



# Promised

*God's blessing is seen in the promises He keeps.*

## **GENESIS 12:1-5a; 13:11-18**

There are probably few things more exciting than when someone promises to do something for us that's going to be a blessing. On the other hand, there are few things more disappointing than when someone fails to keep a promise. God will never disappoint us in this way. He not only blesses us with good things (Jas. 1:17), but a part of His blessing is seen in His faithfulness to keep His promises through Christ, "for every one of God's promises is 'Yes' in him" (2 Cor. 1:20).

- **What are promises God has kept that are expressions of His blessing?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **GENESIS 12:1–14:24**

Genesis 12 is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. It introduces the promises that are central to the covenant that God would make with Abram that would have implications for the remainder of Genesis—even though they would not be completely realized until they were ultimately fulfilled in Christ. God’s blessing that began in the garden and later witnessed by Noah would be forever realized through Abram and his seed.

Abram was from Ur, a region in southern Mesopotamia. God directed him to leave his land, relatives, and father’s house to follow the Lord’s leading. He made several promises to Abram:

- to give Abram a land which would be the land of Canaan (12:1,7);
- to make Abram into a great nation (12:2);
- to bless Abram (12:2);
- to make him a man of renown (12:2), doing for Abram what the people in the plains of Shinar wanted to do for themselves (11:4);
- to bless those who blessed him and to curse those who mistreated him (12:3).

God’s purpose for blessing Abram was not only for Abram. He chose Abram ultimately to be a blessing to people from every nation, which is communicated twice for emphasis (12:1-3,5).

As Moses delivered this account to Israel, it was important for the people of Israel to realize that their heritage began with God’s purposes and promises to their forefather, Abram. It was for this reason when God called Moses to go to Egypt to deliver the people out of bondage that Moses was to tell them that “the God of Abraham” sent him (Ex. 3:16). Furthermore, just like with Abram, God expected their faithful obedience to His calling.

 **As you read Genesis 12:1-5a; 13:11-18, consider our personal responsibilities to God in response to His promises.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## MOVE (GEN. 12:1-5a)

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Abram: Go from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you. <sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. <sup>5a</sup> He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

## VERSE 1

The Lord's call to **•Abram** to leave his *land, relatives, and father's house* sounds a lot like Jesus's words to forsake everything else and "follow me." Paul indicated that the gospel was first told to Abraham, so this should be no surprise (Gal. 3:8). According to Acts 7:2-4, God initially spoke to *Abram* in Ur. After that, he and his family moved to Haran in Aram, and it was while Abram was in Haran that he received this word from the Lord. God was calling Abram to leave everything that had provided him social and economic stability and go to someplace not only unfamiliar but also unknown. Hebrews 11:8 indicates Abraham "went out, even though he did not know where he was going." What God was promising was a new *land* for Abram. What God was doing was teaching Abram to trust Him.

## VERSES 2-3

Having promised Abram a land, God promised to make him into a *great nation*. This was possibly the most surprising of all the promises God made to him. Abram was seventy-five years old (v. 4). Sarai his wife was unable to conceive and did not have a child (Gen. 11:30). However, the Scriptures teach that nothing is impossible for God, and it is God who "opens" and "closes" a woman's womb (18:14; 20:18; 29:31; 30:22; 1 Sam. 1:5-6; Luke 1:37). Apart from a miracle of God, this promise was not going to be fulfilled.

Next, God promised to *bless* Abram. In Genesis, God's blessing refers to God's bestowment of prosperity and fertility in life and the

ability to achieve what God has promised. God then promised to make Abram's **name** a name of renown. Matthew pointed out what made Abraham's *name* so renowned by beginning his gospel with, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Certainly, God blessed Abram for Abram's sake, but it was bigger than Abram. What's more, Abram, his sons, and grandsons at times show themselves to be blessings to others in Genesis (Gen. 30:27-30), but this promise is ultimately fulfilled by God in Christ, "the Son of Abraham."

Verse 3 shows how God's blessing on Abram would affect others. Those who aligned themselves with Abram and seek to bless him would be **blessed** by the Lord. Those who were against Abram and treated him with contempt would be cursed by God. It is important to remember whom the Lord has cursed so far in Genesis. God said to the serpent, "you are cursed," and promised that the seed of the woman would ultimately defeat him and rectify what he did there (3:15). When Cain murdered his brother, God told Cain, "you are cursed" (4:11). In Genesis 9:25, Noah declared that his son "Canaan will be cursed" because of how shamefully he treated his father. Those who mistreat Abram would be cursed like the serpent, Cain, and Canaan were cursed. They would become identified with the seed of the serpent who opposed the seed of the woman, while those who align themselves with Abram align themselves with the seed of the woman.

Finally, God reiterated His purpose for blessing Abram. It was that through Abram ***all the peoples on the earth will be blessed***. In verses 1-3, God revealed His promises to Abram, His pledge to Abram (God says ***I will*** four times), and His purpose for Abram. The apostles in the New Testament understood that these things are ultimately fulfilled through the gospel, to the Jew first and then the Gentile (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10; Gal. 3:28).

### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *The Church*

The New Testament speaks of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. (See 1 Chronicles 16:23-24; Psalm 67:1-2; Revelation 7:9.)

## VERSES 4-5a

Abram did what God told him to do. This is what a person who trusts in God does. Even though he was **seventy-five years old**, he left a place of security in **•Haran** to go to the unknown because God told him to. Also, we learn that **his nephew •Lot** went with him. This will be useful information for the narrative in Genesis going forward. Abram took **his wife, •Sarai**, *his nephew Lot*, everyone else who was with him, and everything else he possessed and set out for the **land of •Canaan** about 450 miles away. The land of Canaan was the territory situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, stretching south to the border of Egypt and north to the Euphrates River (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 1 Kings 4:21).

