

ORIGINS

"THE BEGINNING OF MISSION"

GENESIS 12:1-9

This Week's Core Competency

Salvation by Grace – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. *Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Paul calls Abraham "the father of all who believe" (Ro 4:11; cf., Gal 3:7) because just as he was declared righteous by faith so are they. The apostle quotes Genesis 15:6, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness," in two places in the New Testament. In his defense of justification by faith rather than works to the Romans (chaps. 3-4), he asks rhetorically, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?" (4:1) and answers, "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (v. 2). Likewise he asks the Galatians, "Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" (3:5) and replies, "Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham" (vv. 6-7). He then explains how God announced the gospel in advance to Abraham by quoting God's words to the Patriarch: "All nations

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

– Genesis 15:6

will be blessed through you" (3:8; cf., Ge 12:3c). Galatians 3:29 encapsulates his thought: "If you belong to Christ," i.e., if you believe, "then you are Abraham's seed," i.e., Abraham is your father, "and heirs according to the promise," i.e., you receive the blessing mediated through Christ.

If Abraham is "the epitome of faith in the Bible" as one commentator says, good questions to ask would be: what did he believe, and when did he believe it? The answers to those questions can be found in Genesis 12: 1) Abram believed the promise God made to him (vv. 1b-3); and 2) he believed when God appeared to him in Mesopotamia (v.1a; cf., 11:31; Ac 7:2-4). What we have in Genesis 12:1-9 is not the Abrahamic covenant; the blessings offered there are not covenanted to Abram until later. In Genesis 15:2-3, Abram, still childless, inquires as to whether Eliezer, his servant, will be his heir, and God assures him, "a son coming from your own body will be your heir" (v. 4). Then God takes Abram outside and tells him, "'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (v. 5). At that point the text declares, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Because these words are not found until Genesis 15, some have concluded that Abram wasn't declared righteous until ten years or so after he left Mesopotamia. One commentator argues convincingly why that was not the case. He writes: "On the surface it may appear that this report of Abram's faith was a result of the preceding assurance from God—several English translations

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begin 'and Abram believed in the LORD.' The NIV leaves the conjunction 'and' untranslated to avoid the implication that verse 6 resulted from or followed verse 5 chronologically. A close study of the Hebrew construction 'and he believed' reveals that the writer did not intend this verb to be understood as a result of the preceding section" (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 309). The author goes on to defend his point from the construction of the Hebrew verb before concluding, "We must conclude that the narrator did not want to show sequence in the order of the verses; rather, he wished to make a break with the narrative in order to supply this information about the faith of Abram . . . In other words, the text does not necessarily mean that Abram came to faith here. Hebrews 11:8 asserts that he left Ur by faith. Genesis 15:6 simply reports at this point the fact that Abram believed, and for that belief God had credited him with righteousness. The verse is placed here as a conclusion to the dialogue in which Abram questioned God about the promise, and prior to the enacting of the covenant. Abram's status as a believer to whom God imputed righteousness is reported here—now God will bind himself by covenant to Abram the believer" (310).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

11:27 This is the account of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. 28 While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. 29 Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

Genesis 12:1-9

1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. 9 Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "had said" in v. 1.
- * Circle "go" in v. 1.
- * Highlight "I will" in vv. 2, 3.
- * Highlight inflections of "bless" in vv. 2, 3 in a different color.
- * Circle "you will be" in v. 2.
- * Box "so" indicating *result* in vv. 4, 7.

- * Box "as" indicating *comparison* in v. 4.
- * Underline "people they had acquired" in v. 5.
- * Circle "Canaanites" in v. 6.
- * Circle "appeared" in v. 7.
- * Bracket "built an altar" in vv. 7, 8.
- * Circle "called on" in v. 8.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Read Acts 7:2, 3 (cf. Ge 12:1). According to Stephen's testimony, God appeared to Abraham—not his father, Terah—while the patriarch was still in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran, but Genesis 11:31 indicates that Terah took his son, grandson, and daughter-in-law out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. Who then do you think made the decision to leave Ur? Explain.
2. Verse 1 records God's command to Abraham; verses 2 and 3 record his promises to him. What is the *implied* relationship between God's commandment and his promises?
3. The word "bless" is a familiar term in the Bible. What does it mean—how do you understand it?
4. In what ways did God promise to bless Abram?
5. Has God fulfilled his promises to Abraham—what do you think?
6. Explain the relationship of the paragraph beginning in verse 4 to the previous one.
7. Explain the significance of the *comparison* in verse 4.
8. What can we infer about Abram's spiritual condition from verse 4? (See Heb. 11:8; cf. Ge 15:6)
9. Abraham found Canaanites in the land when he arrived there. So what?
10. **Discussion:** Abraham built an altar in the vicinity of Bethel where he "called on the name of the LORD" (v. 8). The same expression occurs in Genesis 4:26 referring to Enosh and others in the line of Seth but with no mention of an altar. What exactly did the Sethites do (NIV margin, "Or to *proclaim*") and what does that suggest Abraham did?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

