



WHEN GOD
CALLED
ABRAM
(Part One)

GENESIS 12-15

Bible Study April 21, 2023



The New Beginning

- ◇ The Bible so far has been a tale of man's repeated failures, disobedience, corruption, and wickedness. God in His great love, mercy, and grace, had provided for man and delayed judgement that they would have a chance to return to Him and be saved. Yet, countless generations went to the grave rejecting God's grace in favor of worshipping man-made idols of non-existent gods. The world of men was steeped in sin.
- ◇ The Lord, however, was faithful to His desire to save man and restore them to the fellowship Adam and Eve had briefly known when they walked in Eden with Him. God had promised a Redeemer would come from the seed of the woman, Eve. Because God is holy, righteous, and faithful, He would fulfill the promise by preserving a remnant of Eve's descendants even as He sent the waters of the Great Flood to wipe mankind from the Earth. Through Noah and his family, the line of the Redeemer whom God purposed lived on.



The New Beginning

- ◇ In Genesis 10, we read that God had once again required that His image (man) multiply and fill the earth, expanding His Kingdom to all corners of the world. Yet, men quickly fell back into sin, disobedience, and rebellion against God and His purposes.
- ◇ Nevertheless, God's grace and His redemptive plan remained. As we move into Genesis 12, the details of God's plan to use the seed of the woman (Eve) in His Kingdom plan begin to emerge. God would call Abram (who would become Abraham) to become the patriarch of the specific nation that would serve and facilitate this redemption plan. Through Abram, all mankind would have the hope of salvation. He would become the model of faith which allows God to impart righteousness and forgiveness.

The Key Figures

ABRAM

Son of Terah. Husband of Sarai. Uncle of Lot. Would become Abraham. Living in Ur, the land of the Chaldeans (descendants of Shem). This city was known for idolatry and worship of the moon god Nannar. The man who would be the patriarch of Israel spent the first 75 years of his life in a pagan culture, yet God still chose

Abram to become the model of faithful obedience for all generations to come. As we learned in our previous lesson, one's origins need not condemn them. Christ's eternal kingdom will include the faithful and redeemed from all nations and people groups.

Like Sarai and Lot, Abram's walk with God would not be perfect. The difference is that Abram, in his heart, was faithful to believe God, repent of his mistakes, and walk in trust and obedience to all God commanded. Because he believed God, the Lord was able to impart righteousness to Abram, which is the model of how we are made righteous now by faith in Christ the Lord.

SARAI

Half-sister and wife of Abram. She is the one chosen by God to bear Abram's covenant son, Isaac. Her walk with God would not be without missteps. Her story will illustrate the necessity faith, patience, trust, and obedience as part of our relationship with God.

When God purposes us for a particular ministry (when we feel His call), it is important that we remember God's purposes must be fulfilled in HIS WAY, according to HIS TIMING by HIS METHOD. Too often, we sense the call of God, but when events don't unfold as we anticipate, when the results aren't what we expect, when things just don't seem to be happening, we are tempted to take matters into our own hands. If we are going to serve God, we have to trust Him and do it on God's terms.

LOT

If Abram is our model of a man who walks in obedience to God with his eyes on the Lord, Lot's story is a warning of how the things of this world can distract us from the path of fellowship with the Lord.


At all times in Lot's story, his choices are dictated by lust and desires for things of this world. Once he establishes himself in worldly ways, he is unable to break from them and return to God. The result is repeated disaster, culminating with the loss of his family (save for two unmarried daughters) in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot would even become the patriarch of the Ammonites and the Moabites, who would persecute Israel. It is only Abram's love and intercession with God that repeatedly saves Lot's life.

Lesson One: Trusting God. When God calls on us to move, we must do so without hesitation, trusting in His provision and purposes wherever He leads us.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. ² “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring^[c] I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. ⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. (Genesis 12:1-9)



What do we learn from this passage?

