



Unit .02

Session .01

God Makes a Promise

Scripture



Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-6

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” **4** So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ... **1** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall

be very great.” **2** But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3** And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” **4** And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” **5** And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” **6** And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Intro Options



Main Point:

God is a promise maker
and a promise keeper

Option 1

No one expected much from him. After all, he couldn't even speak fluently until he was nine years old, proving that he lacked perhaps even a normal mental capacity. His later expulsion from school and refused admittance into polytechnic school only furthered his fate to be ordinary. But none of this stopped Albert Einstein from becoming one of the greatest scientists the world has ever seen on his way to winning the Nobel Prize.

At the age of 22, he was fired from the newspaper where he worked for “not being creative enough” and then one of his first attempts to make it on his own failed, going bankrupt. Few, if anyone, would have expected Walt Disney to achieve any level of success, let alone winning thirty-two Academy Awards.

▪ What other stories of unexpected success encourage you?

There is something that draws us into stories like these. Stories where people overcome all odds, even great failure, to defy all expectations and succeed. We like the idea of “ordinary” people doing the extraordinary. Perhaps because that is how most of us see ourselves—as rather ordinary. But few of us are content to remain in our ordinariness. We yearn for more. So maybe, just maybe, we too might overcome the odds. If we work hard enough, or if we catch that lucky break that is. Or perhaps there is another way that has nothing to do with our capabilities and effort. Maybe there is another way we can make a difference—a way that is outside of ourselves.

Option 2

As a kid, you probably made a few “pinky promises.” Or maybe you said, “cross my heart and hope to die” at the end of a more serious promise. Or maybe you simply said, “I promise.” Just take a minute to think about all the times your friends have “sworn” you to secrecy. Today, maybe those secrets and promises are a little more serious.

▪ What other phrases have you used to say “pinky promise”? What do you say or do now when you make a promise?

God's promise to Abraham carried a lot of weight—more weight than any other promise we've received or any promises we've made. So, God didn't just speak the words, “I promise” to Abraham. He showed him the night sky and compared his number of descendants to the number of stars. But God didn't stop there. He had a covenant ceremony with Abraham, in which He committed to give Abraham all that He had promised (Gen. 15:7-21).

TEACHING PLAN

Several generations passed between the time of the flood and the opening of Genesis 12. The final thirty-eight chapters of Genesis focus on only four generations of a family, four patriarchs: Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. This is telling. There is something important about this family, and we find out what it is in the opening four verses of this chapter. These verses record the Abrahamic covenant—an everlasting covenant God made with a man who most believe was a worshiper of pagan gods when God first spoke to him.

Read Genesis 12:1-4.



God began by calling on Abram to take a step of faith. Abram was to leave three things: his land, his relatives, and his father's house (v. 1). It might be difficult for us to appreciate the gravity of this calling. We live in a mobile society with much looser connections to family. But for Abram, this was a calling to leave everything he knew. His identity. His security. His life as he knew it.

▪ What are some things you have had to leave to more faithfully follow God?

But God's considerable calling did not come without considerable promises. If Abram were to step out in faith and follow God, then God would do three things for him. He would give him a new land, make him into a great nation, and bless him (v. 2). God would give Abram all that he left behind, but to a greater degree. But don't miss the word "will"—this word shows up eight times in verses 2 and 3. God *will* do this. When God spoke to Abram that day, He was inviting him to leave the sure for the unsure, the known for the unknown, what was in his hand for what God promised to do in the future. In that moment, Abram had to decide whether or not he trusted this God he just met.

▪ Even though there were difficult moments for Abraham and his wife leaving everything they knew behind, they walked through those difficulties by looking forward to what God promised. How can God's future promises help you walk faithfully through current difficulties?

As we consider what God called Abram to do that day, we should pause and consider how clear God was about the nature of the covenant relationship He was establishing. This was a unilateral covenant, meaning it would depend solely on God, without condition. Six times God said, "I will." Only once did He say "you will" to Abram, and that was in the context of what God would do through Abram rather than what Abram would do for God. God would accomplish it. Giving Abram a new land, growing a nation, and blessing him was God's project, not Abram's. It would be strictly an act of grace. 

