

STUDY ONE — GENESIS 12
GOD'S CALL

P R O M I S E

— GENESIS 12 - 25 —

GOD'S GRACIOUS INITIATIVE
IN THE LIFE & TIMES OF ABRAHAM

OVERVIEW

Genesis 11:27-12:3 – Genesis 1-11 captures how God’s blessing of humanity in the garden is quickly forfeited in sin. In place of God’s blessing comes a curse and humanity cycles downward in rebellion and depravity. There seems to be little hope as even Noah (Gen 9:20-23) and his descendants (11:1-9) are tainted with sin.

Yet as the narrative zeroes in on the life of Abram, we see God working to restore his blessing to all humanity. Unprompted and unearned, God takes the gracious initiative and makes a unilateral promise to bless Abraham, and in turn the world, through his offspring. God’s promise to make Abram’s name great stands in sharp contrast to the inhabitants of Babel who proudly sought to make a name for themselves.

It’s highly likely that the Lord’s call came to Abram whilst in Ur (see Acts 7:2-4, Gen 15:7 and Neh 9:7). Excavations in the 20th century reveal the darkness of Ur – it was a centre for lunar worship and a place of human sacrifice.¹ In sin, God and his ways had become shrouded in darkness. It was into this darkness that God took the initiative to shine the light of the knowledge of his Name (cf. Josh 24:2).

Genesis 12:4-9 – God’s great promise is received by Abram with great faith (cf. Hebrews 11:8-19). Though childless and nomadic, he left everything behind in faithful obedience to the Lord. Abram reminds us that faith evidences itself in obedience (Jas 9:21-22) and is confident in what we hope for and certain about what we do not see (Heb 11:1). This confidence is reflected in Abram’s tour through the Promised Land. From North to South, he erected altars, worshipping and proclaiming the name of the one true God in a land of darkness. Of this Hughes’ powerfully reflects, ‘Abram would build altars at Bethel, Hebron and Mount Moriah ... How beautiful – the only architecture that remained from Abram’s life were altars.’²

Genesis 12:10-20 – Due to thematic overlap, comment will be reserved for our later study in Genesis 20. Suffice to say however that obedience doesn’t exempt us from difficulty and that in this early difficulty, Abram’s faith falters as he turns to his own scheming in place of trust in God. Though he serves us as an exemplar of faith, his actions here also stand as a warning for us too.

¹ Tell el-Muqayyar. The city dates back to 5000BC, features a prominent ziggurat devoted to the moon-god Nanna and also a ‘death pit’ of 73 servants sacrificed to accompany the corpse of Queen Puabi in death. See R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, 181-182.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, 187.

PROMISE+FULFILMENT

OFFSPRING

Of Abram’s ‘offspring’ or ‘seed’ in verse 7, Paul later writes in Galatians 3:16,

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.”

Though Abram’s offspring did become a great nation in the people of Israel, Paul points out that God’s promise ultimately found fulfilment in “Jesus Christ the son of David, *the son of Abraham*” (Matt 1:1).

Through this seed, God’s blessing has come to the nations. Jesus took the curse of our sin upon the cross that all who trust him in Him might be restored to God’s blessing for all eternity.

As those who have been joined to Jesus by faith, we too are part of Abraham’s seed and heirs of the eternal promised land –

“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3:29)

Christ’s global church, bringing blessing to the nations (1 Pet 2:9-10), the risen Jesus receiving the name that is above every name (Phil 2:9), God’s promises to Abram have truly been fulfilled in the one who left not Ur, but his heavenly home, in obedience to the Father.

GETTING STARTED

1. What has been the most significant season of change in your life? How did you adjust, and what challenges did it bring?

INTO THE TEXT

Read Genesis 11:27-12:3

2. On what basis does God issue this great promise to Abram?
3. Where in the Genesis account does it reveal what it is like to be under God's blessing? How was this blessing jeopardised?
4. How is it that God will ultimately fulfil the promises made here to Abram and restore his blessing to the nations?

Read Genesis 12:4-9

5. In what ways is Abram here an exemplar of faith? (cf. Heb 11:1)
6. In what way does Abram here foreshadow the ultimate exemplar of faith, Jesus? (cf. Phil 2:5-11)

Read Genesis 12:10-20

7. Abram's bold act of faith was met with a famine. Has there been an instance in your life when a great step of faith/obedience was met with early and serious discouragement?
8. What is God's purpose in periods of such testing? (cf. James 1:2-4)
9. Abram turned to Egypt when his faith gave way to fear, to what do you usually turn when things go wrong and you're tempted to disbelieve God's goodness and power? Alternatively, reflect upon what personally gives you confidence for the future in this time of global upheaval? Is it God or in more natural things such as the scientific community, government policy or your own asset portfolio or resourcefulness?

TAKEAWAY

10. Spend some time together praising God that in Christ, his promise has been fulfilled. Specifically, that we the 'peoples' or 'nations' of the earth have been restored to God's blessing that we might know him and enjoy him forever! What a certain hope!