

GENESIS 12–14

“The more we study what is said in Scripture of Abraham and the events of his life, the more we shall be struck with the peculiarity and loftiness of the position which he holds. His name stands out from the first as a mighty landmark in the history of redemption. It has been calculated that in the later books of the Old and New Testaments there are about 100 references to the covenant made with Abraham, as compared with some eight or ten references to the covenants with Adam and with Noah. . . . As the centuries of [the history of revelation] roll on, the call and the obedience of Abraham stand out more and more clearly, as forming in many respects the greatest epoch between the Fall and the coming of the Saviour. At each great step taken afterwards in the development of God’s purposes of grace towards men there is some reference to the revelation made to Abraham. At each great revival of spiritual life among God’s people, at each turning-point in their history, there is a fresh taking hold of the covenant made with Abraham, and of the promises given to him and to his seed.” (Douglas Bannerman, *Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, 3, 5–6)

Significance of Abraham is highlighted in very structure of the Genesis narrative . . .

*Abraham and the Genesis “Prologue”*

Genesis 1–2 introduced what humans are “for”: made in God’s image for communion (to listen, trust, obey), dominion (to form/fill particular gardens with goodness, order, beauty), mission (rivers: covenantal life/blessing to every corner of kingdom) – in Genesis 3, our first parents lost original kingdom by breaking communion: refused to listen/trust/obey, forfeited dominion, and filled earth with violence – after God hit “reset” in the Flood, massive effort to unite in dominion and communion *without God* (Babel); but God must lower the “stairway” to His dwelling place – the human “mission” was in a sense imposed by the scattering of humankind, but communion with God and dominion as His stewards would have to be restored by other means . . .

Against that dark backdrop of worldwide human rebellion, under repeated divine judgment, the narrative sharply narrows to one man and his family – i.e., “all of world history is related to the promises that God makes to Abraham” (Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 120)

*The Call and First Promises (12:1–3)*

As we noted last time, given introductory details in 11:26–32, *not* a promising candidate to bring life to world; yet to this childless wanderer with a laughable name God’s call comes initially in Ur (Acts 7:2–4), again in Haran (Abram now 75, cf. 12:4) – a story of divine *election* (initiative)

Called out of the east to come back west to God’s “garden” – initially three promises (vv. 1–3) of land, seed, and blessing; which, against the backdrop of Genesis 1–11, address universal human problems (God will have a *people* in communion with Him, in a *place* of dominion, enjoying the *prosperity* of His blessing) – explicitly says this will extend to “all families of the earth” (v. 12b)

“Premillennialism insists that all the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant must be fulfilled since the covenant was made without conditions. Much of the covenant has already been fulfilled and fulfilled literally; therefore, what remains to be fulfilled will also be fulfilled literally. This brings the focus on the yet-unfulfilled land promise. Though the nation Israel occupied part of the territory promised in the covenant, she has never yet occupied all of it and certainly not eternally as the covenant promised. Therefore, there must be a time in the future when Israel will do so, and for the premillennialist this will be in the coming millennial kingdom. Thus the Abrahamic Covenant gives strong support for premillennial eschatology.” (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 530)

Back to threefold promise (for an overview, see Paul R. Williamson, “Abraham, Israel and the Church,” <http://beginningwithmoses.org/oldsite/articles/abrahamisraelchurch.htm>): a certain

order/priority to these – without a people graced by God, formed for Him, place and prosperity may lead to ruin; restored *communion* with God must precede restored *dominion* – first priority is to learn to live by every Word that proceeds from God (listen, trust, obey): thus Abram brought to Canaan to learn to live by faith (no seed, land is inhabited)

### *Abraham's Initial Responses (12:4–20)*

First, he goes/follows – second, he starts gathering people through witness (12:5 refers to souls “made”) – third, he worships (walks north to south, building altars, calling on Name; cf. 4:26)

After these promising beginnings, begins to experience increasingly severe testing: not just travel to faraway land that's inhabited (!); now natural disaster (v. 10) renders land uninhabitable; and when he goes looking for help (because tests of faith are always also tests of wisdom), encounters situation that threatens his wife and seed – whether or not we share Pharaoh's assessment of his blameworthiness (did he lack faith? or wisdom?), one thing is clear (remember who's writing and reading this); God will fight for this man and his seed and bring him back to the land of promise (beginning of Abram's “great name”: “touch not My anointed ones,” Ps 105:15)

### *Trouble with Lot (13:1–18)*

As Abram leaves Egypt laden with its riches, further testing awaits: the land (perhaps because of lingering effects of the famine) cannot support both him and Lot – striking how Abram (to whom the land promised) refuses to seize what God promised by driving out his nephew – he is patient, and generous (his faith “works by love,” even offering to be the one who moves!); when Lot seizes the Eden-like land to the east (v. 10), Abram manifests (as we'll see) no resentment

God's response to Abram's faith under testing is to speak again (v. 14): all of this (360 degrees) is going to belong not only to him, but also his seed forever

### *A Rescue Mission (14:1–24)*

The humility, patience, and love that spring from the soil of Abram's faith in chapter 13 are all the more remarkable in light of the events of chapter 14 . . .

If ever an “I told you so” moment, this is it, but Abram the man of faith is also a man of peace: no resentment or bitterness, only openhanded generosity (born of confidence in God) – being a man of peace doesn't mean being a pacifist in the face of violent aggression and injustice – if he's such a fighter, why doesn't he just take over Canaan? answer emerges after the battle . . .

Who is this tenth king (v. 18, not mentioned before or after)? stranger still is way Abram acts in his presence – we learn that he is the *priest* of El Elyon: represents God to man and man before God, and as such comes to refresh Abram (with royal food) and bless him – explicitly claims the glory of the victory for El Elyon, and without blinking, Abram submits: in presence of the king-priest (and king of Sodom!), he tithes of all – king of Sodom interrupts: claims the persons, tells Abram the rest is his – but in this “generosity” is a trap, and Abram senses it: this king is making a claim antithetical to El Elyon's, and Abram's allegiance is to Salem and its King, not Sodom

*This* is why Abram won't use military force to conquer Canaan: the land (kingdom) is El Elyon's, and He gives it to whomever He will – what God promises, *He* must give; this kingdom comes by grace, not by human force and cunning (it can't be secured by our works; or hindered, in Moses' time, by the power of Israel's enemies!)

Next time: Genesis 15–17