

Third Presbyterian Church
Midweek Bible Study
Miracle Series – Call to Abram
Lesson 19 – Faith to leave our Comfort Zones

Genesis 12:1-4 (NIV)

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.

1. Why did God call for Abram to leave his country, his people, and his father's household?
 - a. The sermon used a term "Separated to be Elevated." Explain this concept and talk about a time when God called for you to be separated before you were elevated.
2. Abram didn't answer God in the affirmative the first time God called him. It was not until this second call that Abram was obedient to God.
 - a. What is your response to this delay in answering God as it relates to God's call in your life and the call of God in the lives of others around you?
3. How do comfort zones form a false sense of security?
4. Why does God constantly call us to step out of our comfort zones?
 - a. Give example of you accepting God's call to leave your comfort zone and what was the result of this obedience?
5. Too many are waiting on an ABRAMIC call to serve the Lord when we have not prepared ourselves to hear God nor to respond to that kind of call.
 - a. Why does God not give this kind of call to someone new in the faith?
 - b. What do we need to do to prepare ourselves to hear and receive this kind of call from God.
6. What are ways we can break out of our comfort zones to receive and respond to the call of God in our lives.
7. Our Praise is directed to the direction our faith points.
 - a. Agree or disagree with this statement...Why?
 - b. Give example to explain this truth.
8. Share your main takeaway from the sermon and the lesson?

A. God's Great Call to Abram, (The Abrahamic Covenant, Part 1): The Call to a Life of Separation From the World, [12:1](#)

(12:1) Introduction— Separation— Abraham: there was the call of God to Abram, the call to live a life of separation. God called Abram to the most difficult task a person can ever face: that of changing his life, of completely turning around and forsaking everything in this world he loves and finds dear. God called Abram to leave and forever separate himself from...

- his country.
- his relatives.
- his father's house, the family's possessions and property.
- the love, care, support, security, and approval of the people he knew and held dear.

Why? Why would God call Abram to give up the very things that mean so much to a person? For this very reason: the people and things of the world apparently meant too much to Abram. Abram was putting his world and family before God, putting their love, security, possessions and approval before God.

How do we know this? Because this was God's second call to Abram. He had not followed through with God's first call. Remember, Abram and his family were now living in Haran. They had left Ur of the Chaldees some years before when God first called Abram ([Genesis 11:31-32](#)). God's first call issued at Ur is unquestionable. Scripture is clear about this:

⇒ Stephen, in his great sermon right before his martyrdom, declared that God first called Abram in Ur:

"And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia [Ur of the Chaldees], before he dwelt in Charran (Haran), and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee" ([Acts 7:2-3](#)).

⇒ God Himself reminded Abram of the first call:

"And he [the Lord] said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" ([Genesis 15:7](#)).

⇒ Nehemiah referred to the first call:

"Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham" ([Neh. 9:7](#)).

The second call is now issued while Abram is in Haran. This is seen in two facts.

First, the Hebrew text reads, "The Lord said to Abram," not "had said." The past perfect tense "had said" used by some translations is most likely an attempt to make this call the same as the call issued at Ur, an attempt to reconcile this passage with [Acts 7:2](#) (cp. KJV and NIV). But as stated, the Hebrew text points strongly to two calls, the first being given in Ur of the Chaldees, and the second now being issued in Haran.

Second, the Hebrew word "and" or "now" (waw) is connecting and adding to the events of Abram's life in Ur ([Genesis 11:31-32](#)) not repeating the events. A different experience in Abram's life is now being given, not an old experience recovered. The first call is not being explained; a second call is being issued.

The point is this: apparently Abram did not go all the way with God, not when God first called him. Abram started out following the promises of God when he left Ur to begin his journey, but he stopped in Haran, far short of the promised land. Why? Was his reason legitimate, or was he distracted by some worldly attraction or greed?

⇒ Did Terah, Abram's father, become ill? Abram had remained in Haran for at least five years. Thus it is unlikely that an illness of Terah's had kept Abram in Haran. It is possible, but most unlikely, that Terah would have been ill for five years. (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, Vol.1. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, p.83; Herbert Lockyer. *All the Books and Chapters of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958, p.12).

⇒ Did Abram backslide, lose his zeal and commitment in following after God and His promises?

⇒ Did some business opportunity arise in Haran that attracted Abram, and he gave in to the temptation of greed?

⇒ Did Terah and the immediate family put pressure on Abram to remain in Haran?

Abram's reason for stopping in Haran is not stated; therefore, we cannot be absolutely sure why he remained in Haran. But based upon the threefold demand of God for separation, the weight seems to be that Abram had backslid, that he had lost sight of God's call to separation. God was apparently striking at the very things that had distracted Abram from God's call, striking at the very things that had led Abram to backslide and forsake the promised land. This is the subject of this great passage: *God's Great Call to Abram (The Abrahamic Covenant, Part 1): The Call to a Life of Separation from the World*, [12:1](#).

[1. The call to separate from his country \(v.1\).](#)

[2. The call to separate from his relatives \(v.1\).](#)

[3. The call to separate from his father's house \(v.1\).](#)

1. (12:1) Separation— Abraham— Country— Worldliness: Abram was to leave and separate from his country. A person's country means...

- the land where he was born, lives, or holds citizenship.
- the land of his own people and language.
- the land of his own culture and environment.
- the land of his own society and community.
- the land of his own government and laws.

A person's own country usually means the land of his own people, the people he looks like, talks like, and acts like. Abram was being called to leave his old country and forever separate from it: to separate himself from the people, culture, environment, behavior, and language of his past. Why would God demand of Abram such a thing as *separation*? Because the people of his world had become...

- idolators
- false worshippers
- ungodly
- immoral
- covetous
- lawless
- wicked

The people of Abram's world had forsaken and denied the only living and true God. They were self-sufficient and humanistic, living only for this world and its pleasures and possessions.

It was impossible, totally impossible, to live for God and for the world at the same time. The ways of this world—its flesh, lusts, pleasure, possessions, and greed—did just what the ways of the world always do: corrupt men. Consequently, God had no choice: God had to demand that Abram live a life of separation, that he separate from the worldliness of his country.

Abram was being called to a new life, to start life all over again, to seek after a new country—the promised land—that God would show him (see note—[Genesis 12:1c](#) for more discussion).

Thought 1. The life of separation—separation from the world—is not a heartless demand of God. It is simply the demand that we separate from the ungodly, immoral, and covetous ways of this world. This world is notoriously wicked in the sight of God and should be to us.

