

Genesis 12.1-7

Now God said to Abram, "Leave your country, and your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who treats you with contempt. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram went, as God had told him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they went to go into the land of Canaan. They entered into the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, Canaanites were in the land.

Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." He built an altar there to Yahweh, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 25.7-10

These are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred seventy-five years. Abraham gave up his spirit, and died at a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael, his

sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is near Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased from the children of Heth. Abraham was buried there with Sarah, his wife. Abram traveled, still going on toward the South. There was a famine in the land. Abram went down into Egypt to live as a foreigner there, for the famine was severe in the land.

These two passages are really the bookends of the story of God and Abraham. There are preparatory verses in chapter 11 of Genesis that get us ready for the Abraham Story. These two passages, though, are really the beginning and the end of Abraham's walk with God.

Quickly, the first verses of chapter 12 are called the Abramic covenant – the contract between God and Abraham. God gives Abraham an open-ended invitation. God says ...

Leave your country, and your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who treats you with contempt. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.

And a little later after Abraham (the Abram) has accepted the invitation by picking up everything and following ...

“I will give this land to your offspring.”

Contrast these promises by God to Abraham with the reality at the end of chapter 25 and the end of Abraham's life. Abraham possesses no land except for a small cemetery plot he had purchased when Sarah had died. There is only one

child, Isaac, through whom the promise will be fulfilled. It seems that the promise that God made to Abraham is never fulfilled – at least in Abraham's lifetime.

Oddly, Abraham does not complain. In fact, it appears that Abraham never expected the promise to be fulfilled during his lifetime. He never anticipated seeing the reality of the fulfilled promise.

This sense of the unfulfilled promise is also found in the New Testament in Hebrews 11. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews begins this chapter with an unusual statement:

Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen. For by this, the elders obtained testimony. By faith, we understand that the universe has been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which are visible.

The writer continues the chapter by listing just a few of the well-known matriarchs and patriarchs of the Old Testament faith: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah.

Then the writer concludes by saying: *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and embraced them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

Does God not keep his promises? How can God be true to us and still not keep his promises?

I think this is God's way of leading us forward into a deeper and more intimate personal relationship with us.

First, how did Abraham understand God's promise. Abraham heard promises of land, numerous descendants,

greatness, and protection. All of these things were critical to survival on the edge of civilization in that time. Abraham was one of the Habiru – a word that developed possibly into the word *Hebrew*.

Habiru is a term found in various languages in 2nd-millennium BCE texts throughout the Fertile Crescent for people variously described as rebels, outlaws, raiders, mercenaries, bowmen, servants, slaves, and laborers. The

original meaning of the word denotes a social category, not an ethnic group. They were the pastoral nomads who traveled from pasture to pasture with their herds and flocks on the edge of civilizations; rather than the deep desert nomads.

The connection of the Hebrews with the Habiru may be seen throughout the Old Testament, and in the Letter to the Hebrews. They were people who lived as strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Abraham heard promises of land, numerous descendants, greatness, and protection. It would not be the last time that Abraham misunderstood God invitation to obey him and follow him. Certainly, Abraham's understanding of God's command to sacrifice Isaac, the child of the promise, was a misunderstanding up to the point of Abraham raising the knife above his son – but one that brought a change and growth and deepening of Abraham's relationship with God.

So, God leads us from our limited understanding of his promises, to that which he wants to give us. In this way God leads us to his desire for us – a loving, personal, and intimate relationship with him abundant and eternal.

What have been your aspirations? What have been your aspirations to have another for yourself? Maybe that is how we can get at it. Have you aspired and hope to have a

person for yourself? Have you prayed for that person to be with you and be a blessing to you? I am sure we all have had that experience – maybe a few.

Then, try something. Instead of praying for someone – pay attention to the preposition – for someone in the sense of having someone for yourself. It is a prayer for someone on your behalf.

Now, take yourself out of the prayer. Pray for someone on their behalf. You will see how this lifts your prayer and your relationship for them. You may not get what YOU want with that person, but you will get what the other needs and what God wants for them.

That is something of what I am trying to say about where Abraham started in his response to God's invitation

and where he ended in life. Initially, I think Abraham responded to the invitation for what he could get for himself. Through his life, though, Abraham began to see his response to God's invitation in a deeper and more meaningful and loving way – his relationship with God and others ... *You will be a blessing.*

In a sense God leads us on ... in the best sense. He leads us onto a greater and deeper relationship with him. He takes us a step at a time into newer experiences. He helps us to grow.

God places his promises in our spirits and assures us that through Jesus Christ he is with us on the journey and at its conclusion ... no, not “conclusion,” its perfection.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews knew his Bible and the story of God's history of salvation for his people. In the last part of Hebrews 11 he continues with his summary of the great persons of faith in the Old Testament: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

Then he concludes by saying: *These all, having had testimony given to them through their faith, didn't receive the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

Through faith in Jesus Christ you and I receive and carry the promise of God forward for ourselves and for others around us and those yet to come. In a manner we are the

fulfillment of the promise of God to Abraham; and yet there is more to come.

God is leading us, his people, to his promise. We call it his kingdom that is both within us and yet to come.