

Genesis 12 - God Calls Abraham

I. Introduction

A. This morning we are going to look at the first two stories about Abraham in the Genesis account

1. The first story is God's call to Abraham to leave his country, people and family
2. The second story is Abraham's journey to Egypt

B. Like I said last week, we are going to look at these stories under four questions:

1. What are the promises?
2. How are the promises ultimately fulfilled in Christ?
3. How does Abraham respond to the promises?
4. What do Abraham's responses teach us about faith?

C. But, before I start this morning with Abraham, I want to talk for a moment about the Kingdom of God

1. The Kingdom of God is a major topic of the Gospels - in fact, Jesus' message was about the Kingdom of God
 - a. Mark 1:14-15 - *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*
 - b. So, the Kingdom of God is somehow at the center of the gospel that Christ proclaimed, but I think sometimes we overlook the importance of that topic
 - c. Christ's purpose in coming was to bring the Kingdom of God to fruition
2. But, when we start talking about the Kingdom of God, immediately we have questions
 - a. In fact, I think a reason we often don't focus on the kingdom of God is that it is hard to define. What exactly is the Kingdom of God?
 - b. There have been many good works written on this topic, but one that has been especially helpful to me is Graeme Goldsworthy's definition
 - c. Graeme Goldsworthy defines the Kingdom of God as 'God's People in God's Place under God's Rule'
 - d. This definition is useful because it captures each iteration of the Kingdom of God in Scripture
 - e. Starting with Eden, we had God's People, Adam and Eve, in God's Place, the Garden of Eden, under God's rule, God Himself walked in the Garden
 - f. The Kingdom of Israel again repeats this, we have God's People, the Israelites, in God's Place, Israel, under God's rule, the Theocracy
 - g. The church also fits the definition, God's people, believers, in God's place, the church, under God's rule in Christ
 - h. And the final consummation clearly fits the definition, God's People, all of the redeemed, will be in God's Place, the New Heavens and Earth, under God's Rule when Christ returns to take His throne
 - i. So, there is this theme through the Bible of God's People in God's Place under God's Rule
3. Why am I starting this morning by talking about the Kingdom of God?
 - a. Abraham's story is about the Kingdom of God
 - b. This morning we are going to see God come and give great promises to Abraham
 - c. As we look at these promises, we don't want to take a narrow view of what is going on, but instead consider it in terms of the whole Bible and God's redemptive purposes
 - d. And as we do that, I hope that we can see that God's promises to Abraham were truly redemptive promises, promises that God would again graciously install the Kingdom of God among mankind
 - e. So, let's read Genesis 12 and listen for the redemptive promises of God

D. Read Genesis 12

E. Four Questions: Promises? Christ? Responses? Faith?

II. What are the promises?

A. Genesis 12 is full of promises from God to Abraham

1. The rich density of promises in Genesis 12 underlines the fact that Abraham's relationship with God is based on His promise - I mentioned this some last week, but I will repeat it here again
2. Abraham's relationship with God is not based on faith, it is based on God's promise - Abraham's faith is merely his response to God's promises
3. In the same way, all of our lives should be based on the promises of God - II Peter 1:3-4 - *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*
4. So, the first thing I want to do this morning is simply note what promises are made to Abraham here in Genesis 12 - and I count four distinct promises

B. The first promise is found in the Genesis 12:1 and repeated and clarified in Genesis 12:7

1. Genesis 12:1 - *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.*
 - a. At first glance, this seems like a command, and it is a command from God to Abraham
 - b. But, there is a strong implied promise as well - God commands Abraham to go, but as Abraham goes, God will show him a land
 - c. So, the promise is that God will show him a land - this becomes the main topic of the next three chapters - how does Abraham respond to God's promise of a land?
 - d. To underscore this promise, it is repeated again in the middle of the chapter
2. Genesis 12:7 - *Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."*
 - a. The promise of land becomes clearer in verse 7 - the identity of the land is given, Canaan
 - b. The promise of land would have been a great promise back then, in fact, even now if someone promised to give you a country for your descendants to possess, that would be a very great promise
 - c. But, the greatness of the promise isn't merely in the physical blessing of having a land, it is a reflection of a major theme of Genesis that started back in chapter 1
 - d. In Chapter 1 and 2, God created and prepared a land, that is a garden, for His people, Adam and Eve, to dwell in where they had communion with Him
 - e. Graeme Goldsworthy points to this initial land to help us define what the Kingdom of God is, and He defines it as "God's People in God's Place under God's Rule"
 - f. But, the Kingdom of God was closed to humanity as Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden, they were kicked out of the place of God's Kingdom
 - g. If we use the concept of "God's People in God's Place under God's Rule" we can see that this promise is central to the kingdom of God by promising a new place where God's kingdom is
 - h. God promises to give Abraham a place, a land, where His people can dwell in communion with Him
 - i. So, this promise is a great promise because it is primarily a redemptive promise - God is undoing the curse of sin by promising a new land, a land promised to Abraham in the land of Canaan

