

ReGroups 10/1/23

Origin Stories: Proof of Concept - Genesis 12

The first part of Genesis 12 is a monumental record in all of history. Not only does it set the stage for the Redemption Story that has brought salvation to the world, but it also established the foundation for a nation that has impacted the world in almost every category. The contributions that Israel has brought to our world are almost unsearchable, from religion to politics and every area in between.

Genesis 12's second half, while not as famous, will prove to be as important. The story we're going to study tonight will raise many questions, perhaps more than it provides answers, but that's only if we miss the overarching point. Immediately after God makes these great promises to Abram, we see just how committed to fulfilling those promises God was.

This chapter will serve as a showcase of multiple key attributes of God all at once. In this chapter, and in the next several, we find a very unlearned Abram making many questionable decisions, seemingly unconcerned with how they align with his newfound faith. All the while, God stands behind him and patiently oversees His every step.

Keep this in mind as you study and consider the messages found in Abram's story, because ultimately this is all about emphasizing God's character *over and against* Abram's. If there's one chapter in the Bible that serves as a proof of concept for what it means to be in a covenant relationship with our God - it's this one. What we will learn tonight should humble us all and cause us to marvel greatly at the God we serve and belong to. **Before getting started, how would you define a "covenant relationship" with God?**

A Little Faith, A Lot Of Sigh

Read **Genesis 12:4-9** and discuss the first steps of Abram's walk with the Lord. Verses 5-7 are meant to emphasize the tension that comes along with walking by faith. Abram journeys in the direction that God was leading him in, but he is soon confronted by the challenges ahead.

Verse 5) Abram must have been a man of some means, seeing that he had some amount of possessions to leave Ur with. Most people of his day barely owned the ground they slept on, seeing that they were slaves. Not only did Abram have many possessions, but he also happened to have servants of some kind.

It's here that we can relate to Abram right out of the gate. He obeyed God, but the thought of leaving *empty handed* never even crossed his mind.

Whether he was supposed to "leave all behind" or not may be a mystery. However, we do read this emphasis in the New Testament callings, specifically those in the Gospels. **Luke 5:8-11, 27-28** highlights the sacrifice made by Jesus' original disciples.

This contrast isn't to belittle the sacrifice that Abram made, but to bring attention to what he was willing to do, *with so little evidence*. Think about it - even without knowing that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the Disciples still had an entire Old Testament full of reasons to trust in God. **Based on your knowledge, what is some of the greatest evidence for God's faithfulness in the Bible?**

Abram literally had nothing, other than oral legends passed down about Adam, Enoch, and Noah. He had no Bible, no Church, no time-tested evidence. Despite that, he still took that first step. **How much more confidence should we have in God, seeing as to how much we have to stand on?** When we talk about stepping out on faith, such would be no leap in the dark. God's light shines plenty bright on His track record of trustworthiness and sovereignty.

Staring Down Mountains

Verse 6) Abram initially finds no home for himself or his family in his journey through Canaan's land. As it turns out, there were many vying for this land in those days. Abram found nowhere to settle or rest. It's here that he begins to learn that there would be no immediate, or even long-term, security in this world.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus himself was a wandering, homeless man. As undignified as this may sound, we cannot avoid the truth even when it's uncomfortable. Jesus didn't come to this world to be lavished with riches or coddled by material things. What we may think are the bare necessities, Jesus was without *even those...*

Continuing with the theme of New Testament Discipleship and to understand how Abram was an unfinished picture of that, check out **Matthew 8:18-22**. Consider Jesus' stark demands and then compare how Abram went about his journey. **What lines up and what stands out as different?**

There are two ways to interpret this:

- 1) Either Abram is a picture of someone without the full revelation of God and his half-steps are **a preview of what is possible**, and **expected**, for Christians...
- 2) Or Abram is an example of **how God is patient with us**, as we make real life decisions beneath His ideal commands.

It could be that both of these points are meant to be drawn from studying Abram's life. As we'll see, God's patience with Abram is really the whole point of these stories. At the same time, as his faith grows he is expected and proves able to **make better, spiritual decisions**.

In verse 7, God assures Abram that He will yet find a home for himself. Finally, he finds a *temporary* dwelling place in the hills of Bethel. It's there that Abram spends time seeking more of the Lord, before wandering to yet another place.

