

Abraham's Call

By faith we obey God's call and trust God's promises.



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFE GROUPS

Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-21

February 23, 2020

(Gen. 12:1-7) ¹The 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. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴So 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. ⁵He 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. ⁶Abram 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. ⁷The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

(Gen. 15:1-21) ¹After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." ²But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." ⁴Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." ⁵He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. ⁷He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." ⁸But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" ⁹So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." ¹⁰Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. ¹²As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." ¹⁷When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, Kennizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites."

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- **What is the most significant promise you have made? Were you able to keep that promise? Why or why not?**
- **What determines whether we believe a promise made to us?**

The source of a promise, the nature of the promise, and the time frame in which it was made affect our decision to trust the promise. Most of us would likely say we believe promises from God. Today, as we look at the life of Abraham in Genesis, we will consider how willing we are to take God at His Word and surrender to His plan.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Have a volunteer to read Genesis 12:1-7

God told Abraham some very specific things about how He would bless him. First, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, meaning that he would represent an entire line of people. Then He promised to give Abraham a great name and a new land. Finally, God told Abraham that all of the peoples on the earth were going to be blessed through him.

- What did Abraham have to sacrifice in order to obey God's call?
- Why is it often difficult for us to take God at His Word? What does our unbelief say about our view of God's character and power?

To do all God called him to, Abraham had to let go of his community, security, and identity. To Abraham, these promises must have seemed extravagant and unlikely. His wife was barren. How could he be the father of a great nation if he could not produce one son? How could his name be great on the earth if there was no son to carry it on after he died?

Have a volunteer to read Genesis 15:1-6

Many event-filled years have passed since God first made His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. Abraham almost lost his wife to Pharaoh and the promised land to his nephew Lot. He almost lost his life and all his possessions in a war with four kings. He still had no child, and his current heir was a Syrian slave.

- Why did Abraham doubt he would ever become a father? What indicates Abraham had given up hope?

While grateful for God's promises, Abraham wondered about the value of the reward if he had no son to give it to. Abraham had entered Canaan at age seventy-five with Sarah, who was then sixty-five years old. Several years had passed and the couple remained childless. Abraham may have wondered if he would ever have a son. It seems as though Abraham had little hope God would actually fulfill His promises. Fear and worry were starting to creep into his heart.

- What does God's kind response tell us about His character and grace?

Abraham was persuaded by God's promises and by His power to bring them into existence. This kind of faith takes on the character of obedience. This kind of faith in God alone is credited for righteousness.

Have a volunteer to read Genesis 15:7-21

- How did God respond to Abraham's doubts (vv. 9-10)? Why did God ask Abraham to do this?

It was a common Ancient Near Eastern custom to seal a covenant with the sacrifice of animals. According to this custom, when an agreement was made between two people, the lesser person in the agreement would walk between the severed pieces of the dead animals to indicate that if he broke his end of the agreement, he too would be torn in two.

- Who is the lesser person in the covenant between God and Abraham? Who do you expect to walk between the pieces of the dead animals?
- Who walks between the pieces of the animals (v. 17)? What does a "smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" symbolize? How does this story remind you of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Smoke and fire are symbols in the Old Testament of God's presence. God met Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2) and God led Israel out of Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22). Thus in verse 17, God Himself passes between the pieces of the animals. By doing this, God was promising to bear the consequences of His own covenant (2 Corinthians 5:21). As the lesser person in the covenant, Abraham should have passed between the pieces, but instead God passes through the pieces giving us sure hope that He would fulfill His promises to Abraham and to us as the covenant God made with Abraham has been extended to us through Christ (Rom. 4:23-25).

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD’S STORY

- What are some ways that your heart is like Abraham’s heart? In what ways are you struggling to surrender trust and control to God?
- How does knowing that God always remains faithful to His Word help us through seasons when our faith is weak?
- How might we tangibly encourage one another to believe God and surrender to His plans this week and in the weeks ahead?

PRAYER: Spend some time thanking God for His promises and His faithfulness to always uphold His end of the covenant, even when we are unfaithful. Take time to thank God for sending Jesus and declaring us His righteous children.

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD’S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Genesis 18-19
 DAY 2 – Genesis 20-21
 DAY 3 – Genesis 22
 DAY 4 – Genesis 24
 DAY 5 – Genesis 25:19-34, 26

KEY VERSE: Genesis 26:4

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.
 Explain what the text means.
 Apply the verse to your life.
 Respond to God.

Our team has put together Bible study resources to encourage and inspire you as you engage in God’s Story. Visit chetscreek.com/gods-story for videos, study guides, and more.

OUR VISION

To be a church
 for the unchurched,
 here and around the world.

ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW
 GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a
 way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

Genesis 12:1-7

12:1-3. According to Acts 7:2, The Lord spoke to Abram while he was still in Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:31). God gave Abram a one-verb command with four aspects to it. Abram was to go out from (1) his land, (2) his relatives, and (3) his father's house, (4) to a land chosen by God. Obedience to God often means leaving one thing in order to receive something else even better.