"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward [perverse, crooked] generation" ([Acts 2:40](#)).

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" ([Romans 12:2](#)).

2. (12:1) Separation— Abraham— Family— Relatives: Abram was to separate from his relatives. Relatives means parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins—all the people within a family who are related by blood. Most persons have a close bond with a few family members and relatives, and there is always pain and emptiness when that bond is broken. Family and relatives—especially in the ancient world—provided love, care, acceptance, support, responsibility, training, education, and security for one another. This would have been true with Abram and his family and close relatives. It must have been very difficult for Abram to leave and forever separate himself from his loved ones. Yet this was exactly what God demanded of Abram.

But again, why? Why would God demand that Abram separate himself from his family and relatives? Because the people in Abram's day were living immoral and wicked lives, and the family had been heavily influenced by their neighbors: the family had given itself over to the worldliness of their day. Abram's family had become...

- idolaters
- false worshippers
- ungodly
- immoral
- covetous
- lawless
- wicked

Imagine! Abram's family had even become idolaters, worshippers of false religion. They had rejected the only living and true God, worshipping the man-made religion of their day. (See note—[Genesis 11:27](#); note—[Genesis 11:27-28](#); and note—[Genesis 11:29](#) for more discussion.)

This was the reason God called Abram to leave and separate from his family and relatives. This was why God called Abram to turn away from his old life and begin a new life...

- a life that would be totally separated from the world and its pleasures and possessions.
- a life that would be totally separated to God, totally committed to God, and that would diligently seek after God and His promises.

Thought 1. The life of separation—separation from family and relatives—is not a heartless demand of God. It is simply the demand that we be totally separated to God, that we put God first in our lives, even before family, relatives, and friends.

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" ([Matthew 22:37-38](#)).

3. (12:1) Separation— Worldliness— Greed— Possessions— Pleasure— Abraham: Abram was to separate from his father's house, that is, from both the immediate family and the family's holdings, their property and possessions. Remember: Abram's father, Terah, had just died; therefore Abram was to inherit a part of the property and possessions of Terah. Scripture does not say what the inheritance was, but the land or property of the household must have been great. Nevertheless, God demanded that Abram leave and separate from his father's household, its property and possessions.

Why would God not want Abram around his family, their property and possessions? Because the family had become heavily influenced and enslaved by the greed of this world, the lust for worldly...

- possessions
- property
- furnishings
- comfort
- power
- recognition
- influence
- position
- honor

Greed—the lust for more and more—arouses the human heart and flesh. Abram and his family had apparently become enslaved by the possessions of this world, the lust for more and more. Their minds and hearts were given over to seeking the things of this world, not the things of God. Consequently, God had to demand that Abram break away from his family, that he be totally separated from those who were enslaved by the greed for more and more. Abram had to get away from his family and their holdings, get away from the worldly influence of those who were always seeking after the possessions of this world.

Thought 1. The life of separation—separation from one's house, from one's immediate family, and from the family's possessions—is not a heartless demand of God. A person is often ruined by the worldly influence and greed of family members. Worldliness and greed will destroy us. Therefore, when God calls us to turn away from the worldliness and greed of family members, it is not a heartless demand.

⇒ It is simply the demand that we focus our minds and hearts first of all upon God.

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" ([Matthew 22:37-38](#)).

⇒ It is simply the demand that we put God first in our lives, before family members, even before father or mother.

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" ([Matthew 10:37](#)).

⇒ It is simply the demand that we seek God first, seek Him even before food, shelter, and clothing.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" ([Matthew 6:33](#)).

⇒ It is simply the demand that we focus our attention and affections on things above, lasting things, not on things of the earth, things that are temporary.

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" ([Col. 3:2](#)).

⇒ It is simply the demand that we not trust in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God.

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" ([1 Tim. 6:17](#)).

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" ([Luke 14:33](#)).

⇒ It is simply the demand that we exchange the riches of this world for the treasures of heaven.

"Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions" ([Mark 10:21-22](#)).

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" ([Phil. 3:8](#)).

Thought 2. Note one other significant fact: the Hebrew actually reads: "Go for yourself" or "Leave for yourself." God was calling Abram to leave and get away from his old life *for himself*, that is, for his own benefit, good, and welfare. Abram would reap enormous results if he separated himself from the ungodly of this world. It was for his welfare, profit, gain, and advantage that God was demanding a life of separation from the ungodly of the world. So it is with everyone of us.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" ([Matthew 6:33](#)).

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" ([Col. 3:2-4](#)).

B. God's Great Call to Abram (The Abrahamic Covenant, Part 2): The Great Promises of God, [12:1c-3](#)

([12:1c-3](#)) Introduction— Promises— Land, The Promised— Seed, The Promised— Abraham— Israel—

Jews: there were three promises made to Abram, three very special promises. Note that these promises were conditional, and Abram had to do exactly what God demanded in order to receive them.

⇒ If Abram believed God and did what God said, he would receive the promises of God.

⇒ If Abram did not believe God and refused to do what God said, he would not receive the promises of God.

Abram had to believe God—believe God enough to obey, enough to separate from the world he knew—and follow after God and His promises. Another way to say the same thing is this: Abram had to believe God enough to make the supreme sacrifice to God, the sacrifice of himself. Abram had to sacrifice his life, his world, and all that he was and had. Abram had to totally give himself over to God. Abram had to surrender, submit, and deny himself: he had to totally commit his life to God. He had to die to self and seek after God with his whole heart.

If Abram believed and obeyed God that much, God would do these three very special things for him. These three things make up the message of this great passage: *God's Great Call to Abram (The Abrahamic Covenant, Part 2): The Great Promises of God, [12:1c-3](#).*

1. God promised to give Abram the promised land (v.1c).

2. God promised to give Abram *the promised seed*, meaning a great nation of people (v.2-3).
3. God promised to give Abram *the promised seed*, meaning the Messiah, the Savior of the world: a special blessing to all the people on earth (v.3b).

Note that God's promise to give *the promised seed* had a double meaning. It meant both...

- the seed of a great nation of people ([Genesis 12:2-3a](#)).
- the seed of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself ([Genesis 12:3b](#)).

1. (12:1) Land, Promised— Inheritance— Heaven— Rest, Spiritual: God promised that He would give Abram *the promised land* ([Genesis 12:1c](#)). The Hebrew here actually says that God will *show* him the land, but [Genesis 12:7](#) tells us that God was actually promising the land to Abram. What land? God did not say; He did not identify the land. Note this:

⇒ The land was only promised: it lay out in the future; it was not to be immediately possessed. The land was just what believers have called it for centuries, *the promised land*. It was to be the great hope of Abram. This is the reason the land of Canaan is referred to as *the promised land*.

