



Promise

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Scripture: [Gen. 12:1-9](#)

Series: [Open \(5/50\)](#)

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Genesis 12:1-9

Please open your Bible at Genesis 12.

This is week 5 of our one-year journey through the Bible.

A quick review of what we have discovered so far: God introduces Himself to us as our Creator and therefore our owner. He filled the lives of the first man and woman with good gifts: a happy home, fulfilling work, a loving marriage, and fellowship with God Himself. All that the first man and woman knew was good, but they wanted the knowledge of evil, and we have been stuck with it ever since.

The knowledge of evil changed everything. Paradise was lost. The man and the woman were dislocated from their home, they experienced difficulty in their work, dysfunction in their marriage and they were at a distance from God. They were locked out from Paradise with no way back in.

The knowledge of evil spread and it grew. What Adam and Eve had chosen was in them, and when their children were born it was in them too. The world's first baby became the world's first murderer when Cain murdered his brother Abel. Violence increased until at one point in human history, God saw that "every intention of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil continually," (Gen 6:5).

But God had promised that evil would not have the final word. He promised that he would send a deliverer. From the beginning, the Bible is a story of hope. When sin entered the world, God promised that it would not stand. God would send a Deliverer, an offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

The story of how God will fulfill His promise begins in Genesis 12. Genesis 1-11 has been about the history of the world. But in Genesis 12, the story focuses in on one man and one family.

Abram, who is later renamed Abraham was born around 2000 B.C. (Gen 17:5). He grew up east of the Euphrates river where he and his family worshipped idols (Joshua, 24:2). Abraham served gods of his own making. He did not know the God who made him.

But one day, God of glory appeared to Abraham, just as He had appeared to Adam and Eve in the Garden. We are told this quite specifically in Acts 7:2:

...The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.

Here is this man who knows nothing about God. He is not looking for God. He is worshipping God's of his own making—he's an idolater. And the God of glory just appears to him, and says the marvelous words in Genesis 12:2-3:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The last part of the promise tells us why we should be interested in Abraham today. If God had said to this man, "I will bless you" the promise would have no relevance for us. God blessed someone in another part of the world 4000 years ago: What is that to us? Here's what it is to us: God says to Abraham, 'In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Genesis 12:3).

So, the promise to Abraham is a promise for us. The blessing given to Abraham is the means by which God's blessing will come to all the nations of the world. And this is why, from Genesis 12 on, the Bible story follows the line and family of Abraham.

We are emphasizing throughout this year that the whole Bible is one story. From beginning to end, it is about the Lord Jesus Christ. We are going to find that its main themes repeat again and again as we begin to grasp the essence of what God is saying to us in the Scripture. When we looked at the story of Noah, we saw that God's salvation, from the beginning was by grace, through faith, in Christ. We will see these themes are very clear in the story of Abraham.

1. God's Promise is a Gift of Grace (Gen 12:1-9)

Abraham worshipped idols. He served other gods (Josh 24:2). Abraham did not know God, he did not seek God, he did not obey God. But the Lord of Glory appeared to Him and said, 'I will bless you, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

It is as if God says, 'If I wait for man to seek Me and find me, they will never come. I will seek them, I will find them, and I will bless them. I will make myself known to them. That's how this blessing begins. That's grace. God was looking for you long before you were ever looking for Him.

There are two specifics in God's promise of blessing to Abraham.

i. A Blessed People

...And I will make you a great nation (Gen 12:2).

ii. A Blessed Place

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you, (Gen 12:1).

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land..." (Genesis 12:7)

The very heart of the promise is that Abraham will be blessed by becoming a father of a blessed people, and that they will live in a blessed place. That's the Bible story in a nutshell. It's all about how God steps into this fallen world, to gather a blessed people and bring them to a blessed place.

But there is a problem. God promises to make Abraham into a great nation, but Abraham has no children. He was 75 years old, and Sarah was just 10 years behind him. Think about this: Both of them were eligible for social security and well past the hope of having children!

And then there is another problem: Abraham sets out for Promised Land, but when he arrives, he finds that it is already occupied. The Canaanites were in the land, (v6).

So, God promises to make Abraham the father of a blessed people living in a blessed land. But Abraham cannot fulfill the promise. He has no children, and the place is already occupied. Only God could bring the promise about. The promised blessing is a gift of grace. It comes from God, and it depends on God.

We are going to keep coming back to this. It's all the way through the Bible. God is always taking the initiative. God is the one who moves to bring blessing. Otherwise it would never come about.

2. God's Promise Is Received By Faith (Gen 15:1-6)

Years passed without any sign of a baby arriving or of the Canaanites leaving. But Abraham believes the promise of God, though at times he wonders.