▪ God was willing to accomplish for Abram what Abram couldn't accomplish for himself. What does this communicate about God's character?

COMMENTARY

**God is a promise maker
and a promise keeper**

Genesis 12:2-3.

12:2. We can't miss God's promise to make Abram's name great (v. 2). This promise is juxtaposed with the account of the Tower of Babylon the chapter before. As people gathered in rebellion of God's command to scatter, they sought to build a tower reaching into the heavens to make a "name for [themselves]" (11:4)—to make their name great. So they worked together diligently to make that happen, but their work only brought them destruction and discipline.

But here, Abram wasn't the one working. God was determined to bless him and Abram would get a great name, not because of his effort or because he would seek it but simply by God's goodness and grace toward Him. Having a great name and blessings does not come by our efforts to reach up toward God; instead, it comes from God's graciousness to reach down to us.

12:2-3. God clarified something else important about His intention to make Abram's name great and bring blessing; something else that was lost on the masons laying bricks in vain pursuit of greatness. The blessing God promised to give Abram was not intended to end with him; rather, it was a means to an end. Abram would benefit from God's blessing but he would be a conduit of blessing, not its final recipient. God made much of Abram so Abram could in turn make much of Him.

We see this where God expanded on the blessing in store for Abram (v. 3). God would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who treated him with contempt, and all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him. God had a blessing of protection in store for Abram, but more importantly, He had a blessing of provision in store for all of humanity. This promise takes us back to Genesis 3:15 and the offspring who would come from this nation promised to Abram, crush the head of the serpent, and bring about the greatest imaginable blessing to humanity. The blessing was not land, or even family, but redemption. The curse would be broken. Sin would be defeated. Death would be overcome. And all who would trust in the one coming—in Christ Jesus—would be blessed.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 56, DDG)

God is Faithful

God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "He who calls you is faithful; he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

TEACHING PLAN

Abram's calling was followed by his journey into the Negev (Gen. 12:5-9) and an excursion into Egypt during a famine where his trust in God's promises faltered (Gen. 12:10-20). Abram became worried that because his wife, Sarah, was so beautiful the Egyptians would kill him to take her as a wife. God had promised to protect Abram, but the patriarch acted out of fear instead and plotted with Sarah to lie and say she was his sister. When the deception was uncovered, the Pharaoh sent them away.

Read Genesis 15:1-6.



God came to Abram in a vision and told him he did not need to be afraid. But notice Abram did not respond with gratitude. His response dripped with cynicism and doubt: "You want to talk about great reward? What possible reward could you have in mind? You haven't even given me a single son, and yet you promised I would be a great nation." Here we see Abram beginning to develop his own plan to help God out. Without a son, Abram had chosen a slave in his house to be his heir. Abram would do on his own what God had not done for him.

▪ How have you tried to "help" God? How did it turn out?

So many times, we mistake God's apparent "inactivity" for His "inability." We think God is not working at all just because He is not working how or when we would like or expect. This often leads us to either anxiety or outright rejection as we try to take matters into our own hands.

▪ Which one of these are you more inclined to: anxiety or rejection? How do both responses result from a failure to trust in the future promises of God?

God responded in mercy and grace to Abram's disobedience. No, Eliezer would not be Abram's heir. God would give him a son from his own body. And then the Lord took Abram outside and invited him to count the stars. In that moment—as the patriarch gazed into the expanse of God's creation and was reminded of his Creator's capability—he believed. And God credited that belief as righteousness. Paul and James would later refer to this as Abram's moment of salvation—or more precisely, justification (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23). When Abram placed one foot in front of the other in obedience to God's calling in Genesis 12, he was exerting faith to some degree, but that was not saving faith. That was primarily an act of obedience. This moment under the starry night was different. Because of Abram's belief here, and only this belief, righteousness was credited to him.

▪ How has God been gracious to you during your own moments of disobedience?