About this passage, in general, one author writes, "Within the book of Genesis no section is more significant than 11:27-12:9 . . . Abraham's obedience to the divine call, forsaking his homeland and family for the worship of the LORD in the land of promise, stands as an example and an incentive to all his descendants to follow suit. This will bring blessing on themselves and to the whole world" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15*, 281). On the point of 12:1-9, in particular, another writes, "The passage provides a paradigm of the obedience of faith. It shows a faith that left everything and obeyed the word of the Lord; but it also portrays a believer who proclaimed his faith. The narrative develops these ideas nicely in two cycles: the Word of the Lord and Abram's response to it [vv. 1-6], and then the appearance of the Lord and Abram's response to it [vv. 7-9]" (Ross, 262).

In the first cycle, God called Abram while he was still in Mesopotamia and promised to bless him in three ways provided he obeyed the command, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you" (ESV). One writer categorizes these promises this way. "First there were personal promises given to Abram. God said, 'I will bless you; I will make your name great.' Then there were national promises given to this childless man. 'I will make you into a great nation.' And finally there were universal promises that were to come through Abram. 'You will be a blessing . . . and all people on earth will be blessed through you'" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy kingdom Come*, 52). Abram clearly believed God's promise because he went "as the LORD had told him." Hebrews leaves no doubt about it, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (11:9). Moreover, Romans declares that Abraham was justified by faith (4:3).

On whether people are justified, deemed righteous by God, by faith or doing good works, Paul writes in Romans 4:1-5, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but not before God. What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" Then Paul goes on to explain. "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." In other words, God credited

Abraham's faith in the promise God made to him while he was still in Mesopotamia as righteousness before he had done any good works to merit it. Paul puts it this way. "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteous might be credited to them" (Ro 4:10, 11).

Abraham's experience flies in the face of world religions and contemporary spiritualities that teach one day everybody will stand before God, who will then judge each person one by one and reward everyone who has done more good than bad in heaven and punish everyone who has done more bad than good in hell. Abraham was declared righteous because he believed God not because his good works outweighed his bad. This means that people aren't on the road to heaven because they are decent, sincere people who try to live by the Golden Rule or faithfully adhere to the tenets of a particular religion, or any such thing. People are on the road to heaven because they have faith in God's promise to save those who trust in Jesus Christ.

When Abram left Haran, Sarai and Lot went with him along with "the people they had acquired" there (v. 5). "This expression probably does not refer to the acquisition of slaves, for the Hebrew word *nepeō* would not likely be used for that. And it certainly does not refer to their children, because Sarai was barren until Isaac's birth (21:1-7). Cassuto argues that this expression probably refers to proselytes (*ibid.*, p 320). If he is correct, then the narrative implies that, already in Haran, Abram had been sharing his faith in the Lord" (Ross, 265). When he arrived in Canaan, the land was occupied. Canaanite antagonists were there, which explains why he did not immediately inherit the land.

In the second cycle God appeared to Abram to confirm the promise he had made to him (vv. 7-9). At first, the LORD spoke to Abram; then he appeared to him. Their relationship was growing more intimate. Abram responded by building an altar to the Lord and by worshipping. As he headed south to survey the land God promised him, he pitched his tent in Bethel, built an altar there, too, and "called on the name of the LORD." This expression probably refers to something other than prayer. Luther translated the Hebrew verb

"preached" (*predigte* in German) suggesting that in worship Abraham proclaimed the name of the Lord (i.e., his attributes and actions). "The Lord promised to make Abram's name great, to make him famous,

and Abram responded by proclaiming the name of the Lord-making the Lord famous in Canaan, as it were" (Ross, 267).

The Message of the Passage

Those who believe and are made righteous like Abraham are to respond by obeying God and proclaiming their faith like he did.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

11:27 **the account of** This Hebrew term occurs repeatedly throughout Genesis—each time marking the beginning of a new section of the book (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). As the heading of each new section, it introduces what became of or what happened following the ancestor mentioned. Therefore, the account of Terah is not actually about Terah; it is really about who proceeded from Terah, namely, Abraham and his kin. "It is the father of the principal hero of the succeeding tales who gives his name to the family history" (Wenham, 256). "We may reconstruct the chronology as follows: Abram received the word from God in Ur, the family left Ur to go to Canaan (11:31) by going through Haran (apparently the ancestral home), Terah died in Haran (v. 32), and Abram continued on to the place that God had promised (12:4). The record of the Word of the Lord to Abram (vv. 1-3) was placed at the beginning of the Abraham stories proper, after the report of the death of Terah" (Ross, 258).

v. 32 **205 years** If Abram was born when Terah was 70 (11:26), and was 75 when he left Haran (12:4), then Terah must have been 145 when Abram left and must have lived another 60 years in Haran before he died since he lived 205 years (11:32). But Ac 7:4 indicates Abram left Haran after Terah died. Perhaps Terah's son, Haran, was the oldest seeing he died first (11:28) and Abram was born much later, or perhaps Stephen was following the Samaritan Pentateuch of Ge 11:32, which indicates Terah lived 145 years (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 190).

