**Lesson 2**

**27, 28 September 2021**

**Genesis 12-14**

***Another Perspective*:**

**God’s Word to Abram –** Recall that last week we said that we wanted to consider one more perspective when we look at scripture. We know we need to consider the perspective of the original audience and of our modern audience, but we also want to look at the perspective of the *participants* of the account we are reading. As we begin Genesis chapter 12 we see that the Lord has a message for Abram. He says in part, “Go out from your land…to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you…and you will be a blessing.”

**Implications for Sarah –** So we want to consider how this message to Abram would have impacted his wife Sarai. We said last week that Sarai’s “Bible” was not a written document but several centuries of oral tradition passed down from generation to generation. Beginning in Genesis chapter 12, however, something new is added. What does Sarai’s “Bible” look like now?

**Sarai’s “Bible” –** Sarai’s “Bible” now looks a lot like Abram because it now includes direct communication from God to him. That is, the Word of God for Sarai literally includes a word *from* God *to* her husband. Not only that, but sharing the message that God gave him with his wife was one of the first ways that Abram was a blessing to other people. Hearing the promise that God would make Abram into a great nation would have huge implications for Sarai.

**A New Perspective –** Last week we considered three ramifications of Sarai’s barrenness that powerfully impacted her life. But now all that has changed because she is the wife of the one who received these special promises from God. Now her personal heartache has changed to **hope** because God has promised offspring. Her public shame is replaced by a **sense of expectation** as she waits for God to fulfill this promise. And she no longer feels excluded from God’s plan because, as Abram’s wife, **she will be part of the fulfillment**. So as she considers—and savors—this announcement from God, there is new lightness to her step and new light on her horizon!

**Go to the Land I Will Show You –** There was another part of God’s message to Abram that would powerfully impact Sarai’s life and that was the command to leave his father’s land and go to a new land. I think it would be good for us to stop for moment and consider what this would have meant for them. The command would have affected far more than just Abram and Sarai. Genesis 12:5 tells us, “Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. He took his **wife Sarai** . . . his **nephew Lot** . . . **all the possessions** they had accumulated . . . **and the people** he had acquired in Haran. What people? There would have been personal servants plus herdsmen (and women) to care for all the livestock. Imagine the time it would take to feed and water all those animals. And then there was the matter of setting up camp! Each time they came to a new stop along the way, they had to set up tents for all those people . . . and then take them down again and pack up all their belongings when it was time to move on. This was no small endeavor! Do you feel the sand in their sandals yet? And do you sense how completely life has changed for these wealthy former city dwellers?

**Take-Away Thought –** Abram obeyed the call of God on his life and spent basically the entire rest of his life living in tents. But I don’t think that the longing to live in a city ever left him. Hebrews 11:9-10 tells us, “By faith (Abraham) stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise. For **he was looking forward to the city** that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” We today have been promised a place in New Jerusalem. May we look forward to it and long for it as greatly as our spiritual ancestor Abraham did.

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**Jen Wilkin, *God of Covenant* video #2: *Calling and Covenant*, part 1**

**Heads Up on the Wrap-Up Question** – Jen opens by discussing a homework question that we haven’t done yet. It is the “Wrap-Up” question on page 28 of your workbook. For now, write “See pages 188-189” next to the Wrap-Up box as a reminder. As you think about how to answer the Wrap-Up question in the weeks to come, you need to remember that the *goal* of this question is to have you reflect on who God is, see yourself in light of it, and then ask yourself: “Is there something of which I need to repent? Is there a relationship that needs to change? Are there words I should speak? Is there a way I should pray?”

**Topic** – Recall that in Genesis 11 we saw the story line narrow from the dispersion of ALL of Noah’s descendants over the earth to just the family of Abram, through whom the promised Redeemer would eventually come. So Moses is continuing to follow the righteous line from Seth to Shem and down to Abram and his descendants. Moses is also answering the big question that loomed in the minds of his original audience: “How did Israel end up in Egypt?”