C. The first and second promises are closely tied together and the second promise is found in verse 2

1. Genesis 12:2 - *And I will make of you a great nation*
2. Like the promise of land, this promise is another redemptive promise - it would be great on its own, but its true greatness is found in its redemptive nature
3. Coming back to the concept, "God's People in God's Place under God's Rule," God promises Abraham not only a new place, but also a new people
4. Adam and Eve had lost the right to be called God's people, but God promises that through Abraham there will be a new nation, a new people that will dwell in the new land
5. So, this is our second promise - the promise of land and the promise of a son - we will focus on this promise more in the second promise section starting in chapter 15, but the promise of a son is a promise

that there will be a people that will inherit the land and it is the same promise made here

6. Abraham will become a great nation that will dwell in God's land, there will again be "God's People in God's Place under God's rule"

D. The third promise is found in the middle of verse two

1. Genesis 12:2 - *and I will bless you and make your name great,*
2. The first thing that stands out about this promise is it recalls the preceding story of the Tower of Babel
 - a. Gen. 11:4 - *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."*
 - b. The goal of the tower builders was to make a name for themselves by ignoring God, but their purpose was thwarted by God who will make a name for Himself
 - c. On the other hand, Abraham is promised by God to obtain a great name - he would receive by promise what humanity could not take by force
3. Again, this promise is redemptive, it is not merely that Abraham would become famous and well known
 - a. As we discussed when we looked at chapter 2 in Genesis, the Garden of Eden was the place of God's blessing
 - b. The elaborate discussion of the trees and the rivers in Genesis 2 point to it being the place of perfect blessing to God's people
 - c. But, again, this blessing was lost when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, primarily symbolized in the loss of access to the Tree of Life
 - d. But, just as God has promised a new Place and a new People, God also promises a new blessing - God will bless Abraham - the benefits of communion with God will be restored
4. This helps us understand both the promise to Abraham and the sin of Babel
 - a. Babel, in trying to make a name for themselves, attempted to gain the benefits of communion with God without God
 - b. They wanted to make a name for themselves and build a kingdom from which they would not be dispersed - the concept of a great name is tied to the idea of an undefeatable kingdom - but the kingdom they sought was not God's kingdom, it was man's kingdom
 - c. But, in Abraham, God promises that there will be a blessed kingdom, a kingdom with a leader whose name is great, and therefore whose people will not be dispersed and that kingdom will be the Kingdom of God
 - d. As with the previous two promises, God is making promises to renew and reestablish the Kingdom of God with man

E. The fourth promise is found at the end of verse two through verse three and contains three clauses

1. Genesis 12:2-3 - *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.*
2. The promise is to make Abraham a blessing and then how Abraham will be a blessing is defined in three ways: blessings to those who bless Abraham, curses to those who dishonor Abraham, and blessings to all the families of the earth through Abraham
 - a. The redemptive nature of this promise is clear - redemption will not end with Abraham but will propagate through Abraham to all humanity
 - b. This is again a reflection of something that has gone before in Genesis - at the Tower of Babel, humanity was scattered, each family went its own way
 - c. So, as God promises redemption to Abraham, it would not be plainly clear that God's redemption would affect all humanity
 - d. But, God makes it plain, not only the curse of Eden but also the curse of Babel would be undone in God's redemptive purposes
3. But this last promise also states requirements on being joined to the blessing of Abraham
 - a. To be a recipient of the blessing of Abraham, one must bless Abraham
 - b. And if one dishonors Abraham, not only will he not receive the blessing, but he will be cursed
 - c. So, redemption is promised but also requirements are made to receive the blessing

