

Genesis 12:1-8

The Call of Abram

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father’s house and go to the land that I will show you. ²I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother’s son, and all the possessions they had accumulated and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to travel to the land of Canaan. Eventually they arrived in the land of Canaan. ⁶Abram passed through the land until he came to the Oak of Moreh at the place called Shechem. The Canaanites were in the land at that time.

⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.” Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent there, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

Promised Direction

I.

“How do I break this to my wife?”

Sometimes a husband can have some difficult news to tell his wife, but *this* was a doozy. God can really leave a person hanging sometimes, can’t he?

After a hard day of work tending to whatever business had been necessary, you’re going to go home. The wife is going to ask how your day was. The typical husband response is “Fine, just fine. Everything went fine.” Usually, however, this isn’t enough. Somehow she wants something a little more specific—a little less detached and distracted.

What to do? What he had to tell her *this* particular day was not your standard, run of the mill business of the day. Present *this* news wrong and you might just get run out of the tent. Literally.

“Well, Abram! You’re finally home from work. How was your day?”

“Ah, Sarai, my day was fine, I guess. But...we need to talk. We have been married for a long time. Business has been pretty good, but we have to move. Now.”

“But, Abram, we’ve *always* lived in this area. Your family is nearby. *My* family is nearby. I *like* it here. I’m used to the climate; I’m used to the people; I know where to get all my medical attention; I know the markets and where to find what I need. I’m happy right here.”

“Sarai, I understand your feelings, but this isn’t entirely *my* idea. In fact, it isn’t my idea *at all*. *God* told me we are supposed to move.”

Now, it’s true that people these days *say* God spoke to them, but *did* he, really? Was it just a *feeling* that came over them? Do they claim God spoke to them in their hearts? Are they claiming an actual, personal revelation from God, or something else?

“Oh, sure, Abram, *God* told you we are supposed to move. You expect me to believe that?”

“Yes, Sarai, I do. *God did* speak to me and tell me that we are to move. He said: ‘Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father’s house’ (Genesis 12:1, EHV).”

“That’s pretty specific, I guess. How long will it take to get to our new home?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, where are we going?”

“I don’t know.”

“You expect me to leave everything I have known and traipse off with you to God only knows where to do God only knows what?”

“Now you’re catching on!”

“What?”

“Yes. *God* knows where. *God* knows what. He didn’t tell me yet.”

“C’mon, Abram, do I have to drag *everything* out of you? Give me details! What *did* God tell you? You are proposing to change my whole life.”

“Well, God said: ‘Go to the land that I will show you. ²I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you’ (Genesis 12:1-3, EHV).”

“Do you understand everything he promised you?”

“Not yet, but I’m sure he’ll tell me as we go along.”

It took a lot of guts. It took a lot of courage. Not just for Abram to tell Sarai what was going on, but for Sarai to go along with it. They both had to announce all this to their families. They were going God knows where to do God knows what. They didn’t have the internet to email back some pictures of their new home. They didn’t even have a phone to contact all their loved ones to let them know they had arrived safely.

Blind faith. That was what they showed in God’s promises. God promised them direction. God promised big things.

But at the same time, he gave them very little to hang their hats on. Abram was 75 when they pulled up stakes. The veiled promise was that God would give him a homeland and heirs and make him into a great nation. God promised even that every family of the earth would be blessed somehow in Abram.

God required Abram and his wife Sarai—later named Abraham and Sarah—to trust these promises even when they couldn’t see any fulfillment. It would be 25 more years before the son was born who was to be Abraham’s heir. They would live in this land Abraham was being directed to go to, but they wouldn’t own the land on which they lived. They were strangers in the land God promised that their heirs would one day inherit. The only piece of ground they would eventually have a deed to was a little piece of land for a family burial plot.

In fact, God steadfastly declined to give the fulfillment of his promises in an easy, simple, or obvious way. God let the couple live in a darkness so impenetrable that it often frustrated Abraham and Sarah. So long were the intervals between the times when the promises would be reiterated that sometimes the two came up with their own schemes to try to fulfill God’s promises their own way. It never worked out so well.

God required Abraham and Sarah to trust him. He brought his promises to fruition only when it was too late. The promise was absolutely impossible to come to pass. The human situation was too hopeless. *That* is when God sent the son he promised to them. The Apostle Paul writes: “Hoping beyond what he could expect, he believed that he would become the father of many nations, just as he was told: ‘This is how many your descendants will be’” (Romans 4:18, EHV).

II.

To know God is to trust the Word of God without any evidence of fulfillment. God saying it is enough. God does not go back on his promises. God’s promises are to be our support in times of trouble. The Apostle Peter says: “The word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:25, EHV).

It was impossible for Abraham to be the father of one son, let alone many nations. He was landless, except for his burial plot. He had no place of his own, but lived as a nomad. He lived in God’s land, but was surrounded by unbelievers. Yet God promised: “All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you” (Genesis 12:3, EHV).

No matter how dark our path. No matter how forlorn our hope appears to be, the word of the Lord endures forever.

Human reason looks around and sees sin and weakness. Broken marriages. Children born out of wedlock. Couples who call themselves Christian and yet insist on defying the will of God and living together without the piece of paper that identifies them as husband and wife. All kinds of rebellion against God's will.

Much that we believe must be believed against all odds—hope against hope.

III.

It is one thing for Abraham and Sarah to believe these promises and set out for God knows where to do God knows what. After all, Abraham *did* hear these promises directly from God. God came down and spoke to Abraham. Whether by vision or personally in *this* particular instance isn't told us. But we know that God *did* speak to Abraham in person several times. We know that he appeared as a visitor and ate with Abraham and Sarah in their tent. He spoke to Abraham about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and personally listened to Abraham's prayers about the few righteous in those cities.

We don't get such favored status. Or do we?

Jesus came down to live like a homeless person to make sure we have the promise of an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade in heaven. Jesus was willing to give his very lifeblood in payment for our sins so that we could have this great inheritance.

Paul says: "The statement 'it was credited to [Abraham]' was not written for him alone, ²⁴but also for us to whom it would be credited" (Romans 4:23-24, EHV). Abraham looked ahead in faith to Jesus. He didn't ever know exactly how God would fulfill his promise, but he knew that it *would* be fulfilled.

While God didn't speak to us in person, he did speak to us personally, didn't he? He spoke to us by sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts in baptism to work faith there. He has spoken to us again and again by the Word of God that we enjoy. Abraham had God speaking to him in person, but he didn't have even the Old Testament. He didn't have even *one* book of the Bible. We have something Abraham could never imagine—the completed history of God's saving activity—all written down for us to read and learn and absorb again and again.

IV.

God sees your obstacles. He sees your sins. He realizes the hurts you must face in this life. He knows all about your sorrows and your foolishness and your wickedness. He listens—as only a good and loving Father can.

Isaiah says: "It was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5, EHV).

Abraham was given a promised direction: head out, and I'll tell you on the way where you are going, and I'll let you know when you get there. God kept his promises. He brought them safely through. Eventually Abraham's descendants took possession of the promised land. Eventually came the One descendant through whom all the families on earth would be blessed—Jesus.

Because of that descendant, you and I have a promised direction, too. We know *exactly* where we are going—heaven. We still don't know when we will get there. We don't know exactly the trials and tribulations we will face along the way. But we *do* know that God will be with us, just as he was with Abraham. Because God has removed our sin, we know that his promised direction is heaven, and he will lead us safely there. Amen.