**Abraham (Abram)** – Moses devotes 14 of the 50 chapters of Genesis to the life of this one man. Abraham is extremely significant to our understanding of who the nation of Israel is (and subsequently, who *we* are as the people of God) and of who Christ is.

**The Pattern Continues** – God makes a number of “I will…” statements in the first three verses of Genesis 12, so right away we see that He is setting the agenda. In fact, the opening statement, “Now the Lord *said* to Abram…” is reminiscent of the creation account in chapter one, where we see the refrain, “And God *said*…” repeatedly. Something similar occurs in His dealings with Noah where we read, “Then God *said* to Noah…” over and over in the account of the great flood. We know what the pattern is: when God says something, then it is SO. It happens. In chapter 12, we see the “so” in verse four: God had *said*, “Go out from your land…”, *so* Abram went. What has changed is that the “and it was so” part of the pattern is now carried out by the people of God, who respond in obedience to the command of God.

**God’s Calling** – God tells Abram, “I want you to leave your country (a big thing), your kindred (a smaller thing), and your father’s house (an even smaller thing).” In other words God is telling Abram to leave behind absolutely everything that is familiar to him. To better understand this, we need to understand something about the city of Ur. Life in Ur was not difficult: they had stone houses, hot and cold running water, and the people were well educated. Ur was a very modern city for its time. When Abram leaves Ur, he will never live in a stone house again, but will spend the rest of his life living in tents. Not only that, but God’s command is rather vague: “Go to the land that I will show you.” In other words, Abram was to just start out in the right general direction and trust God to reveal the path as he went along.

**The Faith Lesson** – Why does God call Abram to leave what is familiar and go to a place where absolutely nothing is familiar and where he doesn’t have the support of his extended family? Have you ever been put in a position like that? What lesson can we learn from such circumstances? It seems that the only way Abram (or his modern day descendants!) will ever learn to rely totally on the God who is worthy of total reliance is to put him in a circumstance where that is his only option.

**“I Will Make Your Name Great”** – God promises that He will make Abram’s name great. Remember that we are just one chapter past the incident of the Tower of Babel, which was built to make a great name for its builders. They wanted to make a great name for *themselves*. But God lets Abram know that He is the One who makes a person’s name great, and He does so on His terms.

**The Promised One** – Abram is promised that he will have a land and descendants and that through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This last statement is a reference to the future promise of Christ—but it isn’t the first time we have seen such a reference. In Genesis 3:15 God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. So in His promise to Abram, God is pulling that promise forward and letting Abram know that that “seed” will come through Abram. It is his seed that will prove to be a blessing to the entire world.

**“So Abram Went”** – Don’t rush past the significance of this statement! We don’t hear any hesitation on Abram’s part. Rather, he immediately responds in obedience to God’s command. Moses mentions Lot again at this point, probably as a reminder that we will be hearing more about Lot in upcoming chapters.

**Building Altars** – As Abram enters the land of Canaan, he begins building altars, i.e. establishing places of worship to the one true God. The first altar he built was at the “oak of Moreh”, which had been a Canaanite place of worship to pagan gods. [Moses specifically reminds his audience about the Canaanites being in the land in order to give his people courage as they would shortly be facing the descendants of those Canaanites when they marched in to conquer the land. He wanted to build their trust in God for their generation. God calls people into uncertainty for the purpose of demonstrating His trustworthiness.] Abram builds a second altar at Bethel.

**“To Your Offspring I Will Give This Land”** – This verse in Genesis 12 is quoted in Galatians 3:16. The apostle Paul wanted his hearers to understand that the ultimate fulfillment of this promise to Abram is Christ Himself!