All Abram had to go on was the promise of God, on what God had said. Abram had to step out in faith and believe God's Word—His promise—about *the promised land*. Note several facts about this great promise to Abram.

1. *The promised land* definitely refers to Palestine, the land of Israel. This is clearly stated by God time and again.

a. Note God's promise to Abram.

"And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him" ([Genesis 12:6-7](#)).

b. Note God's promise to Abram's son, Isaac.

"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father" ([Genesis 26:3](#)).

c. Note God's promise to Abram's grandson, Jacob.

"And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed" ([Genesis 28:13](#)).

"And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land" ([Genesis 35:12](#)).

2. *The promised land* definitely refers to heaven; the promised land of Canaan is a symbol (a type, a picture, an illustration) of heaven, of God's promise to the believer that he will inherit heaven, the new heavens and earth. Note two facts:

- a. God's promised land refers to *the whole world*. It is *the whole world* that Abram and believers are to inherit.

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" ([Romans 4:13](#)).

The inheritance of the whole world could only refer to the *new heavens and earth*—the new universe—that God is going to recreate in the end time. It could not refer to a corruptible universe that is deteriorating, wasting away, and running down, and that would eventually cease to exist millions of years from now—cease to exist just by the natural process of time. (See outline—[2 Peter 3:1-18](#) and notes—[2 Peter 3:1-18](#) for more discussion.)

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" ([2 Peter 3:10-13](#)).

- b. God's promised land refers to *a heavenly country* and *a heavenly city*. It is a heavenly home—a heavenly country and city that are eternal—that Abram and believers are to inherit. Note how clearly Scripture states this:

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" ([Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16](#)).

3. *The promised land* represented many things to Abram.

- a. The promised land was the assurance of *a personal inheritance*: the possession of a new country, of his own property with all its good land, wealth, and rights. Abram believed that he would live in a new city within his own land and country—all given by God Himself. And the land was to be forever, for it was promised by the eternal God Himself.

Note this, for it is important: Abram's hope was for a permanent, eternal city and country. True, he was physically journeying all throughout the promised land of Canaan, believing that God was going to give him and his seed (descendants) the land of Canaan. But while he was journeying, his hope was for the permanent, eternal city and country of God. Abram knew that God's promised land referred to the heavenly as well as to the earthly land. Note how clearly Scripture states this:

"For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" ([Genesis 13:15](#)).

⇒ God's promise included the eternal, permanent possession of the promised land, and Abram knew this.

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" ([Hebrews 11:9-10](#)).

⇒ This refers to the heavenly Jerusalem, the capital of the new heavens and earth (cp. [Hebrews 12:22](#); [Hebrews 13:14](#). See pt.2b above. Also see note—' [Rev. 21:2](#).)

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" ([Hebrews 11:13-16](#)).

⇒ Note [Hebrews 11:15](#): it clearly states that Abram's mind was on the heavenly and eternal country. If it had not been, he would have returned to his former home. He would have never wandered about, suffering the hardships he bore.

Thought 1. Note how the promise given to Abram parallels the promise given to the believer. Abram was to inherit *the promised land* if he turned away from the world and followed God. We are to inherit *the promised land of heaven* if we turn away from the world and follow God. *The promised land* is a symbol, a type, a picture of heaven.

1) The promise given to Abram.

"And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" ([Genesis 17:8](#)).

2) The promise given to the believer.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" ([John 14:2-3](#)).

b. The promised land was the assurance of *conquest and rest, of spiritual victory and spiritual rest*. The promised land was to bring a God-given peace and security, freedom and liberty, deliverance and

salvation to Abram. The promised land meant victory and rest to Abram, a God-given victory and rest...

- from having to wander about.
- from never being settled.
- from restlessness.
- from being exposed to all kinds of trials, dangers, threats, attacks, slavery, and bondage that comes from having no settled home within this world, from having no place that is given and protected by God Himself.

To Abram, the promised land was the assurance of victory and rest, the conquest and triumph over all enemies, a victory and rest that was to be given by God Himself.

Thought 1. Note how the spiritual victory and rest promised Abram represents the spiritual rest promised the believer (see note—' [Hebrews 4:1](#) for more discussion).

1) The promise given to Abram.

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" ([Genesis 12:2-3](#)).

"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" ([Genesis 15:1](#)).

"That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" ([Genesis 22:17-18](#)).

2) The promise given to the believer.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" ([Matthew 11:29](#)).

- c. The promised land was the assurance of *God's own presence*, that is, of God's love, care, provision, and protection. Abram was bound to know this: if God were going to give him the promised land, then God must love and care for him. God would therefore provide and protect him no matter what lay ahead. God—His strong presence—would be with him through all the trials and struggles of life.

Thought 1. Abram's assurance of God's presence symbolizes the believer's experience. The believer can be assured of God's presence: of God's love, care, provision, and protection.

1) The promise given to Abram.

"And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" ([Genesis 17:8](#)).

"And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" ([Genesis 28:15](#)).

2) The promise given to the believer.

"When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" ([Deut. 20:1](#)).

2. ([12:2-3](#)) Seed, Promised— Israel— Jews— Abraham: God promised to give Abram the promised seed, to make him the father of a great nation and race of people ([Genesis 12:2-3a](#)). God meant this both literally and spiritually. Note these facts:

1. God meant the promised seed to be *a physical and literal people*. Abram was to give birth to a new race of people: the Jews, the nation of Israel.

a. Note the Old Testament references.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" ([Genesis 13:16](#)).

"And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" ([Genesis 15:5](#)).

"And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" ([Genesis 26:4](#), the promise is confirmed with Isaac, Abram's son).

b. Note the New Testament references.

"Ye [the children of Israel] are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" ([Acts 3:25](#)).

"And God spake on this wise, That his [Abraham's] seed should sojourn in a strange land [Egypt]; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years" ([Acts 7:6](#)).

"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" ([Romans 9:4](#)).

"Through faith also Sarah [Abram's wife] herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable" ([Hebrews 11:11-12](#)).

2. God meant the promised seed to be *a spiritual people*. Abram was to give birth to a new race of spiritual people: the people of faith, true and genuine believers who would follow after God and His promises. Believers of all nations are counted as *children of Abraham*. Note how clearly Scripture states this fact:

"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also" ([Romans 4:11](#)).

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect" ([Romans 4:13-14](#)).