- 1) This passage is the first time God will mention the Abrahamic Covenant (12:2-3), which is the foundation of our redemption
- 2) Pay attention to Abram's worship of God. Wherever Abram travels, he makes an altar of worship of the Lord. (side note: Altars for the Lord in the Old Testament are always built with whatever rocks are found, never from stone that has been milled or otherwise carved by men's hands. This is to underscore that redemption comes only from God's grace, man has no part in his own salvation save faith in Christ). Abram's heart always acknowledges God's provision and responds with gratitude, joy, and worship.
- 3) God is moving Abram and Sarai to a place that He appoints. We must be willing to move when God tells us to move that He may place us where we are needed that we can be part of His purposes. We must go without delay. Jesus has a similar relationship with His apostles. When He calls to them, they set aside whatever they are doing and immediately follow. Obedience and trust are crucial components of true faith.

Why is our obedience so important?

- ◇ God is concerned that every man has the chance to be saved. He blesses us so that we can bless others in turn and lead them to God. There are generations of Christians and Hebrews who sacrificed, suffered, and died just that others might hear the Word of God and have the opportunity for salvation through Jesus Christ. Where would we be if they had not made God their first priority ahead of their own wishes or ambitions in obedience and faith?
- ◇ Obedience and being sent forth does not mean that we isolate permanently from our families and friends, it just means that God has become our first priority. Remember: It is the things of this world that the enemy can use to derail our walk with God, to tempt us back into our old worldly ways, and distract us from God. This endangers our personal salvation and our place in God's purposes (which will be fulfilled regardless of whether we have the joy of playing a part in His plans).
- ◇ Two of the enemy's favorite weapons are compromise and entitlement. Compromise means we want to obey God, but on our own terms. We are raised in a world of entitlements, which impresses that "freedom" means self-determination and independence, not submission and obedience and certainly not at the cost of our own ambitions. Matthew 6:24 reminds us that those who would follow God cannot be of two minds or serve two masters. God will have first priority and our love or the world will have first priority and our love. Obedience is not just an act of faith and love, it is a *deliberate, conscious choice* that we make each day.




God knows the hearts of men. He did not randomly choose Abram from among the pagans. God knows who among us will believe His Word and respond to His call with obedience and faithfulness. It is our response to His commands that determine what God will do through our lives. Obedience is evidence of faith.

Abram lived by faith and righteousness was imparted to him because of his faith. He obeyed even when He didn't understand, even when he faced trials, tests, challenges and crises of faith. We see that Abram was constantly moving. He was constantly dependent upon God to provide for his needs as he entered strange lands and to protect him among people who did not know or fear the Lord (as we will see, the latter was sometimes a problem for Abram).

Abram worshipped openly in the sight of the pagans of the land. This is the model we must follow, to acknowledge and worship God in the sight of others without shame or hesitation that we can be a light to others. How we live our lives sends a message to unbelievers about our Lord. Abram was a righteous model of a righteous God, a man known by his countrymen to be a man of integrity and faith, a priest of the Lord. Abram was not just known for making altars (which marked his devotion to God), he also dwelled in tents rather than setting roots in any place. Entering Canaan was an act of claiming the promises that God had made, but Abram was still separated from the world and its idolatry by his citizenship in God's kingdom of light.

Out of our comfort zones, into the tests of faith...

*“³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ **In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”** (1 Peter 1:3-7)*



God knows that our walks will not be perfect. The heroes of the Bible (with the exception of Jesus) are still men and women prone to missteps in their walk, as vulnerable to sin and dependent upon God's grace and forgiveness as any of us.

We are about to see Abram make a misstep in his walk with God. We will also see that missteps are never so great that we cannot be restored to relationship if our hearts are truly repentant and our hearts, minds, souls, and strength is centered on God.

Don't forget: We're still in spiritual warfare against an enemy who wants to frustrate God's plans. Our faith will be challenged.

It is one thing to say that God is our first priority. It is one thing to truly believe God is first in our hearts.

Is He?

Once we make the choice to receive Jesus in faith, we become clay in the hands of the Master craftsman. We are to be molded and shaped into vessels that serve His purposes. However, until we face the heat of the kiln, we are not refined into perfect final form, ready for God's use.