III. How are the promises ultimately fulfilled in Christ?

A. In my previous point, I claimed that all of the promises of Genesis 12 are redemptive promises

1. If the promises are redemptive, then they should all ultimately be fulfilled in our redeemer, Christ
2. So, I want to spend the next point seeing how Christ has fulfilled each of these promises
3. And, as part of that, I want to see how we, in Christ, are the recipients of these promises to Abraham

B. I will show you a land and to your offspring will give this land are ultimately fulfilled in Christ

1. The author of Hebrews understood that the physical land of Canaan was never the ultimate promise, but rather a placeholder or a type of the greater promise that was to come
 - a. Hebrews 3:15-4:10 - *As it is said, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief...Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God*
2. And it is Christ who has truly gone before us to prepare and to show us the promised land
 - a. John 14:1-7 - *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*
3. God's place has been prepared in Christ who will lead His people into the New Heavens and New Earth

C. I will make you a great nation is ultimately fulfilled in Christ

1. Paul, in Titus 2, tell us that Jesus died in order to purify a people for His own possession
 - a. Titus 2:13-14 - *looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*
2. So that, in Christ, we are now a holy nation for God's possession
 - a. 1 Peter 2:9-10 - *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*
3. There have been many typological fulfillments of this promise through the ages, but it is in Christ and the nation that He has redeemed that this promise finds its fulfillment - God's People are found in Christ

D. I will bless you and make your name great is ultimately fulfilled in Christ

1. Philippians 2:9-11 - *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
2. Hebrews 1:3-4 - *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*
3. Christ, Abraham's son, has inherited the name above every name! He is blessed and His name is great! God's rule is found in Christ!

E. You will be a blessing is ultimately fulfilled in Christ

1. God blesses those who bless Abraham through Jesus
 - a. Romans 10:9-13 - *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*
2. But, God also curses those who dishonor Abraham through Jesus
 - a. Luke 20:18 - *Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*
 - b. John 3:36 - *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*
 - c. Matthew 10:33 - *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*
3. Abraham's line blesses every family through Jesus
 - a. Galatians 3:7-9 - *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*
 - b. Revelation 5:9 - *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*
 - c. Revelation 7:9-10 - *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

F. As we are associated with Abraham, that is in Christ, we receive these promises as well

1. Galatians 3:26-29 - *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*
 - a. We receive these promises because Christ is the recipient of these promises and we are in Christ!
2. In Christ, we have a promised land - II Peter 3:13 - *But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*
3. In Christ, we are a great nation - I Peter 2:9 - *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*
4. In Christ, we have a name - I Pet. 4:16 - *if anyone suffers as a Christian...let him glorify God in that name.*
Revelation 2:17 - *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'*
Revelation 3:12 - *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*
5. In Christ, we are a blessing - Rom. 10:15 - *"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

G. Through Christ, the Kingdom of God has come and in Christ we have received the Kingdom!

1. In Christ, God's People have been redeemed, God's Place has been prepared, and God's rule has been instituted! And, in Christ, all nations of the earth have been called to join the kingdom!

IV. How does Abraham respond?

A. Chapter 12 lists one of the most famous responses to God's promises in the Bible

1. And it is referenced many times in the Bible as an example of faith
2. Abraham "obeyed and went" when God called Him out of Ur of the Chaldeans
3. But, that is not the only response we see this morning, I think there at least three responses from Abraham that we can discuss this morning

B. But before we look at Abraham's responses, we need to recognize that what we just finished is very important to our understanding of Abraham's responses

1. Why do we care how Abraham responded to God's promises? And, more importantly, why would we think that Abraham's responses are somehow an example to us?
2. As we consider the question, we must see that Abraham's responses were responses to God's promises
3. And God's promises ultimately were made to Christ, Christ has received the promises of God
4. So now, in Christ, we also have received the exact same promises as Abraham, thus Abraham's responses can be evaluated and applied to us because we are responding to the same promises
5. We can see the promises more clearly now in Christ, but they are the same promises, so Abraham's right responses are right responses for us as well and his wrong responses are wrong responses for us too

