

The Blessing: A Study in Genesis 12-36

Lesson 1

Genesis 12-13

A more unlikely candidate to become the father of the Jewish faith could not be found than Abram of Ur of the Chaldeans. He was in his seventies and he and his wife Sarai were childless. The likelihood of him becoming the father of a nation was miniscule. He was an idolater, a pagan. Like his relatives and neighbors, Abram and his wife Sarai, worshipped a pantheon of mystical gods, ruled by the moon-god whom they regarded as the “lord of heaven” and “the divine creator.”

John Phillips remarks on Abram’s life saying,

He had already done very well for himself. He was successful in business, happily married to an outstandingly good-looking woman, well established in the affections of his domestics and servants, and with a lineage and pedigree that could be traced right back to Adam. But rich as he was, respected and religious as he was, when the story of Abram opens, he was a poor lost sinner hurrying on to a lost eternity (*Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, p. 114).

And yet, to this man God appeared and gave specific instructions, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). Abram would become the father of the Jewish people and thus God would begin the fulfillment of His promise to send a Savior to the world! What a **blessing!**

I. Where Faith Begins – Genesis 12:1-12:9

Salvation comes because God issues a call of redemption in grace and sinners respond by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). God spoke to Abram. He initiated salvation by grace through faith (Hebrews 11:1-2). While the Scriptures are silent as to exactly how God appeared to Abram, it was a life-changing event. A divine transaction transpired and an idol-worshipping shepherd, a resident of Ur of the Chaldeans, stepped “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Chuck Swindoll writes, “The Lord chose Abram for reasons known only in Heaven. Abram did nothing to earn or deserve God’s favor” (Chuck Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad’s Amazing Journey of Faith*, p. 3).

God called Abram, who at the time, was 75 years old. He was of the line of Shem and would become the father of the Jewish people. Through Abram, God would begin the fulfillment of His promise in Genesis 3:15 to send a Redeemer, a Savior to the world. While Abram could not have grasped the enormity of his calling, in response to God’s instruction, Abram stepped out in faith.

John Phillips notes, “Thus Abram’s pilgrimage began where ours begins, with a vision of another country, a better country, a home forever blessed as the dwelling place of God. God speaks, we believe, faith dawns, life begins” (John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, p. 115).

In Genesis 11:31-32, we read that Abram departed Ur with his wife, his father, and his nephew in tow. Abram did not fully obey God’s instructions. Instead of leaving his relatives behind, he took his father and Lot along. He obeyed God partially by going as far as Haran, where the journey stalled for an undisclosed amount of time. When his father Terah died, Abram resumed the trek. When they had passed through the land as far as Shechem, Abram built an altar and met with God.

In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised Abram a great people, a great name, and a great blessing. These verses are known as the Abrahamic Covenant, which would be confirmed in a covenant ceremony detailed in Genesis 15.

II. When Faith Falters – Genesis 12:10-20

Abram was about to become familiar with the adage, “A faith that cannot be tested, cannot be trusted.” His newfound faith was about to be tested by God in ways he could not imagine. There were two things in Canaan that Abram most likely did not expect to find—the Canaanites and the famine! Like most of us in our early days of faith-walking, we thought all our difficult days were behind us after our conversion!

Famine in the land of Canaan managed to derail Abram’s faith journey. Having been born in a part of the world known as the Fertile Crescent, the Negev (which means “dry, parched”) must have looked like a wasteland. The very real threat of hunger and possible starvation played a part in his poor decision to go down to Egypt, which looked like a good solution to his pressing problems. It is possible that Lot may have played a part in this decision. In Genesis 13:10 when Lot was choosing the land he wished to inhabit, he made a reference to the land of Egypt being like the garden of the Lord. At any rate, Abram failed to consult with God as he led his family farther and farther away from God’s promised land.

Driven by fear for his own life, Abram instructed Sarai to lie and declare herself to be his sister rather than his wife. How quickly Abram had forgotten the covenant promises of God to make him a great nation and bless all the families of the earth through him. If God’s promises were true (and they are!), he was not going to be killed by Pharaoh. And since a child would need to be born to fulfill God’s promises, Abram risked interrupting the Messianic lineage of Christ by allowing her to be taken into Pharaoh’s harem!

