

Finer Grounds

Genesis

Lesson 7: Promises, Promises

Read Genesis 12:1-3

This lesson begins with promises. In Genesis 12:1-3 we read of the infamous promises made to faithful Abram, or later Abraham. Among them is the land promise to the Israelites, which would not be completely fulfilled until Joshua 21:43-45. The timeline for this promise to be fulfilled cannot be calculated exactly, but most scholars would estimate it to be 800 years or more after it was given to Abram. The time from Abram until the Israelites enter Egypt is where we do not have a definite time frame, but based on some of the Patriarch's ages, we know that it was at least a couple of hundred years. We do know from Exodus 12:40-41 that the Israelites lived 430 years in Egypt alone and in Joshua 14:7,10 Caleb tells us it was 45 years from the spies to the fulfillment of the land promise. At any rate, it was probably just under a 1,000 years before that promise would be fully realized.

Another promise God gives Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 is that He will make him into a "great nation". This was coming to fulfillment in Exodus 1:7 when we are told they had "increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them". From what we looked at earlier, we know that this promise occurred a few hundred years after God declared it to Abraham.

God also promises to bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him. We will see that promise fulfilled repeatedly throughout Israel's history. There are actually two different Hebrew words used in Genesis 12:3 for the word

"curse". The first one used is in reference to those who curse Abram and it is QALAL. It means "to be light, curse, or despise" and has the idea of bringing someone low or thinking little of them. The second "curse" used in verse 3 is in reference to God doing the cursing and is 'ARAR. It actually means "bitterly curse" and has more of the idea of being bound or rendered powerless. I guess no matter what we give, God gives it greater, whether good or bad.

The last promise given in this section is the most important of all the promises. God tells Abram that in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed". We will discuss this in more detail when we get to chapter 22, but for now we will just mention that this is the promise of the Messiah to come through the line of Abram. This promise was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross for our sins around 2,000 years after the promise was made. All were blessed through this particular promise, and we continue to be so today.

Think About It:

How was God faithful in all of His promises to Abram?

Do you think God is slow in keeping His promises?

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If you were Abram, why would you have believed God when He gave these promises in Genesis 12?

Can you think of some promises that God has made to you?

Read Genesis 12:4-20

We are told in Genesis 12:6 that the “Canaanite was in the land”. Canaanites were known to be merchants or traders. Although it is not certain, this statement may have been made in order for us to understand that the land was not just ready for the taking without any inhabitants. Abram’s descendants would not just be occupying vacant land. God was going to have to dispossess these other nations in order to give it to them.

In Genesis 12:8, we see Abram building an altar to the Lord and it says he “called upon the name of the Lord”. We first saw that terminology back in Genesis 4:26 when we saw Seth’s descendants turning to the Lord. We will see it again in verse 4 of chapter 13. There seems to be a link between this phrase and the idea of submitting to God, seeking His protection and guidance, and salvation. In this passage Abram is submitting to God. In building the altar he is declaring God as sovereign in his life and, by calling on Him, he is asking and allowing God to lead him. He is seeking His protection and guidance to lead him to salvation.

The last section of chapter 12 is the disturbing account of Abram coercing Sarai, his wife, to

deceive Pharaoh. Abram undoubtedly was not pleasing to God in this event for several reasons but perhaps most importantly because he was definitely not trusting in God to protect him. Sarai obeys Abram and ends up married to Pharaoh! Plenty of questions and assumptions could be made concerning this scenario, but we don’t know the whole story. Maybe God punished Abram for this sin or maybe he spared Sarai from the act of adultery, as He does for her later when Abram commits the same action with Abimelech. What we can be certain of is that neither Abram, nor Sarai, are perfect and God never condoned every action they committed. He does however protect them even when they have messed up. He does it here by sending plagues on Pharaoh and his house.

Think About It:

How do you think God “appeared” to Abram in Genesis 12:7?

Read Psalm 116. What concepts or ideas are tied to the phrase “calling on the name of the Lord” in this Psalm?

In what ways do you think Abram sinned with the Pharaoh incident?

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In what ways, if any, do you think Sarai sinned in the Pharaoh incident?

Read Genesis 13

By verse 2 of chapter 13 Abram has become quite wealthy. So much so that the land is no longer going to support his livestock along with Lot's livestock. As we know, Lot chooses the better looking land which does not seem very kind or honoring of him towards his uncle, but Abram seems to accept it without quarrel. Unfortunately, Lot moves very close to the city of Sodom where the men are already being described as "wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord". We will talk more about Sodom in another lesson, but you may find it interesting that the Hebrew word for Sodom, CEDOM, means "to scorch or burnt".

As we close this lesson and chapter 13, we see God yet again speaking of His promises to Abram. He settles by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron and again pays tribute to God by building an altar. The Hebrew word for Mamre, MAMRE, means "strength or vigor". What a fitting name for Abram as God promises to make his descendants so numerous that they will be "as the dust of the earth". God does not want Abram to doubt or fear, only trust and believe in what great things He has promised, no matter how hard they may be for our mortal minds to comprehend.

Think About It

Do you think Abram's response to Lot choosing the best land tells you anything about his character and, if so, what?

How hard do you think it was for Abram to believe that he and his barren wife would produce the amount of descendants God was promising or that his descendants would possess all of that land?

What has God promised you that it is hard for you to fully believe?

Do you have a faith like Abram? (see Heb. 11:8-10)