12:4. Having migrated with his father's household from Ur (11:31), Abram stayed an uncertain amount of time in Haran. Since Terah lived 145 years after the birth of Abram (11:26,32) and Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran, Abram literally fulfilled the command to leave his father's house (v. 1).

12:5. Abram was apparently his nephew Lot's protector since Lot's father had died in Ur (11:28). The group's journey to Canaan was about 450 miles.

12:6. Shechem is in north central Israel on the slope of Mount Ebal. Abram's grandson Jacob would live for a time in this region as well (33:18-19). Later, Abram's great grandson Joseph would be buried there (Josh. 24:32). The Canaanites were a distinct cultural group (Gen. 15:21), but the term "Canaanite" is also an umbrella term for many different people groups who were living in the region, including the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

12:7. This is the first of three times Scripture indicates that the Lord physically appeared to Abram (cp. 17:1; 18:1). The Lord's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abram's offspring is the single most repeated affirmation in the Torah. At least 37 references are made to it in the books of Moses. The altar Abram built at Shechem is the first of four he is said to have built; others were set up between Bethel and Ai (v. 8), at Hebron (13:18), and at Mt. Moriah (22:9).

Genesis 15:1-21

15:1. Abram's role as a prophet is shown here. Visions were one of two standard means (the other was dreams) by which the Lord revealed His word to people. The only other patriarch who is said to have received a vision was Jacob. The vision's content included a command (Do not be afraid), an assurance (I am your shield), and a promise (your very great reward). The Lord would reward him richly.

15:2-3. Neither God's protection nor His reward seemed important to elderly Abram since all his goods would go to Eliezer of Damascus, a slave born in his house. Engaging in something of a pity party, Abram made seven references to himself (in the Hebrew) in the space of twenty-two Hebrew words and twice utters the complaint that he was childless.

15:4-6. Ignoring Abram's apparent lack of gratitude, the Lord gave Abram one of the great promises of the Bible; the elderly patriarch would produce an heir from his own body. God then made the breathtaking promise that Abram's offspring would be as numerous as the stars. Old and childless, Abram believed the Lord, that is, he affirmed that God is dependable. God credited it to him as righteousness, that is, He judged or accounted that Abram measured up to the standard, conformed to the norm. Abram's faith and God's gracious response to it served as a paradigm of the Christian experience in three different New Testament books (Rm 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jms 2:23).

15:8-9. Abram, the shrewd businessman who had once dealt with earth's mightiest human—the pharaoh of Egypt (12:14-19)—now negotiated with the Lord God. How can he be assured of God's promise? Verse 9 provides the answer. God provided assurance in the form of a solemn commitment ceremony. The cow, female goat, and ram were mammals later authorized for sacrifice in the Law of Moses; however, this is the only time that three-year-olds—specimens in the prime of their lives—were used. Turtledoves and young pigeons were permitted for certain Israelite sacrifices (Lv 5:7). The ceremony here differs from other sacred rituals in the Old Testament involving animals in that no animal parts were burned.

15:13-16. Here the Lord revealed to Abram the prophet an outline of the events of Genesis 46 through Exodus 13. Like Abram himself, his promised offspring would live as foreigners. The land that did not belong to them was Egypt, where they would be enslaved and oppressed (Ex 1:11-14) for approximately 400 years (more precisely, 430 years; Ex 12:40). God would judge the nation they served through a series of ten miraculous plagues (Ex 7:14-12:30), after which they would go out with many possessions (Ex 12:35-36). Though Abram would not live to see these events, he would go to [his] fathers in peace—die a peaceful death—and be buried at the ripe old age of 175 (25:7). Abram's descendants would return to the land in the fourth generation, that is, after four hundred years in Egypt; in this case, each generation seems to be one hundred years, Abram's age when Isaac was born (21:5). The Lord also hinted regarding the purpose of the return of Abram's descendants to the promised land. In large part Israel's return to Canaan would bring God's judgment on the iniquity of the Amorites.

15:17. When the sun had set, the Lord caused a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch to appear and pass between the divided animals. Both elements symbolized essential aspects of God; the smoke perhaps representing divine inscrutability, and the flame God's power. By going between the divided carcasses, the Lord was solemnly obligating Himself to fulfill the terms of the covenant—symbolically indicating that He would Himself be split asunder if He failed to carry out His promises.

15:18-21. The second explicit covenant in the Bible between God and a person (9:9-17) is established here with Abram, obliging God to provide the patriarch with offspring and a geographic inheritance for them that began in the south with the brook of Egypt (either the Wadi El-Arish or the Shihor River—the easternmost branch of the Nile in Egypt's delta region) and extended as far north as the Euphrates River. The list of ten different people groups here is the longest list of Canaan's inhabitants in the Torah. This is the only list to include the Kenites, Kenizzites, and Kadmonites; the Kenites and Kenizzites were probably groups living in the Negev that coexisted peacefully with the Israelites. Perhaps the Kadmonites were the same as the Qedemites, a desert-dwelling enemy of Israel.