

LESSON THREE
THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT
(For Group and Sunday School Leaders)

The covenant between God and Abraham (referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant) is the central focus of this lesson. Genesis 12 begins with a vital prologue that sets the stage for the promises and ceremonies that would follow. They testify to the irrevocable nature of the promises of God. The passage begins with a task given to Abram. He was called to leave all that he had known – his home, most of his family and his country of origin. – and travel to an unknown location that God would reveal in due time. Notice that Abram's initial directive from God was a command and associated with a series of promises that Abram would receive from God if he obeyed. When we think of faith, we think of it in terms of the assurance of God's promises but isn't there integrated within God's concept of faith a call for obedience. Doesn't Abram's obedience bring a works element into the concept of faith? No, grace covers it all. Do not lose sight of God's grace for it is not the obedience that establishes the faith. Rather it is the obedience that demonstrates the faith and the trust in God. Abram's own righteous living or good deeds would in no way make him righteous in God's eyes; it was simply his faith. It is not by works that we have been saved. No, it is by grace through faith – a gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Faith and obedience were hallmarks of Abram's life. When God made Abram promises, he believed. And when he was commanded, Abram obeyed. (Genesis 12:4; 22:2) At times this faith required great risk on Abram's part. Abram left what was known to him in order to step out into what God was calling him to. It is faith like Abrams – faith in the only living God – that saves sinners (Ephesians 2:8). It was Abram's faith in God's promise to give him many descendants that caused God to count him as righteous (Genesis 15:1-6). Abram's faith was well founded in the God who always keeps his promises.

As we look at God's promises in the Abrahamic Covenant and examine the faith of Abraham, keep in mind the fingerprints of grace for even Abraham worshipped other Gods (Joshua 24:2) and he lied to protect himself (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:2). But God extended His grace and we see the handiwork of a gracious God who pours out his favor in order to bring maximum glory to himself. Now we have the assurance that all those who respond in faith to the good news of Jesus are heirs of the promises given to Abraham. (Galatians 3:28-29)

Read Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-15; 17:1-14; and 21:1-7

Questions:

1. Verse 4. Was it a good idea to bring Lot with him?

Whatever you bring with you from the old life into the new is likely to create problems. Terah, Abraham's father, kept Abraham from fully obeying the Lord; and Lot created serious problems for Abraham until they finally had to agree to part. Abraham and Sarah brought a sinful agreement with them from Ur (20:13), and it got them into trouble twice (12:10-20; 20:1-18).

The life of faith demands total separation from what is evil and total devotion to what is holy (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). As you study the life of Abraham, you will discover that he was often tempted to compromise; and occasionally he yielded. God tests us in order to build our faith and bring out the best in us, but the devil tempts us in order to destroy our faith and bring out the worst in us.

When you walk by faith, you lean on God alone: His Word, His character, His will, and His power. You don't isolate yourself from your family and friends, but you no longer consider them your first love or your first obligation (Luke 14:25-27). Your love for God is so strong that it makes family

love look like hatred in comparison! God calls us "alone" (Isa. 51:1-2), and we must not compromise. — Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – Pentateuch.

2. How many things did God promise Abram? Let's make a list. Let's examine Genesis 12:2-3.

This celebrated passage is a prologue to the set of passages that together form the Abrahamic covenant (15:1–21, note), the irrevocable promise of God. There are seven elements in God's promise to Abram in these two verses. The number seven suggests fullness and completeness. They are as follows:

(1) God commanded Abram to leave his home and family, promising to create a great nation through him—the people of God (18:18). This people would be the Hebrew nation. God set them apart to be His agents to reach other nations. This first element and the seventh element are the most significant in the set.

(2) God promised to bless Abram. The blessing of God is His smile, the warmth of His pleasure (1:22, 28; 2:3; 9:1). The Lord's promise of His personal blessing to Abram and Sarai included the benefits of a long and healthy life (15:15; especially 24:1), plus wealth and importance (13:2).

(3) That one's name would live on long after one's lifetime was a supreme honor (6:4). Those who brought shame on themselves would be forgotten (11:4). The name Abraham, by which we remember Abram (17:5), is one of the most honored of all names in history.