C. The first response is the famous response, Abraham obeyed and went

1. We see it in Genesis 12:4 - *So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him.*
2. This response is clearly a response of faith, demonstrating Abraham's belief in the promises because:
 - a. God called Him to leave his country and believe that God would give him a new land
 - i. Genesis 12:1 - *Go from your country...to the land that I will show you*
 - b. God called Him to leave his people and believe that God would make him into a new people
 - i. Genesis 12:1-2 - *Go from your...kindred...and I will make of you a great nation*
 - c. God called Him to leave even his family and believe that God would through him bless every family
 - i. Genesis 12:1,3 - *Go from your...father's house...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*
 - d. Abraham had to believe God's promise because obeying meant giving up all these things, it was faith lived out in action, it was faith that believed the promises
3. And to intensify the faith required, God called Abraham to give up all these things and believe even though God didn't even tell him where he was going
 - a. There was no specific promise of what land God would lead him to at first
 - b. There was only a promise that God would lead him to a land
 - c. Abraham had to believe that God's promises were true and that God's promises were good even when he couldn't see the promise
4. So when Abraham obeyed and went it demonstrated great faith - he believed God's unseen promises more than he believed in the tangible benefits he was surrounded with

D. The second response from Abraham is found in verses 5-9

1. Genesis 12:5-9 - *When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country 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. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.*
2. Abraham went to the land that God showed him and Abraham lived in the land, built altars in the land, and called on the name of the Lord
3. Again, this response is a response of faith because:

- a. Abraham doesn't struggle to bring about the promise, He waits on God to fulfill His promise
 - i. When Abraham comes to the land that God promises Him, He doesn't try to take the land
 - ii. In the next chapter, we are going to see that Abraham has enough manpower to defeat powerful kings and good enough tactics to wage war well, so Abraham probably could have made a decent effort at trying to capture the land that God promised to him
 - iii. But we notice that he doesn't, instead he simply walks through the land that God said was his
 - iv. He doesn't ignore the promise, but he doesn't struggle to effect the promise
 - v. He believed the land was his, he sojourned in the land that was promised to him as a foreigner in a foreign land, but he never tries to capture the land, he waits on God to fulfill His promise
 - b. While Abraham waited on God, he worships the God who made promises to Him
 - i. Instead of trying to capture the land, Abraham's response to God's promise was to worship God
 - ii. As soon as the promise of Canaan was made specifically, Abraham builds an altar at Shechem, in the center of the promised land
 - iii. And then he journeys through the land and builds another altar at Bethel
 - iv. Abraham doesn't struggle, Abraham worships - His response to God's promise is not to try to bring it about on his own effort, but to worship the God who will fulfill His promise
4. Abraham's sojourn in the land was an act of faith - he believed God's promise and waited on and worshiped the God who made promises

E. The third response is less encouraging and happens in verse 10-13

1. Genesis 12:10-13 - *Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."*
2. Although Abraham has already seen the relative impossibility of him possessing the land, now another hardship plagues Abraham's sojourn in the land - a famine
 - a. When the famine came, Abraham did the natural thing - he went to Egypt where there was food
 - b. In fact, it appears that what Abraham did might be the right choice, no reason to die in the promised land, that won't bring about the promise
 - c. But, the natural response is rarely the response of faith - what looks right to us, what looks right in our own eyes isn't faith
 - i. Proverbs 16:25 - *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*
 - d. So, Abraham going down to Egypt is not itself a sinful action, nor is he explicitly turning away from the promise, he's merely doing what came naturally, but he did it without faith
 - e. The fact that he did it without faith is emphasized in his next action - he doesn't believe God will protect him and his wife, so he develops an elaborate half truth to deceive the Egyptians
 - f. As Abraham acts without faith, the situation starts to spiral out of control - his deception doesn't protect his wife, instead it endangers his wife - going to Egypt doesn't protect God's promise, instead it endangers God's promise
3. So, Abraham's response to the famine was not to wait on God and trust for His provision
 - a. Abraham just did what came naturally, he didn't seek God's wisdom and direction
 - b. And Abraham's lack of faith lands him in a dangerous position
 - c. So, the hero of this story is not Abraham
4. But there is a hero in the story - when Abraham endangers the promise, God acts to protect His promise
 - a. Abraham's bungling has led to his wife being captured by Pharaoh - how would Abraham's offspring inherit the land if there were no offspring?
 - b. But God steps in and brings plagues down on Pharaoh and his household and saves Sarah and Abraham from the hand of the Egyptians
 - c. God was faithful to His promise because He promised, not because of Abraham's faithfulness
 - d. As we discussed last week, Abraham's faith is a reaction to God's promise, not a basis of God's promise - God will be the hero of His promises