"Therefore it [the promise] is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" ([Romans 4:16](#)).

The promised seed was a spiritual promise as well as a literal promise. This double meaning must always be kept in mind when reading or studying *the promised seed* given to Abram.

- ⇒ Note the Old Testament references above (the first point), the promise that Abram's seed would number as the stars of the sky and as the grains of sand by the seashore ([Genesis 13:16](#); [Genesis 15:5](#)). Literally, this could never be fulfilled if it referred only to one physical nation of people upon earth. There must, therefore, be a double reference. The promise must refer to all believers of *all nations* down through all centuries and millenniums of human history. And history must last a long time, continue on and on so that more and more people can trust Christ and become followers of God and His promise. (What a challenge to get out and bear witness to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!)
- ⇒ Note all the Scriptures above: spiritually, Abram was to be the father of all who believe the promises of God. He was the first person since The Flood and Noah—within the new world—to believe and commit his life to the promises of God; thus Abram was to be the father of all those who followed him in believing the promises. All who walk in the steps of the faith of Abram are counted as his children, as the children of faith, and are to spiritually receive the very same promises made to Abram ([Romans 4:11-12](#). See note—[Romans 4:11-12](#); note—[Romans 4:13](#) for more discussion.)

3. Remember that Abram and Sarah had no children, although they had been married for years. Physically, they were incapable of bearing children. How then could a nation of people be born of Abram when he could not even father one child? Only by God. God alone could quicken the seed of Abram and the womb of Sarah and give them a child whose descendants would grow into a great nation of people. God and God alone could fulfill the promises being made to Abram. Abram's task was to believe God, believe that God would fulfill His promise by doing exactly what He said.

4. Note that God made four *personal promises* to Abram and to the promised seed, the great nation of people that Abram was to father.

- a. God promised *to bless Abram* ([Genesis 12:2](#)). God's blessing means His love, presence, protection, and provision. This means that God was going to look after and care for Abram and the great people Abram was to father. God was going to grant...
 - His love to assure them.
 - His presence to guide them.
 - His provision to take care of them.
 - His protection to secure them.

Thought 1. Note how the very same blessings are given to believers, to all those who follow Abram in believing the promises of God.

"And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee" ([Exodus 23:25](#)).

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" ([Isaiah 41:10](#)).

- b. God promised *to make Abram's name great*. Abram is without question one of the greatest men who has ever lived.
 - 1) The greatness of Abram's name is clearly seen in *secular history*.

- ⇒ Abram gave rise to both the Jewish and Arab nations of the earth. Both peoples trace their ancestry back to Abram and call him *the father* of their people.
- ⇒ Abram was to become *the father* of kings ([Genesis 17:6](#)), and Sarah the mother of nations and kings ([Genesis 17:16](#)).
- ⇒ Abram was known as *a mighty prince* by the surrounding nations even in his day ([Genesis 21:22-34](#); [Genesis 23:6](#)).
- ⇒ Abram was also known as a *prophet of God* ([Genesis 20:7](#)).

2) But more than secular history, Abram's name is great in the *annals of faith*. All believers (all those who understand that Abram is the father of faith) honor Abram. The very name of Abram is synonymous with faith. All truly great men, even if they are unbelievers, have something in which they staunchly believe; and Abram was no exception. He believed the impossible and never staggered in his faith. The name of Abram is great, first and foremost, because he believed God—the promises of God, the Word of God—and he diligently sought after God.

"Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" ([Isaiah 56:5](#)).

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" ([Rev. 3:12](#)).

3) The memory of Abram's name is precious (great) to believers because they know this: if they follow after the glorious promises given to Abram, then the great inheritance given to Abram will also become their inheritance.

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith....Therefore it [righteousness] is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" ([Romans 4:13, 16](#)).

c. God promised *to make Abram a blessing to others*. Abram has been a blessing to the earth in at least two significant ways.

- 1) Abram has given two great peoples to the earth: the Jews and the Arabs. These nations of people, as all others, have not always lived up to their duty as responsible people. Nevertheless, the life and acts of *responsible* Jews and Arabs are a blessing to the earth.
- 2) Abram has blessed the earth with a great example of faith, perhaps the greatest of examples. Abram believed God against all odds.
 - ⇒ He believed God for *the promised land* even when he knew nothing about the land, not even where it was; and he continued to believe God for the land all through his life, even though he never possessed a single acre.
 - ⇒ He believed God for *the promised seed*—a great nation of people—when it was humanly impossible for him and his dear wife to have a child.
 - ⇒ He believed God for *the promised seed*—the Savior—even though he had been living the most undeserving life when God first called him to turn away from the world and follow God. This we shall see in the next note.

Again, Abram has blessed the earth with a great example of faith, the greatest of examples.

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" ([Romans 4:20-21](#)).

d. God promised *to protect and make Abram secure* as he followed after God and His promises ([Genesis 12:3a](#)). Keep in mind that the promises being given to Abram have a double reference: the promises refer to Abram personally, but they also apply to his descendents, spiritually. Very simply stated, God promised to bless

the person who blessed Abram and his descendents, and to curse the person who cursed Abram and his descendents. Who are the people who bless and curse Abram and believers?

- ⇒ The person who blesses is a person who either *approves or accepts* Abram's journey of faith. Some persons would approve Abram's decision to follow God and His promises, although they might not accept God themselves nor agree with Abram. But they would wish him well—give their blessing—as he journeyed to the promised land. Other persons would go farther and accept Abram's decision to follow God and His promises. They themselves might even accept God and join Abram in his journey of faith. They, too, would bless Abram and everyone else who was following after God and His promises.
- ⇒ The person who curses is a person who *disapproves and rejects*, and in some cases fights against, Abram and his decision to follow God and His promises.

This was a great promise to Abram, and it is a great promise to everyone who begins the journey of faith, who truly follows after God and His promises. God promises to protect all believers as they journey toward the promised land. Any person who opposes them and their faith will be cursed, that is, defeated and doomed to failure. But all who wish them well will be blessed. The faith of all believers—both Abram and those who follow after him—will be rewarded: they shall all be victorious and reach their destination, the promised land itself. God will fulfill His promise to Abram and his descendents, the people of faith.

"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

"The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psalm 34:7).

3. (12:3) Seed, The Promised— Jesus Christ— Abraham— Israel, Purpose— Jews, Purpose— Promises— Prophecy: God promised to give Abram the promised seed, meaning the Messiah, the Savior of the world ([Genesis 12:3c](#)).

