



WEEK NINE: Genesis 12:1-9

Sermon Outline:

Key Text(s): Genesis 12:1-9 (but also including 12:10-20)

The prologue has left us hanging. The Lord's judgment on humanity's pride and arrogance at Babel was not accompanied by a corresponding act of grace and we are left to wonder what God will do as his creation purposes are once again in jeopardy.

The answer is found in the Lord's call – and great promises – of Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. In this scene, we have a third “creation” story. A first couple, placed in a new geographical place from which the Lord's purposes will be achieved, and blessing. And such blessing!

The five-fold blessing and associated promises found in Genesis 12:2-3 form the building blocks of the biblical story. They match the number of blessings found in Genesis 1-11 as well as the number of curses and are five of the eighty-eight references to blessing in Genesis!

Blessing was more than wishing someone well or a retrospective way to describe one's good fortune, rather it was a formative word; bringing into being that which it described. The Lord's blessing was what enabled those who were blessed to accomplish their God-giving purpose. It is like starting a new job and being given all the necessary keys, passwords, and technology. These are the “blessings” that allow you to do the job you have been assigned.

First of all, to Abram the Lord promises to make him and his barren wife Sarai, into a great nation (!?) and to bless him. Echoing the language of the builders of Babel the Lord promises to make his name great, and that Abram will be a blessing – enabling others to fulfill their God-given purpose too!

The Lord will bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him – a promise that plays out in the next section – and that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him (and his descendants). In other words, the plans and purposes of God in creation and for humanity will be achieved through Abram and the overflowing blessing on his life!

This is God's “new” way forward!

And Abram provides us with an example to follow. He obeyed the Lord and went to the new land, building altars in response to God's promises, and calling on the name of the Lord.

Almost as soon as the promises have been given they come under threat. First a severe famine that drives Abram from the land and then the threat of Pharaoh who Abram fears will kill him to take Sarai from him. Instead of trusting God's promises Abram resorts to a ruse, asking Sarai to lie and say she was his sister rather than his wife. In this way, he believes, he will be allowed to live and be treated well for her sake.

Upon arriving in Egypt, Pharaoh does indeed see Sarai's beauty and, being told she is Abram's sister, takes her into his house as his wife. He also treats Abram well for her sake and Abram grows wealthy. His ruse has seemingly worked. Or has it?

The Lord, true to his promises, curses Pharaoh who has, unwittingly, cursed Abram. He afflicts Pharaoh's household with serious diseases! When Pharaoh learns the source of his affliction he chides Abram and gives him back his wife, sending him off safely and with all the gifts he had received!

What is the lesson from this story? It surely can't be that lying is the best policy?!

What we find here are two central features of all the stories that follow. First, that the greatest threat to God's plans being fulfilled tends to be the faithlessness of his own people! Second, and much more importantly, if the promises will be fulfilled it is going to happen because of God's commitment to them. This is, after all, God's story before it is ours.

As the story unfolds we see human failure, but we see God's commitment to overwhelm our lack of faithfulness with his own! This is the story of the Bible.

And this commitment – grace upon grace – is an invitation to each of us to respond to what God is doing. A good place to start is to do what Abram does in the beginning of the text: obey what God calls us to even if we don't know how it will turn out, worship him (and remember that worship is more than singing but the alignment of our lives with that whom we worship), and call on the name of the Lord.

Questions to Ask

NOTE: The questions below are arranged into two sets. The first three are very open, allowing for wide exploration and discussion. The second set are more specifically tied to the sermon. Use one, both, or a mix of the two depending on your group.

1. What stood out to you in this sermon?
2. What questions do you have about this text? [If you meet prior to Wednesday, you can access the Big III question portal and ask some of these questions there.]
3. What might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to do in response?
4. Marc drew attention to a couple of ways this opening story of Genesis 12 follows on from the prologue in Genesis 1-11. What other connections do you see?
5. An overemphasis on our failures only tells part of the story. How can we "balance" our recognition of our sin with God's commitment to overwhelm it with his grace?
6. What does it mean to "call on the name of Lord"?

A Prayer to Pray

Pray that as a community of faith we will be obedient to the invitation of God, align ourselves to his values, character, and behaviour, and call on his name.

Readings to Read This Week

The following readings are the next five in the annotated list of readings to discover the big picture of the Bible. You can find the annotated part in the Life Group Resources page on our website.

- Luke 9:18-27
- Luke 22:7-22
- Luke 24:1-12
- Acts 2:1-41
- Revelation 22:1-5

A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

One of our strategic priorities is Community Engagement. This has a number of broad focuses, but one of them is evangelism. This series in Genesis is a broad introduction to the story that leads to Jesus. Is there someone in your life who you might invite to listen to these sermons, attend a service with you, or who might even join your Life Group?

A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

1. September is the beginning of our focus on the work and ministry of Hopefield. We also seek to raise \$35,000 to fund a two-day a week trauma counsellor (focused on DV). You might want to pray for the work of Hopefield as a focus over the month of September.