

TEXT: Genesis 12:1-9

TITLE: Promises to Abram

POINT: God reveals Himself as the Covenant Redeemer to Abram.

Recap: In the first service, we looked at the Tower of Babel, how mankind wanted to make a name for themselves and disobey the law of God to spread out. And the Lord judges the world by confusing the languages. And we will be continuing the series with chapter 12:1-9. READ.

INTRODUCTION

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, several years ago, when I went abroad for mission work, I met a brother who shared with me that when he became a Christian, his family abandoned him and cut off his inheritance, his fiancée broke up with him, and he also lost his job as an engineer. The cost of following Christ was huge for him. I remember I asked him if it was worth it, his answer struck me, he said, “when Christ has called me, I could only leave all things behind me and followed him in obedience.” The cost of following Christ came to many people at a great cost.

This is also what we see here in Genesis 12, we see that the Lord has called Abram out from his father’s house to an unknown place. How did Abram respond to God’s call? And what did he do in response to God’s covenant promises? This is what we will be looking at today.

Our goal is that you may faithfully cling to the One who graciously made His promises to you so that you may respond with faith and worship. We will be considering the text in four major headings:

- I. The Lord calls**
- II. Abram’s response in obedience**
- III. The Lord confirms**
- IV. Abram’s altars**

I. The Lord calls

Moses begins the chapter with God’s call to Abram, “get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.” This command appears to be very urgent. The reason is likely because this was not the first time the Lord has spoken to Abram. We know that from the end of chapter 11 when Moses tells us that they have actually already left Ur of the Chaldeans. But it is possible that the death of his father Terah was hindering Abram to travel further in the journey. So, when the command came to Abram here in chapter 12, the command appeared to be more urgent.

And we also see that this command was radical. It is because the Lord has not only told him to leave his country, but also to forsake his relatives and his immediate family to go to an unknown land. This is like calling a man to give up his inheritance and to go to a new country. But we must recognize that in this context, the call to abandon his family was connected to the person’s roots and past, usually connected to the gods that are tied to the family. And Joshua actually tells us in 24:2, “*And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.’”* So, it means that the Lord here was ultimately telling Abram to forsake his idols that he and his family used to worship, and to follow Him. So, what we see here was that the Lord chose Abram not because he was intrinsically a better person, but out of His electing grace. It is because we see here that Abram was an idol worshipper, it is out of God’s grace that He has chosen him from the darkness to follow Him. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, isn’t this what the Lord has done to us as well to save us? When we were dead in our trespasses and sins, the Lord has also called us out of darkness, to “repent and to follow Him!” The Lord’s calling for Abram was not different from ours, just as He told Abram to forsake the idols of his family, we are also called to abandon our sinful ways and idols to follow Him! How wonderful!

But notice that this radical command came with several wonderful and rich promises. But before we look at what the promises are, it is important for us to recognize that the promises being made here are covenantal, even though the word covenant did not appear. It is because if you remember what a covenant is: a binding agreement between two parties, usually between the king and servant. Here, we see that the Lord as a King was sovereignly making the promises, and Abram did not have the right to negotiate here. And we know that these promises were covenantal because these promises form the core of the covenant of promise that the Lord will make with Abram in chapter 15. In other words, what is going on here is that the Lord was promising Abram the covenant, and would later confirm it in chapter 15 with the sign of circumcision.

So, let us look at what the promises are. First of all, the Lord has promised to make Abram into a great nation. Remember that after the world has been scattered at Babel, the world was since divided into different nations. This is a promise that his descendants would not only be numerous, but they would also have a land of their own! But we must recognize that this promise to Abram was ridiculous, for two reasons. First of all, the Lord called Abram to leave his land and his father's house, meaning that he was abandoning the inheritance that belonged to him and became a pilgrim who has no homeland. Second, Moses actually tells us at the end of chapter 11 that Abram's wife, Sarai was barren, and she was already 65 years old. But here, we see that the Lord said that He would raise up a great nation from the descendants of Abram! What a promise!

Then we also see that the Lord has promised to bless Abram and to make his name great. What does that mean? Does it mean that the Lord would give Abram lots of money and lots of cattle and flock? Remember that the context here was covenantal! So, the word "blessing" here does not mean material blessing, but it means a personal covenant bond and relationship with Abraham. Remember what Psalm 25:14 says, "*The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant.*" God the Most High did not treat Abram as a lowly creature, but as a friend. How incredible?! At the same time, the Lord has also told Abram that He would make his name great! This is also significant! Remember that Abram was called to leave his homeland, once he has left, generations later, no one from his homeland would remember him. More than that, remember that this was what the builders of Babel wanted. They wanted to make their names great by their own strength. But we saw last week that the Lord said no to them, and here, we see that the Lord has graciously promised Abram to make his name great.

Not only that, the Lord has also promised Abram that He would make Abram a blessing. This is saying that Abram would become a medium of blessing to others. And because the Lord has blessed him, those who would bless him and his offspring would be blessed and those who would curse him and his offspring would also be cursed. But most importantly, the Lord has promised him that all the nations would be blessed through him. You see, God's plan was not to only bless one person and one nation, but His plan was ultimately to bless all people on earth, without distinction! This is the answer to Babel! The judgement at Babel was dispersion and the scattering across the face of the earth, but here, **the Lord said that He would gather them from all four corners in order to establish His Kingdom!** And we know that this would be fulfilled as from Abram would come the great nation of Israel, **and climatically fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, the True Seed of the woman, through whom salvation will be offered to the world!** Brothers and sisters in the Lord, can you see that Abram was the church in seed form? The Lord has set him apart from the world, He has blessed him, and called him to be a blessing to all the other people. Isn't this what the Lord has called the church to do as well? To be set apart? To be a blessing so that she may become an agent of redemptive grace! This is our identity as well!

