

The Lord Made a Covenant with Abraham

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that God called Abram to leave Ur, the idols of that city, and the idols of his family, and follow Him. In this topic, we will see the details of that call and the obedience of Abram as he went to the land of Canaan.

In Acts 7:2-4, we see that God had called Abram while he was still in Ur. Those verses say, “And he said, ‘Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, “Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.”’ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.’” We are given the details of that call in Genesis 12:1-3, where we read, “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” In these verses, we see that God had called Abram to leave his land and his family.

God also gave Abram some wonderful promises as He called Abram. First, God said Abram was to go to a new land. Then, in Genesis 15:18, God told Abram, “On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.’” Here, we see that God promised Abram that this land was given to him and would one day belong to his descendants. Second, God said He would make Abram a great nation. God promised national blessing to Abram. Later, God expanded that promise to Abram when He said, in Genesis 17:5-6, “‘No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.’” God changed his name to “Abraham”, which means *Father of many nations*, and said that many nations would come from Abraham.

Third, God promised Abram personal blessing. This personal blessing included several parts. God said He would make his name great. God said Abram would be a blessing to others. God said He would bless those who blessed Abram. God said He would curse those who cursed Abram. All of these things were part of the personal blessing that was promised to Abram. Fourth, God told Abram “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Here, we see that God promised Abram that blessing of all of the families of the earth would come through him. This promise is explained more fully in Galatians 3:8 and 16, where we read, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’...Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” These verses make it very clear that this blessing of all of the families of the earth would come through Christ who would descend from Abram.

The fulfillment of this promise is illustrated in the future, because Revelation 7:9-10 says, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” In these verses, we see that people of every nation, tribe, people, and tongue will one day stand before God because of the blessing promised to Abram that was fulfilled in Christ. All families of the earth can rejoice in this promise.

We go on to read what Abram did when this promise was repeated in Haran. Genesis 12:4-6 says, “So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.” Here, we see that Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

Once the father of Abram died, Abram left most of his family in Haran as God had told him to do, but we see that he did take his brother’s son, Lot. The fact that Lot traveled with Abram to the land of Canaan was going to be the cause of some conflicts between the servants of Abram and the servants of Lot. During the time that Abram lived in Haran, we see that the Lord had blessed Abram and Sarai. They took all of the possessions they had gathered. They also took all of the servants they had acquired while they were living in Haran.

We see that Abram, along with all of his servants and his possessions, traveled to the land of Canaan. They passed through the land until they came to the city of Shechem. This is located a little over thirty miles north of Jerusalem, in a valley between two mountains by the names of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The reason why this land was called Canaan was due to the fact that the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham and grandson of Noah, had settled in this region. This is the one on whom Noah had placed a curse in Genesis 9:25, where we read, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren.” We see that God knew these descendants would become very evil and that God said the day would come when they would be judged for this evil.

We go on to read in Genesis 12:7-9, “Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.” Two things happened while Abram was at Shechem. First, we see that the Lord appeared to Abraham. This is one of the many times that Christ appeared to a particular individual in the Old Testament. We saw in Genesis chapter 1 that Christ was the One who spoke the creation into existence. Then, He appeared to various people throughout the Old Testament. That is why John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The fact that it says the “Word became flesh” speaks of the fact that Christ became a man, as well as God, at the time He came into the world to die for our sins and in our place on the cross.

Second, we see the Lord promised Abram that He would give that land to the descendants of Abram. Third, we see that Abram built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. Abram may have built other altars to the Lord earlier, but this is the first one that is mentioned. This word translated “altar” is used four hundred and two times. It speaks of an altar on which sacrifices were offered either to God or to idols. In 1 Kings 18:26, the prophets of Baal leaped about their altar to try and get their god to send fire to burn their sacrifice. In contrast, just a few verses later, Elijah repaired the altar of God. In 1 Kings 18:30-32, we read, “Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me.’ So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord *that was* broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, ‘Israel shall be your name.’ Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed.” Here, we see that one altar was built to offer a sacrifice to Baal and the other altar was built to offer a sacrifice to God.

These verses in Genesis make it clear that the altars that Abram built were to offer sacrifices to God and not to some idol. Verse 7 says that Abram built the altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. True worship from the heart is always pleasing to the Lord. The Lord made that clear in Genesis 8:20-21, where we read, “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.’” Throughout the rest of his life, as Abram moved to various areas, we see that he built other altars to offer sacrifices to God.

This is illustrated by the very next move of Abram. The next move was to a mountain on the east side of Bethel. After he built that altar, we see that Abram called on the name of the Lord. Hebrews 11:9-10 says, “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” It was more important to Abram to build these altars to worship God than to build a house for himself. As a result, he lived in tents the rest of his life. In faith, he was waiting for the city that God is building where Abram and all who come to God in repentance and faith will have the privilege of spending eternity in the presence of the Lord. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why it was so important to Abram to worship God and enjoy fellowship with him. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.