- ⇒ In Abram, all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

God was choosing Abram to bless the whole earth—all the families of the earth—with the promised seed, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. How do we know this? From Scripture: Scripture clearly tells us that this is a reference to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. This will be seen in a moment. But common logic and reason also tells us that *the promised seed* is a reference to the Messiah. Just think: this is a blessing so great that it blesses all the families upon earth, all the families who have lived or ever will live. A blessing this great could only refer to the Savior. Only God Himself—through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—could do something so great that it would literally bless every single family upon earth throughout all the generations of human history. Note several facts about this great promise to Abram.

1. This is the second time the Bible clearly predicts the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised seed, the Messiah and Savior of the world.

- ⇒ The first clear prophecy was given in [Genesis 3:15](#).

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" ([Genesis 3:15](#)).

Now, the second clear prophecy is given in [Genesis 12:3](#).

"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

2. As stated above, Scripture tells us exactly what God meant in this promise: this is a direct—very specific—reference to the promised seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Savior of the world.

- a. Note the Old Testament references.

1) God gave the promise of the Savior at least three times to Abram.

"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

"And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" ([Genesis 18:17-18](#)).

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" ([Genesis 22:18](#)).

2) God confirmed the promise of the Savior to Isaac, Abram's son.

"I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" ([Genesis 26:3-4](#)).

3) God also confirmed the promise of the Savior to Jacob.

"And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" ([Genesis 28:14](#)).

b. Note the New Testament references and interpretation.

- 1) The first New Testament reference is [Acts 3:25](#). Peter preached this glorious fact: Jesus Christ fulfilled the covenant given to Abraham and the other godly fathers of history. What covenant? The covenant of *the promised seed*, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would bless people and turn them away from their wicked ways. Note this clear declaration:

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" ([Acts 3:25-26](#)).

- 2) The second New Testament reference is [Romans 4:3](#). The verse declares this wonderful fact: Abraham was counted righteous—justified—because he believed the promise of God. What promise?

⇒ The promise of the Savior, the promised seed, who would forgive sin and cover wickedness ([Romans 4:7-8](#), [22-25](#)).

⇒ The promise that he would inherit the whole earth (have a part in the new heavens and earth)—an inheritance so great that it could come only through the Savior, the promised seed ([Romans 4:13](#), cp. [Hebrews 11:8-10](#), [13-16](#); [2 Peter 3:7-15](#); [Rev. 21:1f](#)).

Note how clearly Paul stated the fact: Abraham's faith in the promise of God led God to count him righteous (justified before God).

"For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" ([Romans 4:3](#)).

"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" ([Genesis 15:6](#)).

- 3) The third New Testament reference is [Gal. 3:8](#). This verse explains a surprising fact: the promise of the promised seed actually *contained the gospel*. The gospel of Jesus Christ was actually being preached to Abraham when God promised to give him the promised seed.

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" ([Gal. 3:8](#), cp. [Gal. 3:6-9](#)).

4) The fourth New Testament reference is [Gal. 3:16](#). This verse gives a clear explanation: the promise of the seed is singular, not plural. The promised seed does not refer to many persons, but to one person, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior and Messiah of the world.

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" ([Gal. 3:16](#)).

Note this also: a person can only become a child of God's—Abram's seed (descendent)—and inherit the promise made to Abram, by faith in Christ, by believing and trusting Him.

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus....And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" ([Gal. 3:26, 29](#)).

5) The fifth New Testament reference is [Gal. 3:13-14](#). This Scripture declares a striking fact: the blessing of Abraham—the promised seed—includes redemption and the promise of God's Spirit. The great promise of Abraham's blessing (the promised seed) was the promise of redemption, of being delivered from sin and from the curse of the law with its guilt and punishment.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" ([Gal. 3:13-14](#)).

3. The call of Abram and the promise made to him was unique, different from the call and promises given to others before his time. How? God called Abram to father a whole new race of people, a people who were to carry on the godly line of believers and eventually bear the promised seed, the Savior and Messiah of the world.

From the very beginning of human history, beginning with Adam, God had promised to send the promised seed through the godly line of Adam and Seth. Time and again God had to intervene to keep the godly line pure, and this He did right up to *The Great Flood*. At that time God chose Noah, and later the line of Shem, to carry on the godly line of people, keeping the hope of the promised seed and Savior alive.

This is the very thing we see in the call and appointment of Abram. The human race had once again deteriorated into utter depravity ([Genesis 11:1-32](#)). Thus God was intervening in human history. As stated above, He was calling and appointing Abram to father a whole new race of people, a people who were to carry on the godly line and give birth to the promised seed and Savior of the world. Note this: God had at least five purposes for creating a new race of people through Abram. Note that the same five purposes are true of both Israel as a nation and believers as the new nation and people of God.

a. God wanted a people who would love and worship God supremely, a people who would give Him their first loyalty.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" ([Genesis 17:7](#)).

b. God wanted a people who would be His missionary force to the world, a people who would be a dynamic witness to all other nations that God and God alone was the only true and living God.

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

"Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him" ([Genesis 22:18](#)).

c. God wanted a people through whom He could send His Son to the world: God wanted a people through whom He could send the promised seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior and Messiah of the world.

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" ([Genesis 3:15](#)).

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" ([Genesis 22:18](#)).

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" ([Gal. 3:16](#)).

"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews [God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, came through the Jews]" ([John 4:22](#)).

d. God wanted a people through whom He could give His written Word, the Holy Bible, to the world.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" ([2 Tim. 3:16](#)).

e. God wanted a people through whom He could demonstrate several things to the world. Note that all three of these were demonstrated throughout the history of Israel.

- 1) God wanted to demonstrate that *life and salvation are not of this world*, not of the physical and material world. The world is passing away: it possesses a seed of corruption and does not last; it is not permanent and eternal. The world desperately needs to acknowledge and learn this fact.

"Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed" ([Psalm 102:25-26](#)).

- 2) God wanted to demonstrate that *life and salvation are spiritual and eternal*. A permanent and incorruptible seed—a new creature, a new man—was necessary in order to provide salvation and life for man. The world needed to know that whatever God did, He did permanently and perfectly. Thus life and salvation are not to be of this earth, of physical and material elements (which last only for a few short years). Therefore, life had to be of the spirit—of another dimension of being entirely—in order to be forever and permanent. (See note—[Ephes. 1:3](#).)

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" ([John 3:3, 5](#)).

- 3) God wanted to demonstrate that *life and salvation are secured by faith and by faith alone*, not by works and self-righteousness. (See note—[Ephes. 2:8-10](#).)