II. Abram's response in obedience

So, after we have seen God's call of Abram, and the promises that He had made to Abram, how did Abram respond? Did Abram question the purpose of God? No! Moses tells us that Abram simply responded with obedience. He tells us that "Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him." This is remarkable! Remember that the Lord has called him to abandon his family ties, his inheritance, and his comfort to follow Him. These were not easy to give up! Also, notice that he was not a young man, Moses tells us that He was already 75 when he left Haran. But Moses tells us that Abram simply gathered all his possessions, his wife, his nephew Lot, and his servants to head toward the land of Canaan. This is a response of faith! This is telling us that Abram believed. He believed in the Word of the Lord! He believed that the Lord would carry out what He has promised! And Abram was holding on to the promises of God's word by faith. Hebrews 11:8-10 explain, "*8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" Brothers and sisters in the Lord, just as Abram had believed in the Word of God by faith, this is also a lesson for us that we must do the same! Remember that the Lord has given us His Word, which is contained in the Old and New Testaments! And He has promised us that He will one day come back to take us into glory with Him! Do you believe that? Remember that Hebrews 11 tells us that faith sees absent things. We are called to be like Abram, who was holding onto the Word of God, and walk through the world relying upon no other resource but the Word of God.

However, we must also recognize that this faith of Abram was also a gift from God! Abram could respond that way not because he had greater faith than you and I, but because the Lord gave him the faith to respond in such remarkable way. Faith was just the respond to God's gracious calling and assurance. The response of Abram was the work

of the Spirit of God, who moved in Abram's heart to assure him that the Lord would be faithful to His promise. But we see here that this should be how we should respond to God's command: when He acts in grace, we respond with obedience, willingly and cheerfully. And this response with cheerful obedience is the evidence of our faith in the Lord, who has graciously called us out of darkness to have fellowship with Him.

III. The Lord confirms

So, after Moses has obediently left Haran, Moses tells us that he and his family have come to the land of Canaan. This is quite significant! It is because Moses actually tells us that the Canaanites were settling in there. And remember who they were! The Canaanites were the descendants of Ham, the wicked people who were cursed and who were prophesied to be the slaves of Shem and Japheth in chapter 9. They were a people representing the seed of the Serpent. It means that the Lord has brought Abram into the land of his enemy.

But this was exactly the plan of the Lord, and when Abram has arrived at Shechem, the Lord said "To your descendants I will give this land." The promise here was not only a reassurance of the promise that the Lord would multiply Abram's descendants, but He was telling Abram that His plan was to give to his descendants this land. And if you gather what the Lord has promised Abram: a people, a blessing, and a land. These themes were related to the Kingdom of God in the garden of Eden! So, what is going on here is that the Lord was going to establish His Kingdom again through Abram and his descendants! But more importantly, we should also notice that the location of Shechem, Shechem was actually located at the center of the land of Canaan. So, what was going on here was that the Lord has not only brought Abram into a random piece of land, but He brought him, the seed of the woman, right into the center of the land of the land of the Serpent, and promised him that his descendants would inherit it. Can you see what the Lord was doing? He was establishing His Kingdom in the territory of the land of the enemy. He was claiming dominion over the land of the Seed of the Serpent!

IV. Abram's altars

And after the Lord has confirmed this covenantal promise with him, Moses tells us that Abram responded by building an altar! And he also did the same when he has moved to the mountains of Bethel. These altars are significant! It is because they were for the purpose of commemoration. They pointed to a tie to be established someday between the Lord and the people living in the land of Canaan. But more importantly, they are a form of worship! Remember that this was also how Noah has responded to the establishment of the covenant of preservation in chapter 8. The offering of sacrifice is a proper form of worship in the Old Testament, it is because **the sacrifice was a type of the work of the coming Messiah.** Hebrews 10:11-14 tell us, "*And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*" In light of the words of Hebrews 10, we see that the sacrifice of Abram was a type of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, Abram did not approach the throne of God by his own strength, but he did it through a sacrifice that pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose work at the cross has reconciled man unto God! Beloved in the Lord, this is where we see that the people of God are all saved by the same sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have suggested that the people in the OT were saved differently than we are. But here, we see that we were all saved in the same way through our Lord Jesus Christ. The sacrifices and types were all pointing the OT saints forward to the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Although they did not receive the fullness of what was promise to them, when they look forward in faith to the work of Christ through types or foreshadows, they were saved the same way we are, as we are now looking back to the Cross. How glorious!

More than that, also notice that Abram has also set up an altar between Bethel and Ai and called upon the name of the Lord. This is significant! It is because this phrase "*called on the name of the Lord*" recalls the time when Seth was born to Adam, there, Moses tells us, that "*the people began to call upon the name of the Lord.*" So, what is going on here is that the people of God has begun to worship the Lord again at the time of Abram. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, this is what you have been called to do as well, to call upon the name of God! Just as the people of God in the OT were calling upon the name of the Lord, we, who are the people of God in Christ today are also calling upon the name of God to worship Him in Spirit and in truth! So, when we gather together every Sunday, we have become the Sethites and the children of Abraham, who are calling upon the name of the Most High God. And may together look forward to the day, when all the saints of the past and now and future to come will gather and call upon the name of the Lord. Amen.

Let us pray.