as the sand which is by the sea in multitude” (1 Ki. 4:20), a clear reference to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 22:17).

In or out of the Promised Land, Jewish people are always considered the children of Abraham: “Ye are the sons . . . of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (Acts 3:25).

Every Jewish person is living proof that God still keeps His promise to Abraham. Every attempt to persecute or eliminate the chosen line of Abraham is an attack against God and His eternal covenant. Despite Satan’s attempts to destroy the Jewish people, God will preserve them. A peaceful day is coming for this people, for their prophets envisioned a future gathering to the land of Israel when they will seek God and live in safety (Zech. 10:8–12).

Blessing. The promised blessing to and through Abraham is illustrated in the account of Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen. 20). While Abraham journeyed in Gerar, he feared that Abimelech would kill him in order to take his wife, Sarah. As a defense, he lied and said Sarah was his sister.

Although Abimelech did not knowingly steal another man’s wife, God implicated him, disciplined him, and threatened him with death if he did not return Sarah. In the end, Abraham took back his wife, prayed for Abimelech, and received payment from him. Abraham told the lie, but God protected him by the covenant. Abimelech “cursed” Abraham and was cursed; he then blessed Abraham and was blessed.

Throughout history, God has desired to bless His Chosen People Israel and, through them, all the world. However, God’s desire did not come to pass because Israel failed to obey Him and instead experienced His judgment.

But God, in His faithfulness to the covenant, has not rejected Israel. One day the nation will be restored to Him through the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34) when Messiah Jesus returns (Rom. 11:25–27). Then Israel will enjoy God’s blessing and will lead all nations in worshiping the true God (Isa. 2:2–3). Israel’s future kingdom will last a thousand years (the Millennium) and then usher in the New Heavens and New Earth.

- **In the Church**

Jesus, the Seed of Abraham.

God's promises in the Abrahamic Covenant find fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. Until His coming, the promises could never achieve their full realization.

When Mary learned she would bear the Messiah, she praised God for giving help to “his servant, Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever” (Lk. 1:54–55).

Zacharias the priest, father of John the Baptist, likewise tied Jesus' birth to the Abrahamic promises providing “the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father, Abraham” (Lk. 1:72–73).

The apostle Paul confirmed that Jesus came to fulfill the Abrahamic promises, not only for the Jews but also for Gentiles:

Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers [Abraham], And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy (Rom. 15:8–9).

The New Testament thus expands the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant to include both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul stated that the seed of Abraham consists of all believers: “And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29; cf. Rom. 4:11–12, 16).

The blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant are available in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed (Gal. 3:8).

The Abrahamic Covenant is actually the gospel in advance! The good news, or gospel, consists of God providing the blessing of justification to Gentiles who believe in Jesus, who is the seed of Abraham, “the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16).

The Holy Spirit. Another blessing Christians receive is the Holy Spirit:

Christ hath redeemed us . . . That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:13–14).

Christians have always been a remnant within every nation, from Roman times until today. Believers exist in every land as witnesses to the spiritual blessings that flow to Gentiles from God’s covenant with Abraham. ***Before Jesus, Gentiles were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).***

But Christians are no longer strangers to the covenants. They are grafted in through faith in the Jewish Messiah. Thus Paul urged Roman Christians to contribute to needy Jewish believers in gratitude for the blessings of salvation that came to them via Jesus: “For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things [Abrahamic Covenant blessings], their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal [material] things” (Rom. 15:27).

This present, spiritual fulfillment of Abrahamic promises to all Christians in no way negates God’s promises to the nation of Israel. When Jesus returns to earth, the Jewish people will continue as a people; they will obtain the land of Israel; and they will both receive and channel God’s blessing to the nations.

Listen to the encouraging words of the prophet Isaiah:

Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD (51:2–3).

ENDNOTE

1. In Gen. 15:18 the Hebrew for “made a covenant” is “cut a covenant,” a reference to the act of cutting the animals. The only other reference to it is Jeremiah 34:18–20.