(4) Be a blessing: The phrase is a command. That is, Abram was under divine orders to be a blessing to others. This he did whenever he told about the living God before other nations and peoples (v. 8).

(5) Those who bless: Elements five and six are closely related; together they form a poetic couplet.

(6) Him who curses: Whereas God would bless the peoples (plural) who blessed Abram or his descendants, His curse came upon the individual (singular) who cursed Abram or his descendants.

(7) The final and most significant of the Lord's promises to Abram and his descendants was that all the families of the earth would be blessed through them, the Jewish people who are descended from Abram. — Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Ge 12:2–3). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

3. Is this a conditional or unconditional promise?

God promised to bless Abram and make him famous, but God had one condition: Abram had to do what God wanted him to do. This meant leaving his home and friends and traveling to a new land where God promised to build a great nation from Abram's family. Abram obeyed, walking away from his home for God's promise of even greater blessings in the future. God may be trying to lead you to a place of greater service and usefulness for him. Don't let the comfort and security of your present position make you miss God's plan for you. — Life Application Study Bible.

4. Why would God want him to leave his home and go to a new land?

God often will call us out of our comfortable environment. While we do not know God's reasoning for taking Abraham away from his home and family, we can see that Abraham certainly came from a sinful culture. He grew up in the city of Ur in Mesopotamia – a great commercial center

numbering nearly 300,000 citizens. All those people, including Abraham's father, Terah, and their family, were idolaters. They kept and worshiped man-made gods who were, in fact no gods at all.

After Abraham had married, Terah moved his family to the city of Haran, where he died. Then God called Abraham to make a radical and permanent change in his life. God spoke directly to Abraham and told him he was to move away from his father's family "to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). Abraham obeyed, "even though he did not know where he was going. (Hebrew 11:8). For his part, God promised Abraham lots of children and grandchildren (the people of Israel), even though Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were old by this time and she was barren. Most importantly, God promised Abraham that his offspring would be a special blessing to all nations of the earth. This promise included Jews and Gentiles, Africans and Caucasians, Asians and Aborigines, people who live in the east and people who live in the west – and every other place in the world. With this promise, God chose Abraham as the human channel who would bring Jesus Christ into the world to become the Savior of all who receive Him by faith.

God knows that we can be shaped by the environment which we live in and that as we grow more and more comfortable in that environment, we become less and less likely to change. God will take us out of what our comfort zone in order that we might turn to Him and find new life, a life that is dependent on Him. Have you ever been called out of your comfort zone? How did you respond and was your immediate response, why?

5. How can you become a more obedient child of God?

Obedience is a major characteristic of a person who is mighty in spirit. Generally speaking, obedience characterized the faith of Abraham from his first encounter with God until his death.

All obedience begins with faith in the sovereignty of God. If we fail to believe in God's sovereignty, we will find it difficult to obey Him. Abraham based his relationship with God on his confidence that God would do what He had promised (Romans 4:20, 21). Until we study and prayerfully meditate on God's word, we will never learn to trust Him. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God and responding in confident trust (Romans 10:17)

We grow in obedience by waiting for God's timing. God is very time conscious – not in terms of minutes and seconds, but in regard to our acting in obedience according to His schedule. Throughout the Scriptures we find Him moving in "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4). He is neither early nor late. Ever.

We continue to grow in obedience by refusing to subject God's plan to "common sense" or the reasoning of the world. Some things that God requires look ridiculous from a human perspective. God told Abraham he would have a son through whom He would bless the entire world. Yet He allowed Abraham's obedience to be severely tested – first by requiring him to wait nearly a quarter of a century before providing the promised provision, and later by requiring him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. When God saw the faith and obedience of Abraham's heart, He provided a ram in Isaac's place.

Finally, obedience is immediate, prompt, without hesitation. If you long to obey God, you will not hesitate when He tells you to do something. Many times we fail to obey God because we fear the consequences. Yet He never requires us to do anything outside His will for our lives. Our only responsibility is to obey; God's responsibility is to take care of the consequences of our obedience.

6. When we obey God how will that deepen our relationship with Him?

Absolutely, our sensitivity to God's will increases as we obey Him. Along the way, He provides glimpses of the blessings waiting for us. God always blesses obedience. You can trust Him, obey Him, and be blessed. Or you can disobey Him and spend the rest of your life wondering what He would have done had you obeyed Him. Can you remember a time you trusted God, obeyed Him and were blessed in a way you never expected?