12:1 **leave** Lit., "go for yourself." Abram is to disassociate himself from his familiar surroundings to discover his new identity in a new place. Hence the translation "Go by yourself from your country . . ." (Wenham, 266). "Go, you by yourself, or only with those who are united to you in unique relationship, go on the way that belongs to you alone, and leave behind your kinsfolk amongst whom you have lived till now and who do not wish or are not able to associate themselves with you in your new way" (U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II From Noah to Abraham*, 311).

v. 1 **had said** God spoke these words to Abraham when he was in Ur, not Haran. "It is not really necessary to translate 12:1 'the LORD had said'—even though such a translation is one way to resolve the apparent discrepancy of the location of the call (cf. Gen. 11:31-12:1 with Acts 7:2-4)" (Ross, 258).

v. 2 **great nation** "A 'nation' is a political unit with a common land, language, and government . . . A large population, a large territory, and a spiritual character make a nation great (cf. 12:7; 13:14-17, etc.; Deut 4:7-8)" (Wenham, 275).

v. 3 **bless** "If the word 'bless' (*barak*) essentially conveys spiritual and physical enrichment and, within the narratives of Genesis, the gift of fertility in accord with God's program, then this cohortative is closely bound up with the other two promises in verse 2. God would give Abram fame and fertility" (Ross, 263).

v. 2 **will be a blessing** The NIV makes this sound like a prediction but in fact, the verb retains the force of an imperative. Cf., "you shall be a blessing" (NKJV). "If Abram would get out of Ur, God would do three things for him, so that he could then be a blessing in the land (the second imperative); and he had to be that blessing so that God would do three more things for him. This symmetry should not be missed, for it strengthens the meaning. Abram's calling had a purpose: his obedience would bring great blessing" (Ross, "Genesis," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 47).

v. 3 **will be blessed** Blessings come through Abraham (cf. v. 2) but their ultimate source is God. One translation makes this clear, "And through you I will bless all the nations" (TEV).

v. 4 **left** The Hebrew verb in verse 4 corresponds to the primary verb of Abraham's call in verse 1. This correspondence is reflected in the NIV. The Lord commanded Abraham to "leave" and he "left." "The point is clear: Abram went as an act of obedience to the Word of the Lord, not as a natural migration" (Ross, 265).

v. 5 **Lot** Abram may have viewed Lot as his heir.

v. 5 **all the people** If this refers to *proselytes*, Abram had been sharing his faith in the Lord in Haran.

v. 6 **traveled** Cf., Jos 24:3. "Abram entered the land of Canaan via the northern border and journeyed southward, at first as far as the place of Shechem, subsequently further south to the district of Bethel, and finally further south still, to the Negeb" (Cassuto, 322, 23)

v. 6 **great tree of Moreh** Mention of this tree casts an ominous shadow over the narrative since it refers to a place associated with idol worship (see Hos. 4:13). Moreover, Canaanites were in the land. Abraham found himself in alien territory among people who worshipped local deities.

v. 6 **Shechem** Located in the central part of the land.

v. 8 **Bethel** An important biblical site just north of Jerusalem.

v. 8 **called on the name** Perhaps this means more than Abrahammerely *worshipped* the Lord (cf. Ge 4:26).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

The story of the call of Abram in Genesis 12:1-10 is rich with many lessons. Play this fun game with your kids to get them thinking about the story. Hide a treasure (candy, a new toy, movie tickets) somewhere in your house or outside. Make sure there is enough of the treasure to share. Create a map that leads children around the house or yard and eventually to the treasure. Tell them that God called Abram to go on a journey but the difference is he didn't have a map! He only knew that he was to follow God and that there would be blessings when he obeyed. God promised Abram He would bless him and He would make him a blessing to others. Once your kids have found the treasure, encourage them to think of someone they can share it with. They were blessed and can be a blessing to someone else! This would be a great time to talk about ways your family is a blessing to others. Does your family tithe? What a blessing to God's church and His work. Does your family participate in mission initiatives like Angel Tree or the ChooseLife 5K? What a blessing to those in our community who are in need! Do you serve your neighbors when they are in need? What a blessing to your neighborhood! We are blessed to be a blessing!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ge 12:1-10

1. Did God tell Abram exactly where he was going?
2. Who went with Abram?
3. What did Abram build after the Lord appeared to him?

What Do You Think

1. How did God use Abram to bless all the people on earth?
2. What would you think if God told you to leave your house but didn't tell you where you were going?
3. Did Abram trust God to lead him? Do you?

What R U Going To Do

Make a list of ways you can be a blessing to others. It can include cleaning your sister's room or taking out your neighbor's trash. Maybe you can sell lemonade and give the money to help others. Pray about it and do it this week!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Salvation by Grace - I believe that I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

Memory Verse

Ps 100:5 - For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.