

Read Genesis 12:1-9

v1-3 These verses are once again originally written as a sort of poetry, lost in translation to us. Some of your translations may have these sections indented to show the original style.

v1 In chapter 3 we discussed some of the names for God, including this covenant name of LORD. The original Israelite readers would be encouraged to hear that their forefather Abra[ha]m covenanted with the same God they just had at Sinai (chapter 19).

v1 Abram's name means "exalted father". If the father being referenced was Abram himself, then this was apparently another bout of parental prophecy, as his wife could not bear children.

v1 God's requests to Abram are increasingly demanding and counter-cultural. He had to leave his extended family (which he was possibly in charge of since his brother and father died) and travel with no destination in mind. Unlike today where kids bail out from their parents as soon as they can drive or turn 18, ancient families tended to stay close together; often even in the same home.

Q: Has God ever asked (or told) you to leave your comfort zone?

How about to give up something important to you?

How did you respond to His request/command?

How have things turned out since?

Why do you think God moved you out of your comfort zone?

v2 God is setting up a covenant here. Do you remember the types of covenants we discussed in chapter 6? If so, can you name which one this was? Answer: This was a promissory covenant. It was entirely one-sided. God was doing all the work and making all the promises. Abram only had to believe. We know that his descendants would not believe, and yet God would uphold His side of the bargain...otherwise, we'd never have received the promised Seed of Jesus and the salvation He offered. (cf. *Heb 6:13-20*).

v2 You're going to see a lot of words or phrases repeated after one another in the Bible. It reads funny to us and can occasionally be annoying (Trust me, you're going to roll your eyes when reading the repetitions sometimes and say to yourself, "You just said that!"). However, another dose of context here is that repetition indicated emphasis in ancient Hebrew. So, instead of saying "There was a whole heck of a lot of repetition in that passage!", they'd say "That passage was repetitive repetitive!" Or if you think of Jesus, who was always saying "Verily verily" or "Truly truly" (literally "Amen amen")...He actually meant, "Listen! What I'm about to say is super important!")

v2 There are seven blessings in this verse, again indicating completeness.

Q (v2): Does the Bible teach that following God guarantees our happiness, health and wealth?

v2 Looking back, did God make Abram into a great nation?

Yes, Israel for sure, but also many long-lived Arab nations.

Did God bless Abram?

Yes, God provided for all of Abram's needs (and by grace, so much more) throughout his travels.

Did God make Abram's name great?

Seeing as his name is still known today, around the world, yes. Later in the book of Romans, Paul will discuss how all believers are spiritual children (i.e., a nation) of Abra[ha]m. Further, culturally, having your name remembered was a great honor.

Did God make Abram a blessing?

Yes. Through him, the nation of Israel, Christ and Christians came into the world. A purpose of all of those parties has been to bless those around them with the promises and gospel of God.

v3 The people (plural) that blessed Abram or his descendants would in turn be blessed by God. However, the person (singular) that cursed Abram or his descendants would in turn be cursed by God.

Q (v3): When did this promise of reciprocal blessing and cursing end?

v4 Here's the first of many examples of Abram following God's orders with little to no documented objections. In addition, we see his advanced age, which will come into play later. For reference, Sarai was 65 at the time.

v5 Canaan (later generally referred to as The Promised Land) included modern Israel, Palestine, Jordan and parts of Syria. You may have heard this called the Southern Levant, which is sometimes used to avoid the religious connotations and contested areas (that is, political correctness).

v6-8 We'll hear about Shechem, Ai and Bethel later in the OT. Abram's grandson, Jacob will have numerous events in his life happen at Bethel, including an encounter with God. The nation of Israel would later set up idols there as well, making it a source of embarrassment referenced frequently in the books of the prophets.

v6 Scholars argue over exactly what kind of tree this was in Moreh. Whether it was a terebinth, oak, pistachio or something else, the short of things is that it was a well-known landmark. It was likely an ancient tree from after the flood that everyone recognized.

v7 Here, God promises the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants. We'll find out later that the Canaanites were habitual sinners and idolaters that God would be passing judgment on around the time Abram's descendants returned here. God owned the land and had every right to evict habitually disobedient tenants, who had been given repeated notice.

Q (v7): When did this promise of ownership of Canaan end?

v8 Like chapter 4, we have another reference to "calling on the Lord" indicating evangelism by the faithful.

v9 Abram never really had a home to call his own. He traveled nearly all of his life, living on the promises of God (*Heb 11:8-10 & 13-16*).

Read Genesis 12:10-20

v10 Each of the three patriarchs of Israel (Abram, Isaac and Jacob) all had to flee Canaan due to a famine in their lifetime. Note that Abram does not choose to return home when the land promised to his heirs undergoes famine. Instead, he travels further south to Egypt to ride it out, apparently still trusting God. However...

v11-12 It's rare that the Bible comments on someone's appearance. Here we see that Sarai was apparently still pretty hot at the age of 65. In fact, Abram ends up concerned that the Egyptians will kill him to get to her.

Q (v13): What was Abram's plan to avoid being killed?

Q (v13): How do you feel about this plan? Was Abram lying?

Much like Noah, note how Biblical "heroes" had much the same human concerns that we do, and erred in similar fashion. Keep this in mind lest you idolize another sinner or feel that God could only use you if you were perfect.

v14-15 Abram's plan either backfired or (initially) went off without a hitch. If he was hoping to keep Sarai from the Egyptians, then this went poorly. Alternatively, some have painted Abram in a more shrewd light, postulating that he intentionally claimed to be a brother so that he had the sole right to grant her permission to marry (which he would of course deny).

v16 One way or another, God blesses Abram despite his lie (much to Abram's later shame, I'd hope). Pharaoh showers gifts and (more) wealth upon Abram, in an effort to convince Abram to permit his sister to marry. A camel was the cost equivalent of a Mercedes at Abram's time.

v17-18 To keep Sarai chaste, or possibly as cursing those who (even unknowingly) were cursing Abram, God plagued Pharaoh's household. Somehow or another, Pharaoh puts two and two together on the timing of things and realizes that Abram and Sarai are at fault.

v19-20 Despite probably now wanting to kill Abram over Sarai, Pharaoh respectfully reprovcs the pair before sending them off. In a scene of irony and embarrassment, the heathen corrects the prophet. This whole affair sounds similar to Jacob and Laban (*chapter 31*) and we presume that Pharaoh was divinely warned not to harm Abram, or that the plague(s) induced enough respect for Abram's God to prevent any harm from being done to him (cf. *Ez 36:22-23*). Many generations later, another Pharaoh will not be so willing to hear from God when dealing with Abram's descendants (cf. *Ex 3-14*).