- ◇ Stepping out to follow God's will is claiming our inheritance as adopted children in the family of Christ. We display our faith in God's Word when we obey God's will. Faith without works contributes nothing to the Kingdom; obedience without faith is misguided and self-directed (a work of the flesh, not the Spirit).
- ◇ The longer we walk with the Lord, the more we grow in trust of God, the more we mature in our spirituality. As we mature, we see more clearly God's working in our lives and can respond with joy, gratitude, and worship.
- ◇ The Enemy will use every circumstance, every person, and every worldly temptation to cause us to stumble in our walk. The more victories we achieve in the service of God, the more Satan will send trials and tribulations towards us. The faith we have refined through knowledge of God's Word and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts provides all that we need to overcome such trials.

Abram and the First Stumble


Genesis 12: Abram and Sarai in Egypt

- ◇ When famine came to Canaan, Abram trusted in his own understanding and experience and made the decision to go down into Egypt rather than remaining where God had placed him in the land of Canaan and trusting the Lord to provide for him. There was food and water in Egypt to provide for his family, servants, and animals.
- ◇ Egypt, as we will discover in the Scripture, symbolized rejection of God's way. It was a land of idolatry and a people who did not know or fear God. Because of this, Abram experienced a second episode of doubt in God: He trusted in his own wisdom to devise a plan to protect himself from the Pharaoh, whom Abram knew would desire Sarai for himself, possibly would kill Abram to get her. Abram told Sarai to tell everyone that she was his sister so he would be treated well.
- ◇ Pharaoh did take Sarai, intending to make her his wife. He gave Abram many gifts and treated him well because of Sarai.
- ◇ What Abram and Sarai did not understand was that their actions—first leaving the land where God had placed them and second by risking Pharaoh taking Sarai from Abram forever---jeopardized their place in God's redemption plans. As we read, God had made a covenant that all nations would be blessed through Abram and his descendants. That could not happen without Sarai. True faith should have given Abram trust to remain in Canaan knowing God would provide.
- ◇ Their actions also necessitated God's intervention. The Lord sent curses upon Pharaoh's house until Sarai was returned to Abram. Both of them were expelled from Egypt. Rather than bringing blessing to Egypt as a model of God, Abram's deception caused suffering for many people and endangered Sarai.

Abraham and the Second Stumble

Genesis 20: Abraham and Sarah in Gerar


- ◆ It is important when we stumble in our walk with God to repent of our mistakes and sins, to turn back to God in obedience and faith, and to learn from our mistakes so that we do not repeat them.
 - ◆ Abraham and Sarah—now promised a son in their old age, a covenant child named Isaac through whom God would bless the world---found their way to Gerar (a part of the promised land that was occupied by the Philistines). This was another kingdom that did not know God or fear Him.
 - ◆ Again, Abraham told Sarah to tell people that she was his sister. While this is partially true (she was his half-sister), it is not wholly truthful. Was Abraham modeling the God of Truth when he facilitated such deceptions? Was he trusting in God's protection?
- ◆ Again, the king desired Sarah for a wife and took her into his palace. Again, Abraham was treated well because of the king's desire for Sarah. And again, the Lord was forced to intervene to rescue Sarah (and her future covenant son, Isaac, whom God had promised would be born within that year).
 - ◆ God also interceded on Abimelek's behalf. God is Lord of Justice, and the king's sin against Sarah and Abraham had been unintentional. Had he touched Sarah, Abimelek would have been guilty of sin in the eyes of God. The Lord prevented him from touching Sarah and gave warning by keeping all the women of Abimelek's household from conceiving until Sarah was returned to Abraham.
 - ◆ God still calls Abraham a prophet and Abraham's prayer for Abimelek is an intercession that facilitates God's mercy in removing the curse. Yet, the experience left Abimelek angry with Abraham and certainly Abraham did not bring blessing to Gerar or model our holy God by being deceitful. The fact that God still claimed Abraham and answered his prayers shows that God is faithful to keep every promise and gracious to forgive our sins and missteps.



Fortunately, Abraham's mistakes are the exceptions and not the whole story. Overall, his life is an example of what it means to truly live in fellowship and relationship with God. He is recalled in the Scriptures as a prophet of the Lord and a hero of the faith for good reason.