7. What was so Great About Abram's Faith?

The Bible makes Abraham's faith the model for us all (See Romans 4, Galatians, 3, Hebrews 11, James 2). The surprising thing is that Abram never saw a Bible, had no church, possessed no creed, took no sacrament, heard not even one of the Ten Commandments and perhaps knew little about life after death. Yet Abram's faith shows us what really matters. He heard the voice of God and dared to believe he could trust God when God spoke. He risked his life, his security, his reputation, his future and even his son on the word that came from the God whom he could not see but in whom believed. Can anything better demonstrate that it is by faith, and faith alone, that we are saved. Today we have the Bible, the church, the sacraments, and the Ten Commandments. But God still looks for one essential; faith that trusts Him completely. Read Genesis 15:6 and commit it to memory for it is one of the hallmark scriptures that takes us straight to the Cross. "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Even when Abram did not see how God could fulfill His gracious promise regarding an heir, he trusted the Lord anyway. He looked beyond what he could see to what God could see. That is the greatness of Abram's faith. It was simple faith, without conditions and if someone were to ask Abram how he knew God would fulfill His promises. Abram's response would most likely be: "Simply because."

8. In Genesis, Chapter 12:1-3, God makes promises to Abram that set the stage for the rest of the Bible and Salvation history. How is that so?

God remains forever true to his word, and this amazing passage is the acid test of that fact. These promises to Abraham set the stage for the rest of the Bible and salvation history. Amazingly, even though generation after generation of Abraham's descendants violated God's revealed will, he never withdrew His promises. God disciplined His people, sometimes severely, in an effort to protect them from their own destructive behavior, but still his promises were evident in each generation. And, century upon century, God was faithful to His promises all the way through to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When you read a warning or a promise in the Bible, remember the history of God's faithfulness. Believe it and act on it. As Pastor Scott has stressed on the video, the scarlet thread begins with God's promises in Genesis and weaves its way from generation to generation all the way to the Cross and beyond to eternity.

9. What does it mean that God is faithful? How would you define it?

Tozer begins the chapter with this definition: "Faithfulness is that in God which guarantees that He will never be or act inconsistent with Himself... . He will always be true to Himself, to His works and to His creation" (p. 164). — A. W. Tozer and David E. Fessenden, *The Attributes of God: Study Guide, vol. 2* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2003—), 87.

10. Does God's faithfulness mean we won't have trouble?

God's faithfulness is not proved by the absence of trouble, tension, calamity, disaster, or personal pain. Indeed, His faithfulness is seen most clearly in those times when we question His plan and feel the pain of our circumstances.

Besides Jesus Himself, no one suffered as consistently for God's sake as did the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 and 11:21-30, he catalogs the varieties of pain and hardship he experienced. God's faithfulness to Paul was not seen in the avoidance of pain but in the supply of grace needed to endure it. Paul had such a deep understanding of the role of grace in his life that he said he took "pleasure" in what he suffered for Christ's sake because it resulted in a greater revelation of God's grace (2 Corinthians 12:10). When we arrive at the place where we glory more in the presence of grace than in the absence of pain, we know we are making strides toward maturity.

If you are in the midst of trouble right now, develop the discipline of finding pleasure in the experience of grace—the greatest indicator of God's faithfulness. — David Jeremiah, *Turning Points with God: 365 Daily Devotions* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2014).

11. What was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant Verse 12? Why circumcision?

God's covenant sign with His people under the Old Covenant of Law was circumcision. Why would He choose such a thing? It is because of what it depicts. He wanted the circumcision of Israel's men to be an object lesson pointing toward what would happen to His children under the new covenant of grace. Physical circumcision is the cutting away of a piece of skin on a man's body at the place from which life originates, and by which his gender (part of his identity) is identified. When the skin is cut away, it never grows back.

The apostle Paul points out that in this day of grace we have been circumcised "with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." At the cross, God reached down and cut away from you the source of your old life. That source was the sin nature inherited from Adam. Through Jesus, God has removed it from you through your circumcision in Christ, and it will never grow back. — Steve McVey, *Grace Walk Moments: A Devotional* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2014).