V. What do Abraham's responses teach us about faith?

A. Faith is running after God's promises even when we can't see them

1. Hebrews 11:8 - *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*
2. So, like Abraham, we must believe God's promises in Christ, even when we don't see the end clearly
 - a. Romans 8:23-25 - *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*
 - b. II Corinthians 4:17-18 - *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*
3. And, like Abraham, we must obey when God calls us to give up everything in this world and become sojourners waiting for His promise
 - a. We are commanded to turn away from the same things Abraham was
 - i. Abraham was told to leave his country, his people and even his family to go pursue God's promise - listen to what Christ calls us to in Luke 14
 - ii. Luke 14:25-33 - *Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*
 - b. But, Christ doesn't call us to turn away from these things without a reason
 - i. We can turn away from these things because the promise of God is better
 - ii. Luke 12:29-34 - *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*
 - iii. Like Abraham we are being promised the kingdom of God! It is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom! So, we can leave father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, even our own life and all of our possessions because Christ has given us a better promise!
 - c. In fact, the command itself becomes less of a command and more a promise when we are looking for the Kingdom of God
 - i. As we discussed above, God's command to Abraham was really a promise - a promise to show him a land - in the same way, when God calls us to leave everything here it is a promise - listen to Luke 18
 - ii. Luke 18:28-30 - *And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."*

B. Faith is waiting on and worshipping God

1. I think this is one important thing to glean from Abraham's story - Abraham received great promises, but he never brought them about by himself - the few times he tries to end in disaster
 - a. I think this is important, because there is an entire branch of theological thinking that says we need to install the Kingdom of God in this world by our efforts - it is often called Dominionism and is closely tied to Postmillennial Theology - the idea that we need to take dominion of this world and bring about the millennial reign of Christ before Christ will return
 - i. Now I point this out, but I do it humbly because I understand where these men are coming from and I think many of them are sincerely trying to follow Scripture as they understand it - but I also think these ideas are dangerous because that is not what Scripture calls us to
2. We, like Abraham, are not called to struggle to bring in God's Kingdom now
 - i. John 18:36 - *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*
 - ii. If Christ's Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, were of this world, then we would struggle to bring it in now - but Christ says that it is not of this world, so we don't struggle to bring it to pass
3. Instead, like Abraham, we are to wait on God's promises
 - i. Psalm 37:7-9, 34 - *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land...Wait for the LORD and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.*
 - ii. Philippians 3:20-21 - *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*
 - iii. II Peter 3:13-14 - *But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*
 - iv. Jude 20-21 - *But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*
 - v. We don't have to bring about God's promises, God will bring about His promises, all we have to do is wait patiently and be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace
 - vi. So, we don't need to conquer kingdoms or take over governments or try to rule this world - God has promised that we will inherit the earth, all we have to do is wait on God's promise, He will do it
4. But if we are waiting, do we just do nothing?
 - a. No, while we are waiting we are called to worship the God who makes promises
 - i. Romans 12:1 - *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*
 - ii. Hebrews 12:28-29 - *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*
 - iii. So, no we don't do nothing, we don't struggle to obtain the promise but we do spend our time worshipping the God who made us promises
 - b. So, instead of striving to bring about the Kingdom in our power, we worship God who will fulfill His promises and we call others to worship as well
 - i. When it says in Genesis 12:8 that 'Abraham called upon the name of the Lord' the sense is that Abraham worshipped God publicly, calling all around him to worship as well
 - ii. So, in this sense, we are working to bring about the Kingdom, not by trying to bring about the final consummation in our own power, but by calling others to wait for the promises and to worship God as well

Psalm 27:14
Psalm 31:24
Psalm 130:5
Lamentations 3:25-26
Romans 8:19-25
Titus 2:13
Hebrews 9:28
Matthew 10:22
Colossians 1:11
James 5:7-8

