

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 10

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 12

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 12 begins a new section in the book of Genesis. The first part, chapters 1-11, records infallibly and inerrantly the beginning of all things in the heavens and in the earth—the beginning of time and space, the first man and woman and all living things, the first marriage, the first lie, the first murder, the beginning of nations. In the first part of Genesis, God deals with the whole human race. These first eleven chapters are the foundation on which the whole Biblical record is based in general. If we use the analogy of the tree, Genesis 1-11 is the *root* of the tree, Genesis 12-50, the *trunk*, and the rest of the Bible the *branches*.

The second part, starting from chapter 12 to 50 records the history of the Patriarchs, namely, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob interspersed with a detailed account of the life of Joseph. The attention here is focused on one man and his family. He is chosen to be the channel through whom God would carry out His plan of redemption for mankind. The importance of Abraham is shown by

the fact that no less than twenty-five percent (about fourteen chapters) of Genesis is about his life:

- I. Chapters 12-14: the Calling given.
- II. Chapters 15-16: the Covenant made.
- III. Chapters 17-21: the Confirmation.
- IV. Chapters 22: the Crowning Event.
- V. Chapters 23-25: the Closing Years.¹

The Call of Abraham.

The call of Abraham is given to us in chapter 12. This chapter portrays the powerful faith of Abraham. Abraham showed tremendous faith in the LORD when God called him to forsake his country and kindred to go to the land which God promised. But when Abraham was confronted with a life-and-death situation, he acted in such a manner that could have put the promise of the LORD to him in danger. We can learn something about the nature of faith. The chapter can be structured as follows:

- I. The Call of Abraham (1-3)
- II. The Obedience of Abraham (4-6)
- III. The Appearance of the LORD (7-9)
- IV. The Response of Abraham to Danger (10-16)
- V. The Intervention of the LORD (17-20).

The Call Given

The LORD called Abraham. The divine commentary on the call of Abraham is given in Acts 7:2,

¹ Adapted from Griffith Thomas, Genesis, 114.

And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

The call first came to Abraham when he was in “Ur of the Chaldees” (Genesis 11:28, 31). This city was located in southern Mesopotamia.² Abraham then journeyed to Haran together with his father, Terah. God repeated His call to Abraham when he was in Haran.³ Abraham was formerly a worshipper of other gods.⁴ So when God called him, it was purely out of Divine grace, and not of any merit which Abraham had.

Abraham’s faith has been set as an example for all posterity. If one considers the opulence of the city Ur in which he lived at that time, it would require a great amount of faith on his part to forsake his country, his kindred and his siblings (Genesis 1:1). He and his father Terah were city dwellers. For him to uproot himself from the comforts and conveniences of city life to a more nomadic and country lifestyle would take much courage to accept that change. However, the important point is that *he obeyed God*. True faith in God is shown by obedience to God’s Word.

² John J. Davis, From Paradise to Prison, p.165. Davis argues for the location of the Ur of the Chaldees in southern Mesopotamia. According to Davis, this is “the more likely and generally accepted view.” Another view purports that the location of the Ur was in northern Mesopotamia. Hamilton supports this view (see Genesis: chapters 1-17, 365ff.).

³ Ibid., 166. Davis pointed out the “the pluperfect ‘had said’” used by the translators of the King James Version.

⁴ KJV Joshua 24:2 And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, *even* Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.

In calling Abraham, God promised him seven things:

I will show thee a land.

I will make of thee a great nation.

I will bless thee.

I will make thy name great and

I will make thee a blessing to others.

I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee.

I will bless all the families of the earth in thee.

Whenever God commands, He accompanies His commandments with His blessings. The promise of a LAND is the first promise. This promise of a piece of real estate is significant. God’s promise to Abraham is not something that is ambiguous. Land is tangible. It has boundaries, it has to be possessed and occupied, it must be cultivated and conserved to support a people. Hence, God’s first promise to Abraham is something, which can be seen and measured, in real terms. People can see success and failure with regard to the promise.⁵

God promised that out of him there would be a GREAT NATION. The Hebrew word for “nation” is *goy*, a word frequently used in the Old Testament to refer to the gentile nations of the world. The promise here to Abraham is not to make a great “people,” (Hebrew, ‘*am*), but a nation. Abraham’s descendants or the Israelites would attain “the status and stability of nationhood in a land designated for that purpose.” Israel is to be a nation among nations.⁶ It has been said that the contributions of the Jews to universal progress and advancement far exceed those of other nations, and percentage-wise it is out of proportion!