Charles Swindoll writes,

By claiming to be Sarai’s brother, Abram hoped to leverage local custom to his advantage. He might, indeed, be killed as her husband, but ancient laws made

him her guardian as her brother. Anyone interested in taking Sarai as a wife would have approached Abram for marriage arrangements, giving him time to take self-protective action (Chuck Swindoll, *Abraham: One Named's Amazing Journey of Faith*, p. 20).

Abram's plan backfired. The tragic result was that she was taken into Pharaoh's house and added to his harem. Pharaoh rewarded Abram with gifts of "sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels" (Genesis 12:16). I suspect by this time Abram was exceedingly grieved for what he had done and assumed he had lost Sarai forever. Failing to believe God and trust His provision and plan is always detrimental, a lesson Abram would need to learn over and over again.

Swindoll gives us a helpful ancient world explanation, "Fortunately, ancient marriage rituals included a waiting period long enough to ensure that a bride wasn't already pregnant. So Sarai lived inside the palace but was isolated from sexual contact by anyone, including the king" (Chuck Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith*, p 21).

God sent plagues to Pharaoh's house because of Sarai's presence in the palace. When it was discovered that Sarai alone had been protected from the plague, all signs pointed to the foreigners as the source of the affliction. Pharaoh confronts Abram with his lies. Phillips captures the scene, "To all of his searing questions Abram could answer nothing. He stood there tongue-tied and embarrassed in the presence of the indignant king. What a tremendous opportunity for personal witness to the living God he had lost because he had compromised the truth" (John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, p. 119).

While Pharaoh could have imprisoned Abram or killed him, he chose to deport Abram. Genesis 12:20 says, "Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him." Many commentators believe that among the livestock and servants he acquired in Egypt was a female servant named Hagar! Detours from the faith-walk are always damaging to our spiritual lives. As the trek back to Canaan commenced, we can only imagine the icy reception the humiliated husband receives from his wife!

We marvel at Abram's foolishness and propensity to sin when faced with difficult circumstances, although sadly, we can all relate to him. But even more amazing is God's reaction. God rescued Abram from Pharaoh's wrath and even used the incident to increase the wayward man's wealth. Why? Because the Lord had made unconditional promises that must be fulfilled. And God did not utter those promises without the full knowledge of Abram's frailty, failures, and future. Beloved, we are operating in the same long-suffering and lovingkindness of the Lord who knows us fully and loves us unconditionally. Don't ever lose sight of that truth! Don't get used to it! We are **blessed!**

III. When Faith is Restored – Genesis 13:10-18

Abram, having failed so badly in Egypt, put as much distance as possible between himself and the place of his failure. The journey gave him time to ponder what had just happened and where he veered off the path of righteousness. He returned “to the place where his tent has been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8). Abram returned to the last place he had met with God, knowing He would be found. Praise God, failure is not final in the Lord! Through confession and repentance, we can be restored. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Genesis 13:2 tells us, “Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and gold.” Lot had obviously benefited from Abram’s prosperity, so much so that the land could not sustain the flocks and herds of both men. Strife between their herdsmen required a separation.

Abram gave Lot the first choice of the land. I think we can classify this as an expression of his growing faith in God. Abram believed God could provide for him regardless of the direction he chose. Lot made his decision based on what he saw, a well-watered valley region like the garden of the Lord or the beautiful land of Egypt towards Zoar (see Genesis 13:10). Sadly, he ignored what he knew about this region and “moved his tents as far as Sodom” (Genesis 13:12). Genesis 13:13 says, “Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord.” As we know, Lot’s decision would ultimately have horrific consequences (Genesis 18:20-19:26).

God assured Abram that in giving up what appeared to be the choicest of the land to his nephew and choosing to trust in God, he wasn’t sacrificing anything in the long run. God said, “All the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth” (Genesis 13:15-16).

Abram then moved his tent to the oaks of Mamre and built an altar to the Lord. In doing so, Abram was demonstrating the walk of faith. It is a journey of starts and stalls and stops, of falters and falls. But through it all, our God is faithful even when we are not. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:13, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” Beloved, trust the Lord. Rest in His faithfulness and “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1). God has **blessed** us to be a **blessing**, to make His name famous and His ways known! What a **blessing**!