

Lesson 30
The Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis 11:10-12:20

I. INTRODUCTION

A. From this point in Genesis, God begins to deal with the nation Israel. His dealings are with four individuals: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

B. The main emphasis is upon Abraham, who was God's chosen channel to fulfill the divine purpose of bringing redemption for the whole human race. Through this one individual, God would bring blessing to the whole world.

C. God altered all human history through Abraham. From him God gave a nation that completely reshaped the history of the human race.

D. Abraham has the unique distinction of being called "the man of faith." He stands out as the supreme exemplar of the faith life. Although he occasionally falters, his life was characterized by faith.

E. Abraham is honored by Jews, Christians and Moslems as the father of faith.

II. INTRODUCTION TO ABRAHAM 11:10-32

A. His Progenitors (11:10-26): In these genealogies, God is giving a record of Abraham's tree, tracing his heritage back to the line of Shem. The line of Shem was to bless the world religiously. Abraham, fully qualified by blood stock, becomes the center of the drama of God's religious history.

B. His Past History (11:27-32): Abram lived in Ur of the Chaldees in the Euphrates River Valley. The city was a center of commerce and very progressive for its day. It is best known for the worship of the moon-god Nanna, or Nannar, which went on there. Terah, Abraham's father, was an idolater, living in Ur (Josh. 24:2). It stands to reason that Abram was also an idolater (Isa. 51:1-2). There is no evidence that Terah ever turned from his idolatry to serve the true and living God. Abram married Sarai, which means "contention." Apparently Sarai, before her conversion, was full of envy, jealousy and pride. Abram was given a call by God to leave his idolatry and family and to follow the true God (cf. Acts 7:1-5). Abraham, with his father, Terah, began to move towards the land. He took with him Sarai and Lot. NOTE. Abram in this first call knew he was to leave family, but he took them with him. Apparently Terah was still an idolater and this caused Abraham to get as far as Haran. As long as Abram was in Ur, God could not use him, and, even when he was in Haran he was bogged down because he was not separated from the idolatry of Terah. Apparently Abram lived in Haran quite a long time, and did not pursue God's will until Terah died. NOTE. Abram apparently put his father before the Lord and God could not use him. God will not use a believer until he is committed unreservedly to Him. NOTE. God was gracious to Abram in taking away his father, for now the will of God could be done.

III. THE INITIATION OF A COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM 12:1-3, 7

A. The covenant was made with Abram when he was in Ur, for it says, "the Lord said," indicating that it had been given previously. Apparently it is repeated again to Abram while in Haran.

B. The call of Abram is an act of grace. The human race had turned from the Lord, and there had been judgment at the Fall and the Flood and at the tower of Babel. But God now chooses a man through whose seed-line He will ultimately provide a Savior and a Sovereign one who will redeem and also reign. Through Abraham and his descendants, God will provide for a lost world.

C. He was commanded to leave his homeland, his kin folk and even his father, and this was the condition for Abram to experience the blessings of this covenant

D. The Abrahamic Covenant includes four basic promises:

1. A Land (12:1-7). This land was to be in Palestine and to extend from Wadi El Arish to the great river Euphrates. It was to be their possession forever (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:18). NOTE: From the Biblical point of view, God chose the most immoral spot on the earth as the place for His nation to live.

2. A Nation (12:2a). Israel was to be a great nation (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:1-5). NOTE: God gave this promise at about 2,050 B.C. and Israel became a great nation 430 years later. Abraham had to believe God, for what seemed to be impossible.

3. A Personal Blessing (12:2b-3a): God would bless Abram, make his name great, he would be a blessing and all who blessed Abram and his seed would be blessed by God. NOTE: History has shown that those who have treated the Jews as enemies have been judged by God (Babylonians, Assyrians, Romans, Nazis, etc.).