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" ([Ephes. 2:8-9](#)).

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" ([Titus 3:5](#)).

God's Great Call to Abram, (The Abrahamic Covenant, Part 3): Beginning Faith, [12:4-9](#)

([12:4-9](#)) Introduction: Have you ever thought about changing your life, turning your life completely around? Most of us have. This is what happened to Abram. God called Abram to change his life, to completely turn his life around. God called Abram to forsake and leave all he had ever known...

- to turn away from his old country.
- to turn away from his neighbors, friends, relatives, and loved ones.
- to turn away from his father's household, from all its property and possessions.

This is what is known as separation, *spiritual separation*, a life that is totally separated from this world and the things of the world. This is also what is known as *sanctification*, a life that is totally *set apart* unto God.

But remember, God did not just demand separation of Abram, God gave Abram three wonderful promises:

- ⇒ the promised land.
- ⇒ the promised seed, which meant that he was to father a great nation of people.
- ⇒ the promised seed of the Messiah, which meant the Savior was to come through the godly line of his descendents.

Would Abram obey God? Did he even believe God? He would not obey unless he *first of all believed* the promises of God. Also, was Abram willing to pay the price? Willing to leave and forsake all—to totally separate himself—and follow after God and His promises?

This is the subject of this challenging passage: *God's Great Call to Abram (The Abrahamic Covenant, Part 3): Beginning Faith, [12:4-9](#)*.

- [1. The beginning of faith: believing and obeying God \(v.4\).](#)
- [2. The influence of faith: others followed the lead of Abram's faith \(v.5\).](#)
- [3. The testing of faith: Abram reached the promised land, but he had to pass through the land, not settle down, because of opposition there \(v.6\).](#)
- [4. The confirmation of faith \(v.7-9\).](#)

1. (12:4) Faith—Obedience—Abraham—Separation: there was the beginning of faith. Abram left; he turned away from his old life and began to follow God and His promises. Abram...

- believed God
- believed God's Word
- believed God's promises

Abram believed exactly what God had said; therefore, he did exactly what God said to do. In the simplest statement possible, Abram *believed God and obeyed God*. How did Abram feel about the decision he was making? What kind of emotions did he experience? Abram must have felt what we experience when we are confronted with a major decision that uproots our lives. There was the awareness...

- of great cost
- of great difficulty
- of being uprooted and unsettled
- of apprehension, wondering about the future, new friends, acceptance, and security
- of excitement, the challenge of a new venture

But note a fact that would play a large role in Abram's emotions: he was 75 years old ([Genesis 12:4](#)). Based on the life span of that day, he was a middle-aged man, a man well settled, secure, and comfortable. Moving to a new location and starting a new life—being uprooted and unsettled—would be the furthest thing from his mind.

Yet this was exactly what Abram did, and note: he did not hesitate, debate, argue, or qualify his decision for God; nor did he try to make excuses, delaying his decision. Simply stated, God confronted Abram and called Abram...

- to turn away from his old life.
- to accept and believe God and His promises.
- to obey and follow after God and His promises.

And this was all it took. God called, and Abram believed God and His promises. Abram did exactly what God said: he believed God and obeyed God. He separated from the world and its worldliness—separated from his old life—and began his great journey to the promised land, a journey that was to take him some one thousand miles away.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" ([Hebrews 11:8](#)).

Thought 1. Note exactly what it was that *aroused* faith within Abram, that *stirred* Abram to believe and obey God. It was God's Word, His call and promise. It was God Himself—His Word, His call, His promise—that

initiated faith within Abram. Every person needs desperately to hear God's call and promise. Every person needs to turn away from the worldliness of the world and turn to God; every person needs to live a separated life, a life that is totally given over to God, that diligently seeks after God and the promised land of heaven.

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" ([2 Cor. 6:17-18](#)).

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" ([Rev. 3:20](#)).

Thought 2. It is always God's Word, His call and promise, that arouses us to believe and obey Him. The beginning of faith and obedience always begins with God and *His Word*, with *His call and promise*.

"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God" ([Mark 11:22](#)).

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" ([Romans 10:17](#)).

"But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" ([Hebrews 11:6](#)).

2. ([12:5](#)) Faith— Testimony— Example: there was the influence of faith: others followed the lead of Abram's faith. Sarai and Lot, Abram's wife and nephew, were strongly influenced by Abram's faith. When Abram first sat down and broke the news to Sarai, imagine the utter shock she must have experienced. She could have given Abram a fit...

- fussed
- argued
- rebelled
- refused
- seperated
- divorced
- stayed behind

But note: nothing whatsoever is said about Sarai or Lot opposing Abram, and nothing is said about Abram forcing or coercing them to go. The suggestion seems to be that Sarai and Lot were persuaded by Abram's faith, that the testimony of his faith spoke to their hearts. Thus, they willingly committed their lives to follow after God and His promises.

Thought 1. We must bear strong witness to God and His promises, in particular to our families and loved ones. Our faith in God should influence others, strongly influence them for God.

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" ([Acts 4:20](#)).

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" ([1 Peter 3:15](#)).

"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul" ([Psalm 66:16](#)).

Note two significant facts about Abram's faith.

1. Abram's faith was so strong it did not allow wealth to hold it back ([Genesis 12:5](#)). Abram was apparently a wealthy rancher with great herds and flocks. Scripture says that he had gained great possessions while in Haran, possessions so great that it took a large number of laborers to oversee his ranch ([Genesis 12:5](#)). He also had great holdings of gold and silver ([Genesis 13:2](#)). He was well settled in Haran, thus he would have established markets there to buy his herds and flocks as well as to carry on his other business dealings. It would have been much safer to keep the flocks and herds roaming the countryside around Haran and much more profitable to

remain in Haran than to pick up everything and strike out across the country, especially when he had no idea where he was going. But note what Scripture says: Abram took all his possessions, left Haran, and set out for *the promised land*, the land of Canaan ([Genesis 12:5](#)). Abram risked all he had for God, risked all in order to follow after God and His promises. Abram did not start the pilgrimage of faith half-heartedly or half-committed. He gave all—risked all, sacrificed all—to follow after God and His promises.

Note that Abram also took the laborers and herdsman who worked for him, at least all who would go. (The wealthy of Abram's day had servants, but many of them were employed, not enslaved.) Imagine the persuading Abram had to do—the strong witness and testimony that were necessary—to convince these souls to become pilgrims, followers of God and His promises. Remember: they, too, were leaving settled homes to undertake the lives of pilgrims.