Sometime later,

The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision Fear not, Abram, I am, your shield. Your reward will be very great.' But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Genesis 15:1-2)

Abraham says, "The person who is going to inherit from me is a servant. I don't have a child. There is no line. So, what is it you're going to give me? God has promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation, but at this point he doesn't even have one child.

God brought Abraham outside, and what a moment this must have been. He told him to look into the night sky.

“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5)

‘Abraham, look at the stars in the sky. I made them all. And you can trust what I have promised. Even when a thousand things seem to be against it.’

When a thousand things seem to be against you, you can trust the living God to fulfill every one of his promises in regard to you.

Then we read these words

And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness, (Gen 15:6).

Abraham believed God, and God counted this believing to Abraham as righteousness.

This is one of the most important verses in the Old Testament because it tells us how we can come into a right relationship with God, (cf. Rom 4:3, 5, 9, 11, Gal 3:6, James 2:23). Abraham believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness (v6).

Three questions:

i. Why did God count Abraham righteous?

Was it because Abraham obeyed the command of God? No. It does not say, ‘Abraham obeyed and God counted his obedience as righteousness.’

Was it that Abraham worshipped, and prayed to God? No. It does not say, ‘Abraham prayed and God counted his prayers as righteousness.’

What we read here is that Abraham believed the Lord, and God counted his believing as righteousness. When Abraham believed, he became right with God. That principle runs throughout the Bible. But it leads to a second questions:

ii. What did Abraham believe that led to God counting him righteous?

It cannot be the case that when Abraham believed that God would give him many descendants, God said, ‘Oh good, you believe that you will have many children. Let’s just forget the foul ups of your life, and I will count you as being righteous.’ Of course not. The whole Bible is one story, given to us by God, and what is hard to understand in one place is explained more clearly in another place.

Roll the Bible story forward to the time of Jesus, and you find how to understand what we find here in Genesis. Our Lord had a conversation about Abraham, and this is Jesus telling us how we should understand the story of Abraham:

'Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad,' (John 8:56)

What an incredible statement! Abraham lived 2000 years before Christ was born. But Jesus is telling us that Abraham was given, by God, some glimpse of the day of Christ—what would happen when the promised deliverer came into the World. Abraham realized that there was more to this promise than him having many descendants. He understood that God would give him One Descendant in particular through whom God's promise to bless the world and overcome evil would be fulfilled. That descendent is Jesus, the Son of God who was born into the line of Abraham.

Abraham saw the day of Jesus and was glad! He did not have anything like as clear a knowledge of Christ as we do. I don't suppose for a moment that he knew the name of Jesus, or the details of his cross and death and resurrection. But he was given some anticipation that the Seed would come and that the blessing would be given. He saw the day of Christ from a distance, but he believed.

Abraham was saved in exactly the same way as we are. Though he did not know the name of Jesus or the details of the cross, he was saved by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham's faith looked forward to what Christ would accomplish just as our faith looks back to what Christ has accomplished. It is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ that we are made right with God. It has always been that way, even before He came into the world. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That's the unified story of the Bible.

The key question is not 'Do you have faith?' but 'Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?' Do you believe as Abraham did? In our confused generation, people think that what is being asked for is any sort of faith. We are not asking for some general faith. We are asking, 'Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?'

iii. How does believing make us right with God?

And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness, (Gen 15:6)

Notice that language: 'counted to him as righteousness.' What does that mean? Suppose you have a bank account that is in deficit, and a friend decides to help you. He asks you how much you owe. 'Its \$10,000,' you say.

Your friend asks you to give him your bank account number so that he can wire you the money. He is as good as his word, and when the transfer is made, your debt is paid. What went into your account went out of your friend's account. Your gain was his loss. What was counted to you was counted against him.

That's the language here. Abraham believed the Lord and He counted it to him as righteousness.

If God is to credit righteousness to every believer, He must assume a massive debt in himself. This is exactly what He did in Jesus Christ at the cross.

He who knew no sin became sin for us that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

The cumulative cost of our debt was loaded onto Christ. He bore our sin and He did it so that His perfect righteousness would be counted as ours.

When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father will credit the righteousness of His perfect Son, Jesus Christ, to you. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can put your name into this statement Genesis 15:6: '_____ believed and the Lord counted it to him/her as righteousness.'

How we become right with God is all about his grace. He moves toward us before we ever begin looking for him. He brings us into a right relationship with himself—not through our obedience or worship or prayer—but through the bond of faith where all our debt is counted as Christ's, and all his righteousness is counted as ours.

3. God's Promise Comes at Unimaginable Cost (Gen 22:1-18)

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Gen 22:1-2)

You read these verses and you wonder, what in the world is this all about? Why would God ask Abraham to do this?

God had promised that His blessing would come to the world through Abraham's offspring. But there was no offspring. Then, in a miracle of grace, God gives the offspring. And now, years later, God says that the blessed offspring must be given up!