⁵ Joyce G. Baldwin, The Message of Genesis: 12-50, p.30.

⁶ Victor Hamilton, pp. 371-372.

God promised that He would bless Abraham. In these two verses (vv.2, 3) the word “bless” is mentioned five times! Abraham had just heard from God that He would give a land and that his descendants would become a great nation. How could this be when Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah, who was ten years younger, was barren. Sarah could not conceive. Yet Abraham and Sarah would be the parents of a great nation. God said that He would bless Abraham. The blessing of God bestowing upon a person ensures goodness befalling on that person. So, in Abraham’s case, he would experience and enjoy God’s direction, protection and preservation in the course of his life.

God promised to make Abraham’s NAME GREAT. The name of Abraham is held in high esteem among the Jews, Muslims and Christians. It is not through any self-initiated effort on his part, but rather it is a gift from God.

God promised that Abraham would be A BLESSING TO OTHERS. Abraham was to be a channel of blessing to others. He is not just to be a recipient of God's blessings, he would also be an agent of the blessings which God bestowed on him to others. God gave Abraham the joy of giving to others. This is the character of God, for our Lord Jesus Christ says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This aspect of Abraham’s character is indeed evident in his life. He was never a burden to others; He was a blessing to others.

God promised that His relationship to others would be determined by the relationship of these others to Abraham—“I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.” Interestingly, the singular pronoun in the matter of cursing

emphasises that God would in return curse every single person who curses Abraham. Israel as the descendant of Abraham enjoys this promise. God will bless Israel’s friends but will curse Israel’s enemies. God will bless those who bless the Jews and curse those who curse the Jews.

And finally, God promised that ALL THE FAMILIES of the earth would BE BLESSED in Abraham. What this promise means is that Abraham would be the channel of blessing for the whole world. The passive voice of the verb “be blessed” intimates that divine blessing for the whole world can be received only through Abraham. This is how Paul interprets this verse in his letter to Galatians (3:8):

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.

The Apostle, Peter, also referred to this verse in the same light as Paul, when he preached in the temple to the multitude (Acts 3:25):

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.

The divine blessing of salvation would be available to the world through Abraham’s seed, who is none other than, by natural descent, the Lord Jesus

Christ. This promise is an intimation of the *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:15.⁷

The Obedience of Abraham

Abraham went out or departed as the LORD directed him. The key word is “obedience.” Abraham obeyed. Even at an old age of seventy-five, Abraham obeyed and took with him, Sarah, his wife, and his nephew, Lot. The older a person is, the more difficult it is to get them to change their thinking and lifestyle. All the more, Abraham’s obedience to God’s directive to him to leave his country, his clan, and his siblings, speaks a lot about the courageous quality of his faith. Abraham’s decision to give up the riches and security of Mesopotamia is not an easy decision, let alone natural. It was more advantageous and beneficial for him to remain in Mesopotamia. But he went, anyway. True faith in the heart is evidenced by obedience in action. This is biblical faith—believing God and acting on that belief.

The directive to Abraham did not at first specify precisely the land of Canaan. The divine commentary states that Abraham went out, “not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8b). Somehow Abraham seemed to move in the right direction, out of Haran, southwards into the land of Canaan. He passed through Shechem (located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim), and into the plain of Moreh. And the land was already inhabited by Canaanites. Moreh in Hebrew means “teacher.” The name might have described the place where idol worship had taken place, and some pagan

⁷KJV 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.

shrine might have been erected and instructions were given.⁸

The Appearance of the LORD

Once Abraham was in the plain of Moreh, the LORD appeared and spoke to him. It was a short word but very important. The LORD personally showed Himself to Abraham and specifically pointed out to him that the land on which he had just entered would be given to his “seed.” This is God’s direct revelation and *confirmation* of His promises to Abraham.

Abraham immediately responded by building an altar to worship the LORD (v.7b). Later as he moved further south to Bethel (the word means “the house of God”), he built another altar to worship the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD (v.8). The calling of the name of the LORD is to praise His attributes and activities. This is Abraham’s public proclamation of his faith in the LORD.