**Abram’s First Test: Famine** – Abram has obediently gone to the land God showed him, perhaps expecting it to be a land of plenty. But instead he encounters famine. Have you ever been obedient to something the Lord has asked you to do and then encountered problems? How did Abram respond to this test of his faith? He did not “call upon the Lord” but instead “went down to Egypt to live for a while.” He was relying on his own assessment of what was a smart thing to do. We need to consider what Moses’ hearers would have understood from this account. For years they have been saying, “I know that we were slaves in Egypt, but at least there was good food!” They have been looking back over their shoulders for 40 years, longing for something that they imagined was better than it actually was. **We need to understand that Egypt in the Bible is an archetype for *self-reliance*.** Isaiah 31:1 warns us, “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help . . . but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!”

**Sarai’s Peril** – Abram feared for his own safety, and so he puts Sarai in peril! He acted in self-reliance and self-preservation when he allowed Sarai to go into Pharoah’s harem.  **Failure to love God properly always results in failure to love others as we ought.** But God dealt quickly with this scheme in that He struck Pharoah and his household with some kind of severe plague. And Moses fastidiously refers to Sarai as “Abram’s wife” throughout his account of Abram and Sarai’s lives. God has not forgotten that Sarai is Abram’s wife, and he does not allow the deception to continue. [Note: Being taken into the harem does not imply that Pharoah has slept with Sarai. The language for sexual union is not there in this passage.] So we see God protecting Sarai when Abram does not.

**Return to Canaan** – At the beginning of Genesis 13 we see that Abram retraces his steps to return to Canaan, specifically to the place where he had originally built an altar, and he called on the name of the Lord there. He is finally doing what he should have done.

**The Second Cause of Strife: Plenty** – Genesis 13:5-7 reveals a new problem that Abram encountered. This time it wasn’t famine that caused the problem, but plenty! Lot and Abram each have so much livestock that “the land was unable to support them” both. Abram gives Lot the opportunity to choose which land he wanted to have . . . and he chose the land that looked a lot like Egypt. But what had Abram done before him, when Abram chose to go to Egypt? He had chosen a place that seemed a lot like Ur, full of wealth and plenty. When faced with a problem, Abram had chosen to go with what was familiar and what seemed certain. God pulled Abram back into the place of uncertainty, but what does Lot do? He followed his uncle’s bad example and goes for certainty. In the process he edges closer and closer to danger and to unhealth. He settles *outside* of the land of promise, while Abram “lived in…Canaan.”

**Danger** – Genesis 13:12 tells us that Lot “pitched his tent toward Sodom.” He did what we do so often. We tell ourselves, “I’m not living IN Sodom; I’m just pitching my tent TOWARD Sodom.” Lot is edging closer and closer to a line he should never cross, and we need to pay careful attention to what happens to him, because “he is us”. He pitched his tent close enough to Sodom to see it, telling himself, “It won’t hurt to look.” But as we will see in subsequent weeks, his self-reliant choice cost him dearly.

*to be continued…*

**TAKE AWAYS from Bible Study Fellowship Notes on Genesis Lesson 8:**

* Abram believed God, but partial obedience marked his early walk of faith. God’s call included risks, and Abram responded with half steps of obedience. First, he went with his father and family but stopped short of Canaan to settle in Haran. When he left Haran for Canaan, he brought Lot (part of his father’s family) along with their people and possessions. Lot and these possessions created trouble later. **But God remained faithful to His Word.** He continued to work in Abram’s life to grow his faith and to accomplish His own plans. page 3
* God allows growing faith to be tested. He wants you to succeed and to experience His faithful provision in personal and meaningful ways. Your “faith muscle” develops by trusting God in real life challenges. page 5
* Even when your faith falters, God’s grace allows you to understand better your human weakness and utter neediness of how much you need God’s grace. God promised to dwell with Abram in Canaan in every circumstance…The famine, ultimately under God’s sovereign control, offered Abram a choice. Would he depend on God or…on a human solution? God intends hardships to draw us closer to Him, so we become content with His presence and provisions. page 8