How can the blessing of God come to the world if the blessed offspring is given up? Isaac must live, marry and have children in order for the promise of God to be fulfilled. What is God doing?

Two observations

i. Abraham did not question the need for a sacrifice:

God says,

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you,”
(v2).

Abraham does not question the need for a sacrifice. This is striking because when God told Abraham about the judgment on Sodom, Abraham stood before the Lord and pleaded for the city to be spared (Gen 18:22-23). But he makes no attempt to do that here. Why?

Abraham seems to understand that if God’s blessing is to flow to the world, a sacrifice must be made. Maybe his conscience told him that. After all, when God made the covenant with Abraham, he said walk before me and be blameless (Genesis 17:1). Abraham was a long way from being righteous. He had lied about his wife, and at one point laughed at God’s promise (Gen 17:17).

Yes, Abraham was a man of faith. Yes, he moved in obedience to God. But at best, he was obedient in part. He could not hold up his head and say, ‘I have done what God told me to do.’ He was not blameless, and neither are we.

So how can God’s blessing flow into a fallen world where none of us, even at our best, are fully obedient? This story tells us that God’ promise of blessing to a fallen world can only come by way of a sacrifice. But it tells us more than that. It tells us that God is the one who provides the sacrifice.

ii. Abraham believed that God would provide the sacrifice

“God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” (Gen 22:8)

As Abraham climbs the mountain with his son, there is this poignant moment. Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ Abraham said, ‘God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ (Gen 22:7, 8)

They continue with that conviction up the mountain. When they arrive at the top of the mountain it appears that Isaac will be the sacrifice. Verse 9 tells us that Isaac was bound and laid on the altar.

A.W. Pink points out that Isaac would have been a young man at this time.¹ Forget any artistic impressions you may have seen of a young child lying on the altar. Isaac carried the wood on his shoulders (v7). He was a man in the prime of his life, and he could easily have overpowered Abraham, who was over 100 years old, if he had wanted to.

¹ Pink, A.W. Gleanings in Genesis. Reformed Church Publications, 2015. Pg. 186

But Isaac didn't do that. Why? Because Isaac was willing to lay down his life. So, what you have here is a father willing to give up His son, and a son who is willing to give himself if that's what it will take to bring blessing to the nations of the world. They are together in it! They are as one in it! They say together, 'If this is what it takes to bring blessing to the world, this this is what we do.'

Then at the critical moment, the angel of the Lord calls out from heaven

"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him," (Genesis 20:12)."

And God provides the sacrifice.

Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son, (Genesis 20:13).

The ram was a substitute for Isaac. The ram took his place on the altar. And Isaac's life was spared, because the ram became a burnt offering instead of him.

The life of a ram was clearly of far less value than the life of Isaac. So, God was accepting a lesser sacrifice, for the time being, so that Abraham and Isaac should be spared. But both of them must have understood that one day a greater sacrifice for human sin would have to be made.

Abraham must have wondered, 'What in the world will it cost for God's blessing to come to the world? What sacrifice could be greater than the sacrifice of my only son? The answer to that question of course is the sacrifice of God's only son.

I hope that you will respond to this story in two ways. The first is that I hope you will pull back in horror. If you don't feel that you're not thinking about the story. You're meant to feel, when you read this story, 'What kind of unimaginable cost is this?'

And then I hope that you will react this second way: You can gaze with wonder at the reality to which it points. The story of a father being ready to give up his son and of a son being ready to lay down his life is here in the Bible to show us what it will cost for the promise of God to be fulfilled in order to blessing to come to the World.

God did what Abraham and Isaac could only illustrate. God the Father gave up his dearly loved one and only Son for us. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son (John 3:16).

And in union to that, God the Son laid down His life for us. Can you picture this? Isaac carrying the wood on his shoulders. Can you not see an anticipation there of the Holy Son of God carrying the weight of the wood of that cross on His shoulder as we makes his way to Calvary. He is the sacrifice. He stands under the fire of the judgement of God and becomes this burnt offering for us.

I want you to notice the union of the father and the son in this. Twice in this story of Abraham and Isaac we read of the father and the son together.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together, (Genesis 22:6)

You have the same in verse 8.

Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. (Gen 22:8)

That's how it was at Calvary. The Father and the Son were one in their self-giving for you and for me.

Which is harder, to lay down your own life or to give up the one you love? God experienced both agonies at the same time. God the Father did not spare his own Son but freely gave Him up for us all, (Rom 8:32). God the Son loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal 2:20).

God's promise of a blessed people in a blessed place is a gift of grace. It is received by faith and it comes to us at an unimaginable cost that God Himself bore for us.

*And when I think that God his Son not sparing
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin.
The sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee-
How great thou art, how great thou art²*

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² Carl Boberg. *How Great Thou Art*. 1885.