The Response of Abraham to Danger

A severe famine broke out in the land. Under this very harsh condition, Abraham journeyed to Egypt, a land of plenty. Knowingly or unknowingly, Abraham’s faith is once again being tested. His wife Sarah was beautiful in spite of her age (65 years old). Abraham feared that some Egyptians would covet her wife and resort to kill him. Abraham’s ploy to save his own life was to deceive or tell the Egyptians a *deliberate lie*. It was not an outright lie. It was a half-truth. Sarah was indeed Abraham’s half sister or step sister.⁹ One can appreciate the fear of

⁸ Allen P. Ross, p. 265.

⁹ KJV Genesis 20:12 And yet indeed *she is* my sister; she *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.

Abraham. It was a life-and-death situation in so far as he was concerned. While it is not easy for Abraham, one should not tell a half-truth or a half-lie. God clearly does not condone such behaviour. The beauty of Sarah was reported to Pharaoh. Pharaoh took Sarah into his house, obviously, to make her his concubine. Understandably, Pharaoh showered Abraham with many gifts. Abraham's lie about his wife made the situation more serious and dangerous. The LORD's promises to Abraham would be in jeopardy. The passage illustrates that people, and it includes the people of God too, do respond to danger by deception.

The Intervention of the LORD

The chapter ends with the description of the LORD's intervention in the affairs of men. Abraham's lie has complicated the situation in which God's plan and purpose through Abraham was then in danger. If Pharaoh went ahead to take Sarah to be his wife, the "purity of the ancestress" of Abraham's seed would be tainted, thus jeopardising His promise. So the LORD intervened. It must be stressed that the LORD's intervention to save the situation in no way lessens the sin of lying. The LORD acted for His own sake, that is, His promise to Abraham.

The LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with great plagues. The exact nature of the plagues is not mentioned. It must be terrible enough for Pharaoh to realise his intended action, which would be abominable to God, and to know the real identity of Sarah. Presumably, Sarah who lived in Pharaoh's house was not afflicted. Consequently, Pharaoh chided Abraham, returned his wife Sarah to him pure, and got his men to expel him and

his entourage from Egypt. It was indeed a shameful exit for Abraham.

The Theological Value

Abraham's faith is an example for us to emulate. He believed God and obeyed God's commandment. True and genuine faith must be accompanied by actions in the light of that faith. Faith without works, as James stated, is dead. It is only head knowledge and if it is not acted upon, it is useless. Knowledge must be applied and acted upon to be useful.

The confession of our faith in God must be manifested in our worship of God. If we believe in God and who He is, we must demonstrate our belief by worshipping Him in a manner that reflect His attributes and activities. Today, many Christians show a lack of reverence and fear of the LORD, even in going to Church on the LORD's day in time and well prepared to worship Him as the LORD God Almighty!

People often respond to danger by deception. Telling half-truths to deliver us from dangerous situations is commonplace. We need to remember that the LORD will not always intervene and save His people from every predicament and problem because of their sins. However, one thing, which is learned, is that the LORD's plan and purpose cannot be thwarted, changed or determined by man. Instead God will preserve His promises.

Another point concerning the prevention of Pharaoh from taking Sarah to be his wife, is the preservation of marriage. The LORD showed Himself to be the protector of the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. The extent in which God went to preserve the marriage should enjoin Christians to make every effort to do the same. END

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Read Genesis 12:1-3; Hebrews 11:8-16.

Tuesday: Read Genesis 12:4-6; 2Corinthians 6:14-18; Revelation 18:1-5

Wednesday: Read Genesis 12:7-9; Deuteronomy 27:5-10; 1Chronicles 16:7-19.

Thursday: Read Genesis 12:10-13; Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 121:1-8.

Friday: Read Genesis 12:14-20; Psalm 7:1-17.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways is the call of Abraham similar to your call to become a Christian?

2. How would you explain the miracle of Israel's survival as a nation?

3. What blessings have you received in Abraham?

4. What are the changes in your life to show that your faith in Christ Jesus is true?

5. When a person does not show evidences of the faith he professes, how do describe him?

6. What is the meaning of Abraham building an altar and calling on the Name of the LORD?

7. Where and when have you built your altar and call on the Name of the LORD?

8. How did Abraham respond to danger?

9. Can we tell half-truths? Explain why we can or cannot.

10. What could have been the result of Abraham's deception? How does that apply in our lives?

11. When would God intervene in the affairs of men?

12. Has God intervene in your life to save you from a difficult or dangerous situation?