Like Abram, we are called to trust the promises of God for our salvation. But we have a great advantage over the patriarch: his trust looked forward to what God would do; our trust looks back at what God has done. We trust in the fulfillment of the covenant Abram longed to see—the offspring who was born in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

Genesis 15:1-6

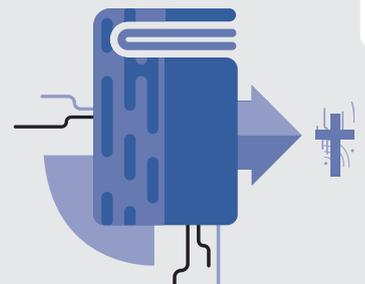
God reassured Abram that he would have children of his own. He would give him offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Not only did God restate this promise to Abram and his children repeatedly (Gen. 22:17; 26:4; 28:14), but He saw it through. Moses said, “The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven” (Deut. 1:10), and again later, “Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven” (Deut. 10:22).

Paul made clear in Romans and Galatians that being the offspring of Abraham was not about your DNA, but about faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:11-12; Gal. 3:7). Paul’s argument here also helps us see how God will continue to fulfill His promise to make Abram’s offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Only those who share Abram’s faith are the sons of Abraham, and these will be an innumerable multitude in heaven from every people group on the planet (Rev. 7).

The Lord made this promise to Abram and demonstrated His commitment to keeping the promise through a covenant ceremony (like a wedding)(Gen. 15:7-21). Genesis 15:7-21 gives this account. God commanded Abram to bring Him certain animals and to cut them in half, except for the birds (15:10). Abram fell asleep, and the Lord told him about the future exodus from Egypt as well as the conquest of the Amorites in the promised land. The presence of the Lord—represented in a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch—then passed between the animal corpses. This act was like God saying to Abram, “Let this happen to Me if these things do not come true. Let Me be cut in pieces if I don’t uphold My end of the covenant.” The Lord was willing to take the covenant curses upon Himself if the covenant were broken, and that is exactly what He ended up doing at the cross.

Christ Connection *(p. 58, DDG)*

God promised Abraham that the world would be blessed through his descendants. Jesus Christ is the promised descendant of Abraham through whom salvation flows to the rest of the world.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



God uses flawed and imperfect people in His good work in the world. What are some ways this encourages us?

William Carey once said, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!"¹ Where can you imagine yourself attempting great things for God as He continues to transform you more into the image of His Son?

Heart



How does knowing that God pursues you encourage you to trust in Him?

How should knowing that God is the One who makes us righteous before Him motivate us to pursue lives of holiness?

Hands



What circumstances in your life tempt you to respond like Abraham did?

What are some ways you can live out a renewed faith this week, knowing God is for you and is working according to His perfect timetable?

Main Point:

God is a promise maker and a promise keeper



Head

The story of Abram (Abraham) and the other patriarchs who followed him reminds us of God's unending faithfulness, grace, and mercy. God did not invite the morally excellent into a covenant relationship—He invited the immoral. He didn't invite the expected, but the unexpected. Then God transformed their identities and their lives into shining examples of faith. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all had significant flaws, yet each one is recorded in the "hall of faith" in Hebrews 11. Not because of who they were or what they did, but because of who God made them and what He did through them.



Heart

Abraham's calling causes us to think about the reality that God is the one who pursues us, not the other way around; it is because of His righteousness, not our own, that we are able to stand rightly before Him. This truth is earth shattering for the simple reason that all other religions throughout the world work the other way around. For them, it is about doing and working and being rewarded if they build up enough credits. But the truth is the complete opposite. God pursues us even when we're not looking, and He rewards us with a relationship with Himself. This relationship does not come through our own works or efforts, but by trusting in the work Jesus accomplished on the cross when He died for our sins. We don't have to work for our righteousness, but we freely receive it from God. This gift both frees and motivates us to lives of obedience in response to the grace God has shown us.



Hands

We see Abraham's brokenness and unworthiness on full display in his response to God. In that moment, Abram stood in judgment over God. He tried to be the arbiter of what is right and wrong, and viewed God as in the wrong for not making good on His promise. But we can also see ourselves in Abram's response. We get impatient, have doubts, and try to take matters into our own hands. The lesson Abraham learned is the same for us—God is good, God loves us, and God is working in our lives to make us more like Him. These are the constant reminders we need every week when dealing with the uncertainties around us. God hasn't forgotten us and He has a perfect timing for the work He is doing.