4. An International Blessing (12:3b): This has been actualized through the Scriptures for which Abraham's people have been custodians and channels, and also through the Savior who was the SEED (Gal. 3:16) in a particular sense and is available to the world (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 13:46-48; Gal. 3:26-29). NOTE. God elected Israel that the whole world would have the news of salvation (Ex. 19:5-6; Amos 3:2 cf. Isa. 44:8).

E. Conclusion: This is an unconditional covenant and God must fulfill it or He cannot be trusted. However, the blessings of the covenant are conditioned on man's faith.

IV. THE INITIAL RESPONSE OF ABRAHAM 12:4-9

A. Abram now has a response of faith. He was obedient by faith, but not with a complete obedience which separated from his kinfolk, namely Lot. But he began the long trek to do what God had told him. (12:4-5). NOTE. So obedient in faith was Abram that he was called the "friend of God" (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23).

B. Abraham was now in fellowship with the Lord and he came into Sichem, which was right in the middle of Canaanite country. And God appeared to him (the pre-incarnate Christ) and reaffirmed the land and seed aspect of the covenant. Abram built an altar unto God as a testimony to the godless Canaanites (12:6-7). NOTE. When Christians are in fellowship with the Lord, the Lord reveals Himself spiritually and Christians become active witnesses for the Lord.

C. He also came into Bethel and built an altar (12:8). Abram appears to have a "mountain top" experience and is at an all time high in his spiritual life.

V. THE INSIDIOUSNESS OF UNBELIEF (12:10-20)

A. After Abram's great victory comes a testing to see if he would continue to trust the Lord. He now has a negative response of unbelief. A famine comes to the land and Abram does not believe that God is able to supply his needs in the midst of it. The will of God for Abram is to be located in the land of Canaan, no matter what the outward circumstances might be, Abram turns to his own natural possibilities and takes a human viewpoint towards life. He did not trust the Lord but he moved

towards the resources of Egypt. Egypt is a type of the world in the Bible. NOTE. Abram is out of fellowship with his God, for he has stopped trusting in God and turned to his own human strength to solve problems. His eyes were upon circumstances rather than the Lord.

B. Guilty of resorting to human devices and wits, Abram begins to misuse people. He takes advantage of his wife in order to protect his own skin. By representing his wife Sarah as his sister (actually his half-sister, 20:12), and creating the impression that she was not his wife, he was in effect lying. He used her beauty and risked tragic dishonor for her in possible abuse by the Egyptians to save his own neck. NOTE. Perhaps Abram rationalized this act by saying to himself that he had to live in order to have a son to fulfill God's promise. What happened to Sarah was unimportant. This is selfishness.

C. Sarai was beautiful woman. She was about 65 years old (10 years younger than Abram who was 75). In light of her total life span of 127 years (23:1), she was equivalent to a woman of about 30-35 in terms of life spans today. So beautiful was Sarai that she attracted the eye of the princes, and even Pharaoh was taken by her beauty.

D. Abram cashed in on the deal, for he was paid a dowry by Pharaoh for Sarai, and he became even more wealthy. NOTE. You can rest assured; however, that Abram was a miserable person, for his heart was not right with the Lord.

E. Just when it looked like Abram had engineered for himself and his wife a colossal mess, God intervened in grace to preserve them and to fulfill his pledge. The Lord plagued Pharaoh's house. This probably refers to some kind of severe illness. How Pharaoh found out that this illness was from housing Sarai we do not know. Perhaps he had a dream or Sarai told him why the illness in his family. NOTE. When a believer is out of fellowship, he makes everyone around him miserable, even unbelievers.

F. Pharaoh rebukes Abram for this evil deed, and sends Abram and Sarai out of Egypt. NOTE: How sad that wicked Pharaoh had to rebuke a true believer on a morality issue. To think that Abram would let the mother of a chosen race live in a harem.

G. Conclusion: Things go from bad to worse when a believer is out of fellowship with the Lord. Abram should have never been in Egypt but when he got there he should have confessed his sin and turned around and went back to Canaan. He did not and the result was confusion, more sin, frustration and heartbreak.