If you read the entirety of Abram's story, you'll notice he never really find a permanent dwelling place. He moved from place to place, clinging to God's promises along the way. Eventually, he realizes that his true destiny was found in another world to come, see **Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16**. **How should these verses influence our own relationship with this world?**

Baby Steps

For most of us, Abram's choices already reflect a surrendered heart, even if he was still figuring things out as he went. Ultimately, this is the Christian walk and lifestyle - **Progressive Sanctification**. **What do you think this means?**

The way in which we begin our journey is not indicative of how we will finish. We are constantly being sanctified, which means "**set apart and made holy**". This is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, which He does until our last day on earth. We start out brand new, forgiven and saved, but we are also without knowledge, direction, inspiration that comes from devotion to God.

Below are some key passages about Sanctification. Read each and discuss the corresponding points:

- **John 3:30** - John the Baptist gives us the basis for Christian Sanctification: We are emptied of ourselves and filled with Jesus. **How can He increase in your life? How would this result in your own decrease?**

- **Romans 8:28-30; 12:1-2** - While 8:28 is often taken on its own, within the greater context it's clear that's true meaning pertains to the good work that God is trying to bring out of our lives. God's desire for us all is to be conformed to image of Christ, which is really a transformation from our flesh to becoming a Spirit-filled being. This is all part of the process of becoming more like Christ and less like our natural, sinful self. **In what ways have you seen God work things out for His glory and your good in your life? How have you been transformed through the presence and power of Christ?**
- **2 Corinthians 3:17-18** - Speaking of transformation, this process should result in us having a clearer vision and understanding of what God is wanting to do in our life. As in, early on in our Christian walk we may have a difficult time discerning the Lord's Will, but as our faces become more and more "unveiled", we should experience the knowledge and liberty of God's Spirit.
- **Philippians 1:12, 3:12-16** - God is persistent. He doesn't give up on us or grow weary when we struggle. In response to this, we ought to be equally inspired and eager to persist and progress in our walks with God. **Have you made noticeable strides in your faith? In what areas have you seen growth? What areas need more attention still yet?**
- **1 Peter 2:1-5, Hebrews 5:12-14** - A key part of the sanctification process is to grow in knowledge and wisdom of God's Word. We will never become more like Christ if we don't know what He is like. God will only work in our lives, if we have hidden His Word and Will in our hearts. His Word intends on building us up, by adding to minds and hearts the things of God. We start on the basics, but should move on to more in-depth concepts. **What would you consider to be the "milk" of Scripture and Christianity? What do you think are the "solid food" ideas and concepts of God's Word?**

The Goodness of God

Before you dismiss, read **Genesis 12:10-20** and discuss your general thoughts about Abram's behavior in Egypt. Clearly, the very fact that he doubted that God would provide for him at home reveals a weakness in his faith. On top of that, his decision in Egypt only add insult to injury.

In hindsight, Abram should've asked for God direction. A more mature version of Abram would have done that. **James 1:5-8** offers us a word that could prevent us from even starting down the road to Egypt.

There is a temptation to try to defend Abram's actions, but there's no need - **He doubts, he lies, and he lays aside his duty as a husband.** James wasn't overstating when he said a "double minded person is *unstable* in their ways"!

However, what is most remarkable about this passage isn't Abram's instability, is it? What stands out the most is **God's faithfulness to Abram...** even more, **God's generosity towards Abram.** Even in his disobedience, God *blesses* Abram. *We would think the opposite would happen, right?*

This shows just how serious God was about keeping His promise to Abram from back in 12:1-3. God wasn't able to turn His back on Abram, even though Abram was stumbling out of the gate. If any story expresses the patience, kindness, and grace of God this one does it. If you want to know what God is truly like, contrasted to our sin and rebellion, this passage proves that God's goodness is so much more pure and overwhelming than we could ever imagine.

Read **2 Timothy 2:10-13** and see how these verses convey what we've witnessed about God in Abram's story. **What is your reaction to this meeting between Abram's unbelief and God's faithfulness? How humbling is it to know and witness how good God was to Abram in spite of his shortcomings?**

Romans 2:4 tells us that such displays of God's kindness are His choice way of opening our eyes and softening our hearts. We often, wrongfully think that God only reciprocates our behavior - whether it be good for good, or bad for bad. **How does this story turn that on its head? What do you think is the ultimate takeaway from this story, pertaining to God's character and how we ought to grow in our faith?**

Has a "Covenant Relationship" with God taken on a different meaning in light of this story?