C. Faith is trusting in God and not ourselves especially when the way is hard

1. To understand how to learn from Abraham's journey to Egypt, first we must clearly define what he did wrong - and this is not exactly an easy task
 - a. But, I think we could summarize it as: when the famine came he trusted himself and his own cunning instead of calling on the Lord and waiting for Him
 - b. So, there are two sides to the problem: he didn't trust God and he trusted in himself
 - c. And when that happened, he found himself acting without faith - he was no longer waiting on God and worshipping, he was no longer living as though the promise were 100% true - he started living like he needed to hedge his bets or like God maybe needed his help to accomplish the promise
2. So, based on Abraham's actions, I want to make two simple statements this morning
 - a. When the way gets hard, trust God not yourself
 - b. When the way gets hard, make sure you're actions are from faith not disbelief
3. When the way gets hard, trust God not yourself
 - a. When the famine came, Abraham started trusting in his own wiles to get him through the trouble, we don't see him call on God or wait for God to answer
 - b. But Scripture clearly calls us to something different
 - c. Proverbs 3:5-8 - *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.*
 - d. We should spend our lives trusting God, not ourselves - *there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*
 - e. We need to remember this especially when the road seems hard, because when troubles come it is even easier to do the natural thing, but we need to make sure we are seeking God's wisdom not our own, that we are trusting God not ourselves
4. And as with our minds we trust in God not ourselves, then we must make sure our actions demonstrate that faith and not disbelief
 - a. As we just saw, when Abraham trusted himself, he started to act without faith, he started to act as though the promise might not come true unless he did something about it
 - b. But Scripture clearly calls us to always act in faith, act as though you really believe that God will accomplish every single one of his promises
 - c. Romans 14:22-23 - *The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*
 - d. Now I'm leaving this application a little open ended because, first, how to act with faith is particular to every individual situation so I can't even begin to address each situation, but also because acting with faith is not always the same for each person, as we see in Romans 14, but we must be acting in faith - if we aren't acting in faith we are acting in sin
 - e. So, we must always be acting in faith because without faith, it is impossible to be pleasing to God
 - f. Hebrews 11:6 - *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*
5. So, when troubles come, we need to guard our mind to make sure we are trusting God not ourselves and we need to guard our actions, to make sure they are demonstrating faith and not disbelief

VI. Conclusion

- A. This morning we've seen that God gave great promises to Abraham, promises of redemption for him and the whole world
- B. And we've seen that each of those promises has been fulfilled in Christ, and that, in Christ, we also have received these promises
- C. And we've seen that Abraham acted in ways that demonstrated faith or didn't demonstrate faith
- D. And since, in Christ, we've received the same promises as Abraham, we should learn from Abraham's responses and believe the promises of God

VII. Question: the people of Israel took the land, or Hebrews tells us to strive to enter God's rest

A. We must realize that something typological is going on in the book of Joshua

1. Joshua was a type of Christ who leads us into the land of promise - his name is even the same as Christ (Jesus and Joshua are actually the same name meaning savior)
2. So, the book of Joshua must be carefully applied to us by looking for Christ to return and lead us into the promised land - into the New Heavens and the New Earth

B. Hebrews notes that Joshua was a type of Christ who was to come

1. Hebrews 4:18-13 - *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

C. But, we also see that in that same passage, the author calls us to strive to enter that rest, but what is he calling us to strive for?

1. Hebrews 3:12-4:2 - *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.*
2. Hebrews 4:14-16 - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

D. This is really the theme of all of Hebrews - we strive to turn away from sin and unbelief - we strive to worship while waiting on God to fulfill His promise - we look forward to the next Joshua returning to lead us into the land

1. Hebrews 6:1-8 - *Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*
2. Hebrews 6:13-15 - *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.*
3. Hebrews 10:19-39 - *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God,*

and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

4. *Hebrews 11:13-16, 32-40 - These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city...And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets--- who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated--- of whom the world was not worthy---wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*
5. *Hebrews 12:3-17 - Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.*
6. *Hebrews 12:28-29 - Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*

E. So, yes, Hebrews calls us to strive to enter that rest, but our striving and struggle is against sin and for worship, it is not a struggle to capture this world