I am starting by showing the human side of Abraham that made mistakes so that we can understand: The heroes of the Bible are people just like you and me. They made mistakes, but those mistakes didn't mean rejection by God. The Lord's issue was with Abraham's deception, for lies do not model a God of truth and justice and holiness. We are going to see every hero of the Bible (except Jesus) stumble at some point in their walks.

However, sinning believers can be forgiven and restored to relationship with God through confession, honesty, humility, repentance, and returning to God in faith. We have been justified by Christ. God is our Father, and He will not forsake or reject those whose hearts are genuinely His. When we are restored to relationship with God and seek His will, He can once again bless us and guide our ministry.



We have also seen that there is an enemy dedicated to undermining God's redemption purposes. When we are adopted into Christ's kingdom and begin our walk with the Lord, Satan is going to place snares in our path.

After we accept Christ and begin to learn God's Word and God's Ways, the Holy Spirit begins to indwell within us, and we become His home and His vessels. God and Satan cannot occupy the same space. The Holy Spirit has cast out the demons of sin within us, but Matthew 12 warns that they are eager to return.

Jesus rescues us out of the kingdom of darkness, but Satan will use every weapon in his arsenal to drag us back to darkness. He will use people around us (even friends and family), our circumstances, our fears and insecurities and doubts, material temptations, fleshly desires, and even threat of physical death to knock us from the path of salvation in God. Fortunately, God provides us with everything that we need to resist the attacks and temptations of the enemy. Ephesians 6 details this arsenal: God's Word, His truth, His righteousness, peace, Spirit, and the certainty of our salvation.

We also need to remember that Jesus has warned us to expect troubles in this world. God will allow certain trials, obstacles, and challenges into our lives in order that our faith in Him can be refined and strengthened. We do not overcome these tribulations through our own efforts or understanding (as we saw with Abraham's missteps), but rather by our dependence, trust, and obedience of the Lord.

As we saw in our Easter 2023, God knows in advance who will choose faith and obedience, those who will put His will before their wishes. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, the Old Testament prophets, Mary, Joseph, the Apostles, and Jesus Christ Himself all said yes to making God's will their first priority and consequently found their place in the Lord's redemptive plans. We all have a place in that plan if we, too, will choose to say "yes" to the Lord in obedience, faith, and trust.

HOW ABRAHAM'S MISSTEPS CAUTION US ABOUT THE INFLUENCE OF SIN

Sin does not nullify our faith or the salvation we receive when we accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf. It does, however, have consequences for us, for the people around us, and for God's purposes.

- ◇ Sin affects our character, integrity, humility. Sin affects our trust in God and obedience to His Ways.
- ◇ Sin affects our ministry and witness for God. People who do not model the values that they preach do not offer trustworthy witness to unbelievers and the unchurched.
- ◇ Sin causes suffering for us when we experience God's discipline and the consequences of our actions.
- ◇ Sin causes suffering for others because of us, as we saw with the Pharaoh and the King of Gerar. In that case, we are no longer a source of God's blessing and cannot serve him effectively.
- ◇ **When our ministry is ineffective, souls can be lost.**
- ◇ When we force God to intervene to fix our mistakes, we are essentially tempting God (which is a sin, see Matthew 4:7). This does not mean that it is a sin to ask God's intervention if we are in distress that did not come from sinful behavior. He expects us to come to Him for help that He can comfort and bless us.

HOW ABRAHAM'S LIFE MODELS A MATURING SPIRITUAL WALK WITH GOD

*The foundational elements
of a relationship with God
are found in Abraham's
relationship with God.*

- ◇ Receiving and believing God's Word
- ◇ Obeying God's Ways
- ◇ Submission to God's Will (without hesitation or delay)
- ◇ Faith in God's promises and blessings (confident faith!)
- ◇ Worship (God deserves it!)
- ◇ Prayer
- ◇ Ministry, service, and witnessing for God
- ◇ Humility and integrity
- ◇ Making God our first priority
- ◇ Growing God's Kingdom
- ◇ Doing good works for God out of joy and gratitude and desire to bring others into relationship with Him



REFERENCES FOR THIS LESSON:

**“BE OBEDIENT: LEARNING THE
SECRET OF LIVING BY FAITH” by
Warren W. Wiersi; DavidCook
Publishing, 1991**