Thought 1. A person has to give all—all that he is and has—to follow God. A person has to risk all and sacrifice all and keep nothing back. God demands all! He demands everything we are and have—the total commitment of our lives and possessions—if we wish to follow after Him and His promises. Scripture is clear about this.

"Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" ([Matthew 19:21](#)).

"Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee" ([Mark 10:28](#)).

"And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow, and he left all, rose up, and followed him" ([Luke 5:27-28](#)).

2. Abram's faith was so strong it endured to the end: he entered Canaan ([Genesis 12:5](#)). A dramatic change had taken place in Abram. Years before, he had made a commitment to God: he had turned away from his old life to start out following after God and His promises. But along the way, when he reached Haran, he stopped. Something distracted Abram and turned Abram aside: some business offer, some worldly opportunity, some need, some temptation, some influence, some fear or distrust. Whatever it was, it caused Abram to turn away from his pilgrimage of faith. Abram stopped, turned aside, and remained in Haran. He gave up his new life in God: he no longer sought after God and the promised land.

But now, some years later, note what happened: Abram went forth—set out—to go into the land of Canaan (the promised land), and he reached Canaan ([Genesis 12:5](#)). This time he endured and persevered. He allowed no distraction, pleasure, greed, trial, or temptation to turn him aside from God. He stood fast in seeking after God and His promises.

What happened that caused such a dramatic change in Abram? Two Scriptures tell us:

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" ([Romans 4:13](#)).

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went....For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" ([Hebrews 11:8, 10](#)).

When God confronted Abram this second time ([Genesis 12:1](#)), Abram apparently got the message:

⇒ Abram saw that *the promised land* involved the *whole world*, a world of righteousness, a new world that would be totally under the rule and authority of God ([Romans 4:13](#), cp. [2 Peter 3:7-10](#)).

⇒ Abram saw that *the promised land* involved the eternal, heavenly city of God ([Hebrews 11:8, 10](#)).

Abram understood the promises of God as never before. To some degree, he saw what believers down through the centuries have always seen, that God was promising far more than His blessings while we walk

upon an earthly land. God was promising far more than just a physical and material inheritance. To some degree Abram saw that God's promise—the inheritance of the promised land—was also...

- the inheritance of a new, eternal world of righteousness.
- the inheritance of the eternal, heavenly city of God.

Abram saw that God Himself was building a new world and city and that God Himself was laying the foundations; consequently, the new world and city would be eternal even as God is eternal. In fact, the Book of Hebrews plainly says that Abram and the other patriarchs were seeking after the heavenly country of God as well as the earthly inheritance of Canaan, that they were seeking after both an earthly and a heavenly country.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country....But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" ([Hebrews 11:13-14, 16](#)).

The point is this: when God confronted Abram this second time, Abram understood the promise of God as never before; he understood the *eternal hope* that God was giving, and it gripped his heart. The result was total commitment to God. Abram made a total commitment to follow God and His promises. He endured and persevered until he reached the promised land of God, the land of Canaan.

"He that endureth to the end shall be saved" ([Matthew 10:22](#)).

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" ([1 Cor. 15:58](#)).

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" ([Rev. 3:11](#)).

3. ([12:6](#)) Faith— Testing— Pilgrim— Pilgrimage: there was the testing of faith: Abram reached the land, but he could not settle down within it; he had to pass through the land as *a pilgrim*, for there was opposition there (the Canaanites). Think for a moment: when Abram arrived in Canaan, what was he expecting to find? A land uninhabited and unpossessed, a free land ready to be claimed by the first pioneer to settle within its borders? Or, was Abram expecting the land to be settled and possessed by people? Scripture does not say, but when Abram crossed the border of Canaan, he found a land already inhabited. The Canaanites, a godless nation of people, were already there. Abram faced a formidable enemy if he began to claim the land. He could easily see that he was not going to possess the land within the foreseeable future. All kinds of questions must have flashed across his mind. He must have been gripped with...

- uncertainty
- hesitation
- misgivings
- questioning

Could it be that he had misread God, that he had made a mistake?

Abram's faith was tested, sorely tested. The faith of this great pioneer for God was tested to the *nth* degree. He was in the land, but he could not yet possess it. Opposition and strong forces stood toe to toe against his claim to the promised land. What was he to do?

⇒ Should he return? Should he give up his faith, turn around and go back home to Haran or to Ur of the Chaldees?

⇒ Should he continue to believe God, following after God's promises, continue to claim the promises of God despite the opposition and the impossible situation that confronted him?

Abram knew something, something that would be obvious to any thinking person: before he could ever inherit the promised land, the godless foes of the land would have to be removed. And he knew another fact as

well: he himself could not remove them. He did not have the power nor the right to remove them. Therefore, if these godless foes were to be removed, God Himself would have to remove them. The only question was this:

⇒ Would God remove the godless foes who stood against his inheritance of the promised land?

This question must have crossed Abram's mind time and again. He would have reasoned something like this:

"My right to the land is only by the promise of God. I possess the land only by faith in His Word and promise. But when God gave me the promise, He knew that godless foes stood against my inheriting the promised land. Therefore, God must expect me to continue in my faith, to believe that He will remove the godless foes. God must expect me to still trust Him to take care of all enemies who stand in the way of the promised land. He must expect me to still believe that He will give me the promised land."

Abram had a decision to make, a life-changing decision. He was in the promised land; God had led him there. But he did not yet possess it. Possession of the land—inheriting the promised land—lay out in the future. Opposition, godless foes, stood between him and his possession of the promised land. What was he to do? Between then and now, if he stayed in the land, how was he to live? Behave? Act? Think? Talk?

⇒ Was he to live as one who believed and followed after God and His promises? As one who claimed the promises of God despite great opposition? Or...

⇒ Was he to live as one who was defeated by godless enemies and by one's own ignorance of God's ways?

As stated, Abram had a choice to make, a life-changing decision. What would his decision be? The next note tells us (see note—[Genesis 12:7](#)).

Thought 1. There is a beautiful analogy for the believer in this experience of Abram. Just as Abram reached the promised land but did not yet physically possess it, so the believer reaches the promised land of heaven immediately upon conversion, but does not yet physically possess it.

When a person is saved—when he truly begins to follow after God and His promises—things happen to him in relation to heaven.

1) God counts the believer as already in heaven (see note 3—[Ephes. 2:6](#)). The believer is not physically in heaven, but he is as good as there. God has promised heaven to him, and what God promises always takes place; thus, the believer is counted as being in heaven, as already there.

"Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" ([Ephes. 2:5-6](#)).

"For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" ([Phil. 3:20-21](#)).

2) The believer is *immediately placed* in the heavenly realm or the spiritual realm of life. That is, his mind and thoughts are focused upon heaven and the things of heaven, upon God and His promises. It is God's Spirit that pulls his mind to spiritual things, that stirs his mind to focus upon heaven and the things of heaven. As stated, the believer is not bodily in heaven, but his mind is to be kept within the realm (upon the things) of heaven. In fact, if he is truly following after God and His promises, he naturally keeps his mind and thoughts upon God and His promises—the Spirit of God stirs him to so focus his mind.

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" ([Romans 8:5-6](#)).

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" ([2 Cor. 10:5](#)).

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" ([Phil. 4:8](#)).

3) The believer's faith in the promised land of heaven is constantly tested just as Abram's was. In fact, the believer is never free from enemies who oppose his inheriting the promised land of heaven. Godless foes—death, Satan, and all kinds of trials and temptations—stand against him while he is living within this world. Just like Abram, the believer is to continue trusting God: he is to believe that God will defeat all the enemies of the promised land, including that final enemy, death.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" ([Ephes. 6:12](#)).

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" ([1 Cor. 15:54](#)).

4) Just like Abram, the believer is a pilgrim upon earth: he lives upon earth, but he is only travelling and passing through, ever seeking for the promised land of heaven. The believer is a citizen of both earth and heaven ([Phil. 3:20-21](#)). Note this: just like Abram...

- the believer journeys upon earth, but his destination is the promised land.
- this is not the believer's home; heaven is his home.
- the believer's mind and thoughts are upon the earth when necessary, but they are mostly upon the promised land of God.
- the believer's faith and hope are not in this world, but in God and in the land promised by God.

Again, the believer is just like Abram: he is a pilgrim upon earth. He lives for the earth, yes, to make it a far better place; but he also lives for heaven, knowing that this earth is only his temporary home. Simply stated, the true believer knows what Abram knew: he is only a pilgrim upon earth; the promised land of heaven is his eternal destiny.

"For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" ([Phil. 3:20](#)).

5) Just like Abram, the believer's life is a pilgrimage of faith. The believer is not immediately transported into heaven when he is converted; he is left upon earth to be a witness for God. But note: the believer is immediately placed in the heavenly or spiritual realm of life. That is, his life—his mind and thoughts—become focused upon heaven and the things of heaven. The believer (his mind and thoughts; his life) begins to roam and move about heaven as well as earth. The believer, so to speak, lives within heaven as well as upon earth: he thinks and acts upon heaven as well as upon earth.

This is what is meant by *the pilgrimage of faith*. The believer actually lives upon earth, but he believes that *in Christ* he lives in the promised land of heaven, and he believes that some day he will bodily live there. Thus, the believer lives upon earth as a pilgrim: his life is a pilgrimage of faith. His life, movements, and being—all that he is—are a pilgrimage of faith.

The point is this: when a person believes in God and His promises, he lives for God and His promises. He lives for something far beyond this earth. This earth is not his home, not his destination or resting place. His faith is in God and in the promised land; thus he lives upon earth as a pilgrim. His life upon earth becomes a *pilgrimage of faith*.

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" ([Phil. 3:21](#)).

4. (12:7-9) Assurance— Faith— Altar— Land, The Promised— Seed, The Promised— Promises: there was the confirmation of faith: God reassured His promises, both the promised seed and the promised land. Abram needed God, needed God to meet him face to face once again. There was strong opposition to his claiming the promised land, and Abram did not know what to do. Abram needed God's presence: His explanation, direction, and guidance. Abram needed assurance, God's assurance. He needed God to reconfirm the promise of the promised land and seed. And the glorious truth is this: God always meets the need of His dear follower. Whatever the believer needs, God meets that need to the maximum. Note that He met Abram's need, gloriously met it. Just what happened between God and Abram is not known; a description of Abram's experience with God is not given. Scripture simply reports the wonderful fact that God appeared to Abram and reconfirmed the promises:

- ⇒ Abram would bear seed (offspring), *the promised seed*.
- ⇒ Abram's seed would be given *the promised land*.

1. What was Abram's response? Abram made the decision for God, to continue following after God and His promises. Note that he built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him ([Genesis 12:8](#)). The altar had at least seven purposes (see [Deeper Study #1—Genesis 8:20](#) for more discussion):

- ⇒ *To offer sacrifices to God*, asking forgiveness for unbelief and sins.
- ⇒ *To make a rededication to God*, renewing his commitment to God.
- ⇒ *To seek God's continued presence and guidance*.
- ⇒ *To worship the Lord*: to worship the very Person who had met his need.
- ⇒ *To acknowledge the Lord*, that the Lord alone could fulfill so great a promise, that he was totally dependent upon the Lord.
- ⇒ *To praise the Lord*, to praise Him for giving so wonderful a promise.
- ⇒ *To testify to the Lord*, to bear witness to the Lord's glorious goodness in meeting his need and in giving so great a promise.

2. Abram moved on—continued his pilgrimage—but he built an altar to the Lord wherever he went ([Genesis 12:8-9](#)). Note that Abram built an altar between Bethel and Hai or Ai, the very next place he went. The idea is that Abram was now committed to God, to seeking after God and His promises. Consequently, wherever he moved, he built an altar and established...

- a place where he could worship God.
- a place that would testify to God.

Thought 1. James Montgomery Boice states the point well:

"I note this sequence: first, Abram arrives in a place; second, God speaks to him; third, he builds an altar....I think the sequence is to be understood as being repeated, though it is not always spelled out in detail. First, Abram arrived at a place. Second, he recognized God's presence. Third, he raised an altar as a testimony to God's claim upon that place and on those who should ever after live there. Abram passed on—to other places and eventually to glory—but the altars remained. They remained as witness to the fact that in this place a child of God once knelt and prayed, proclaimed the gospel of grace, and claimed that spot for God's glory.

"We are called to do that—wherever we are and at all times. We are called to be pilgrims, but that does not mean that we are to pass through this world and leave it untouched. For the master of the heavenly city is master of this world too, and we are ambassadors of His kingdom and are charged with proclaiming His rule, and actually establishing that rule, wherever our pilgrimage takes us. Do you live on this or that street? On this or that block? Then you must build your altar on that street and claim that neighborhood for Jesus" (James Montgomery Boice. *Genesis, An Expository Commentary*, Vol.2. Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1985, p.38).

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