

# Blessing For All Nations

Printed Text • Genesis 12:1–9

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ANALYZE the story of God’s call and promise to Abram; EMBRACE the joy that Abram and Sarai’s faith gave to them from obeying the Lord; and DECIDE what we are willing to sacrifice to claim the promises of God.

## In Focus

Warren and his wife, Deloris, have been married for over 25 years and live a very comfortable life. Warren is a respected corporate executive and community leader, and Deloris is a College Professor. Both are active and faithful members of their church and within their circle of friends. Lately, they both had been thinking about doing more for God, even in distant lands. One day during Warren’s morning devotion, he felt in his spirit that it was time to leave. When he felt it again as he was shaving, he immediately stopped what he was doing and inquired of the Lord. He knew in his spirit that it was time to move on to a new workplace assignment, which might include moving to another country to make a greater impact for God on the world. At work that morning, he learned that the company was in fact reorganizing. They were expanding operations to compete globally, and he was tapped to run overseas operations.

As we will see with Warren and Deloris, and Abram and Sarai in today’s lesson, a decision to follow God’s command continues to reap a reward for those who by faith in Jesus Christ become His seed.

## Keep In Mind

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

**A. Blessing** (Genesis 12:2) berakah (Heb.) – Prosperity, benediction, benefit, favor, peace, invocation of good.

**B. Seed** (Genesis 12:7) zara` (Heb.) – Offspring, issue, progeny, posterity, family, race.

## Say It Correctly

**Canaan.** KAY-nuhn

**Haran.** HAY-ran, -ruhn

**Moreh.** MOH-ray

**Sichem.** SHEE-kem

## KJV

**Genesis 12:1** Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

4 So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7 And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.

9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

## NLT

**Genesis 12:1** The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you.

2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.

3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

5 He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan,

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

8 After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the Lord, and he worshiped the Lord.

9 Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Abram.** The significance of God's call for a nation through Abram was that up to this point, there was no distinction between people and races in the manner that we think of today. After the Flood, the people were dispersed at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). The Bible depicts a detailed review of Shem's descendants—Noah's eldest son. It is out of Shem's lineage, through Abram, that God would call out a people unto Himself to be witnesses in the earth of His greatness. They would receive the blessing for serving the one true and living God in the midst of universal idolatry. Ultimately, Abram's seed through 42 generations would bring forth the Messiah who would reconcile the world back to the Father (Matthew 1:1–17). Abram exemplifies the faith necessary to obtain righteousness and access to the promises of God through Jesus Christ.

**The Land of Canaan.** The Hebrew word for "Canaan" (Kena`an, ken-AH-an) means low region or lowland. Its name denotes that the country resides west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, between those waters on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Named after Noah's fourth son Ham, the land was given by God to Abram's posterity, the Children of Israel, as promised. In modern geography, Canaan is now Palestine.

## Background

In the preceding chapter (Genesis 11:10–32), we learn of Abram’s lineage as a descendant of Noah’s son Shem. In Genesis 9:26, Noah prophesied over Shem, after he and his brother Japheth covered his nakedness, declaring that he would be blessed and that Canaan would be his servant. Genesis 11 ends with Abram’s father, Terah, leading his family’s migration from his native land Ur of the Chaldees to make their way to the land of Canaan, but instead, the group settles in Haran (Genesis 11:31). It is noted in verse 32, however, that Terah remained in Haran until his death. Geographically, scholars maintain that Haran was perched between Ur and Canaan, so they were in the middle of their intended destination. Terah’s name was believed to mean “delay,” and as referenced in a review of Israel’s history (Joshua 24:2), he was an idol worshiper. We will see why Abram and Sarai’s faith and obedience were pivotal to the blessing for all nations as God separates him from his people.

### At-A-Glance

1. God’s Call for a Blessed Nation (Genesis 12:1–3)
2. Abram’s Response to God’s Call (vv. 4–6)
3. God’s Promise of Generational Blessings (v. 7)
4. Abram’s Obedience in Answering God’s Call (vv. 8–9)

## In Depth

### 1. God’s Call for a Blessed Nation (Genesis 12:1–3)

Abram was the youngest son of Terah. He was a descendant of Noah’s son Shem. According to Stephen’s account in Acts 7:2–4, the God of glory appeared to Abram while he was in Mesopotamia, which was before he settled in Haran. Therefore, when Abram heard God’s call in Genesis 12:1, this was his second encounter with the Lord Jehovah, and it’s believed to be not long after his father’s death. Abram was told to leave his country and his family and uproot his home to go to a place the Lord would soon reveal. The Scripture does not indicate that there was a discussion after this command was given, but that Abram moved at God’s word. Abram was surrounded by people, including his own family, who were polytheistic (worshiped multiple gods). For him to hear the voice of the true and living God was monumental. Because of his obedience, Abram is forever etched as “the father of faith.” With this second encounter, however, God made Abram a promise to bless him and make him a great nation, to make his name great and for him to be a blessing (v. 2). This promise from God was astounding due to Abram’s age (v. 4), and as first noted in Genesis 11:30, his wife Sarai was barren. God gave Abram further motivation to adhere to His command with the pronouncement of future blessings. For leaving his father’s house, Abram would receive a father’s blessing—a namesake. God told Abram His sovereign promise to fulfill His word to make a great nation from him and to make his name great. Abram went from not having any children and with no hope of ever being a father to having the promise of an entire nation coming from his loins.