- What role did Abram's trust in God play in his response to the blessing?
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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use other Scriptures to understand Genesis 12:1-5a.*

Read Hebrews 11:8-19 to gain additional insights into Abraham's faith journey. Abraham's faith was tied directly to the promises God gave Him in the covenant relationship set out in Genesis 12. Paul used Abraham's response to these promises as a definition of what true faith is. Read, and perhaps memorize, Romans 4:20-21. Note that genuine faith is believing that God is able to deliver what He has promised.

## SEPARATE (GEN. 13:11-13)

**<sup>11</sup> So Lot chose the entire plain of the Jordan for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup> Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived in the cities on the plain and set up his tent near Sodom. <sup>13</sup> (Now the men of Sodom were evil, sinning immensely against the LORD.)**

## VERSES 11-13

Genesis 13 contains the first of three accounts involving Abram and Lot (Gen. 13:2-18; 14:1-24; 18:16-19:38). Lot provides an example that

contrasts Abram, the man of faith, with Lot, a man of the world. Moses used such contrasts in individuals like Cain and Abel, Ham and his brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau to distinguish the promised line from those who opposed or rejected it. The quarreling between Lot's people and Abram's people because there just was not enough room for both of them in the same location (13:7-8) was just the beginning of the strife that would continue throughout the remainder of Israel's history with the Moabites and Ammonites, Lot's descendants.

To stop the quarreling between them and their people, Abram suggested that he and Lot part ways. As the head of the clan, Abram had every right to choose which region he would take and which region Lot would have, but he graciously allowed Lot to choose which region he wanted. Lot saw that the plain of the Jordan Valley was fertile like the garden of Eden, so he chose it for himself. So Lot **journeyed eastward**, away from Abram. As with Adam and Eve, Cain, and those at the tower of Babel, *eastward* can denote a separation from the blessings of God. (See comments on Gen. 11:2, p. 85.)

Abram lived in the land of Canaan, the place of God's blessing. However, Lot lived outside the land of blessing, living **in the cities on the plain** of the Jordan Valley while setting up his **tent near Sodom**, apparently for his herdsman to tend to his flocks.

Both *Sodom* and Gomorrah were cities in the Jordan Valley that became proverbial types of wickedness and God's judgment. Biblical writers used Sodom and Gomorrah as models of evil (Isa. 3:9; Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 16:49-50; Jude 7). This means that Lot chose to settle down and dwell with the wicked who were **sinning immensely against the LORD**. Lot was willing to settle his family and servants with the wicked in order to profit materially. Although Lot did not participate in their wicked ways, he would come to regret this choice (Gen. 19).

○ What role did Abram's faith in God's promises play in his treatment of Lot?

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## **CLAIM** (GEN. 13:14-18)

<sup>14</sup> **After Lot had separated from him, the LORD said to Abram, "Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west,**  
<sup>15</sup> **for I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see.**

<sup>16</sup> **I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted.**

<sup>17</sup> **Get up and walk around the land, through its length and width, for I will give it to you.”** <sup>18</sup> **So Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.**

### **VERSES 14-15**

This is the first time since 12:7 that there is record of God speaking to Abram. The promise of land is repeated with even more detail. God’s words to Abram contain a wordplay contrasting what Lot did with what God instructed Abram to do. When Lot “looked out” (v. 10) to the plains of the Jordan Valley, he decided to separate himself from Abram and the promised land and went eastward. But here, the Lord instructed Abram to look out to the expanse of the land of Canaan before him. It is possible that Abram was at the same location where Lot was when he looked out.

In verse 15, God revealed the reason for having Abram to look out. God wanted him to see the land that He had promised to give Abram and his **offspring**. *Offspring* is a singular noun with a collective meaning, indicating that this was for Abram and all of his descendants. Furthermore, God promised that all the land that Abram gazed upon in every direction would be an eternal inheritance for them.

***The only way this was going to happen would be by God’s hand and not human effort.***

### **VERSE 16**

God’s comparing Abram’s offspring to ***the dust of the earth*** is in regard to number. Just as *dust of the earth* is plentiful, so the number of Abram’s descendants will be also. What’s more, if the dust on the earth could be **counted**, which it cannot, then so could Abram’s offspring also be counted. The meaning is that Abram’s offspring would be so numerous that it would be impossible to count how many there would be. Once again, it is important to remember that Abram was seventy-five years old with no children, and Sarai his wife was barren. The only way this was going to happen would be by God’s hand and not human effort.

### **VERSE 17**

The expression, ***Get up and walk***, does not mean that Abram was sitting down as God spoke to him. It was a cultural expression indicating

that the recipient of the promise needs to immediately take action. In modern vernacular, God was telling Abram: “Now get up and get going!”

Then the Lord instructed Abram to go walk **through** the land, traveling both its length and width. This is a sign of ownership, the freedom to go wherever Abram wanted to go on his land. This too raises a conundrum. Not only was Sarai barren, a matter concerning the amazing promise of multitudes of descendants, but the Canaanites were living in the land, and they were not going to hand it over to a seventy-five-year-old man who claimed that it now belonged to him because God said so.

### ***Abram worshiped while patiently waiting for God to fulfill His promises.***

#### **VERSE 18**

What was Abram’s response in light of these concerns? He settled down in the land near **the oaks of •Mamre at Hebron**. *Hebron* was located in the south-central mountains of Canaan about 20 miles south of Jerusalem and was the highest city in the land (3,040 feet in elevation). After pitching his tent and settling down in the land God had promised him, Abram **built an altar** to worship the Lord. Abram worshiped while patiently waiting for God to fulfill His promises.

- Why was it important for God to remind Abram of His promises after he had separated from Lot?

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- Why was it important for Abram to set up an altar once he settled in the land?

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