In Genesis 12:3, God established His relationship and the power of this connection by stating that He would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him. God’s presence is marked in the lives of those chosen by Him. Verse 3 ends with the most important component of this promise: God commits to blessing all the families of the earth through Abram. Abram’s seed birthed three world religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Ishmael) all lay claim to him as father. However, the ending of this verse points to the coming Christ who would bring salvation and restoration to the world. Abram’s seed is the divinely appointed channel through which blessing would come to all humankind by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:6–7, 14).

## **2. Abram's Response to God's Call (vv. 4–6)**

Abram followed God's spoken command and departed from his familiar surroundings to a place unknown. Abram, after having departed once with his kindred from his native land of Ur, was once again a nomad at the age of 75, leaving Haran. He took with him his wife, all their possessions, his nephew Lot, and his servants. We can imagine how very unsettling it must have been for Abram to be uprooted again and to move everything he owned to answer God's call. However, in spite of the circumstances, Abram walked in obedience and trusted God based on what God had revealed to him. He went forward and began the journey. His father, Terah, stopped short his migration to Canaan (see Genesis 11:31, NIV). When God declares a call on your life, not everyone is privy to seeing the revelation of God's plan. Therefore, even close relatives may need to be left behind. In Genesis 12:6, Abram arrives in Canaan and the land is already occupied by the Canaanites. He is yet again a stranger in a strange land. He was put in an uncomfortable position by coming into a land that was promised to him but was already inhabited, which could have been a reason to give up. But Abram continued to follow God and remain confident he heard God correctly. Oftentimes, when God gives us a directive, it may not come with full disclosure of the details—like what we have to go through to get to the promise. Just like Jesus, Abram teaches us to keep moving forward by focusing on God's promise (Hebrews 12:2).

## **3. God's Promise of Generational Blessings (v. 7)**

In this instance, rather than just speaking to Abram, God appeared in the form of a theophany—God appeared in human form. Some scholars believe this appearance was Christ in His pre-incarnate state. He showed Abram once again the land He was going to bless Abram with and reinstated His promise to give him seed or offspring. Abram yet again heard a word from the Lord declaring that he would not only receive this land that is already occupied but that his children would live in it. In response to God's appearance, Abram built an altar unto the Lord. The proper response to God's presence and confirmation of His promise is worship. Abram had God's continued assurance that he would receive that which God had spoken, and by making a personal appearance, it further sealed the guarantee.

## **4. Abram's Obedience in Answering God's Call (vv. 8–9)**

Abram continued to move forward at God's command and thus declared his own allegiance to serve God alone. In spite of the culture around him, which had a god for everything, Abram is the father of a monotheistic religion that is based on a relationship with the true and living God. Abram pitched his tent, and wherever he pitched his tent, he built an altar unto the Lord. He remained in constant contact with Him through worship and prayer as he called on the name of the Lord. Abram lived a disciplined life of worship and walked in obedience by listening for the voice of the Lord God. Abram's faithful response to God's promise to make him a great nation required a close relationship and strict adherence to God's instructions. Abram would have been shortsighted if he thought only of the personal impact of this promise, but because the call was greater than he could ever imagine, he was willing to make the sacrifice with his wife by his side.

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. What was God's instruction to Abram (Genesis 12:1)?
2. What was God's promise to Abram (vv. 2–3)?
3. What was Abram's response to God's call (vv. 4–5)?

## Discuss the Meaning

1. How would you respond if God told you to uproot your life and leave behind all you know to follow Him with only a promise of what's to come?

## Liberating Lesson

Today, we are reaping the benefits of the blood, sweat, and tears of our heroes and heroines of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the ancestors before them who sacrificed so that we might have the freedom to be whatever God called us to be. Like Abram, Dr. Martin Luther King did not live to see the fullness of this vision of freedom, but he moved at God's Word and did as he was instructed, walking in love. He trusted God and sacrificed his own personal comfort and gain by believing that God would do what He said. We can continue to honor Dr. King's legacy by showing our willingness to submit to God's plan no matter where it takes us as we serve others and strive to move toward lives of freedom.

## Application For Activation

As you reflect on today's lesson, what has God promised in your life that will bless you and others now as well as in generations to come? What are you willing to risk to follow through with God's plan and bring Him glory, even at the risk of your own comfort? Pray and assess your own ambitions, goals, and interests to see if they line up with God's Word. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you about anything that needs adjustment.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Genesis 12:1–9

**1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:**

No one enjoys being uprooted, especially when one has been settled in a place for an extended time and enjoys a comfortable living. Abram and his family had lived in Ur of Chaldees with his father and brothers. During Abram's time, Ur of Chaldees was a port city that offered wealth and prosperity to its inhabitants, but for some unexplained reason, Terah, Abram's father, moved himself and his extended family to Haran. It was in Haran that God spoke to Abram. God first called to Abram while he was

living in Ur of Chaldees (see Genesis 15:7 and Acts 7:2). Here, God issues an imperative command to yalak (yaw-LAK), the Hebrew word for “depart, get out.” With this command, God indicated three specific areas Abram was to abandon: (1) Abram was to leave the country he had come to call home; (2) he was to leave the safety and security of his extended family; and (3) Abram was to leave his father’s home. This was no small command on God’s part. Family provided a hedge against misfortune and mishap, but God was asking Abram to trust Him completely to provide for his safety and security. Abram was to venture, by faith, into the desert, and to an unnamed location.

**2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.**

It is hard to overstate the importance of God’s call to Abram (and Abram’s final obedient response) for the rest of the Gospel story. With the focus on Abram, God enters human history in a new way and begins to work out His own plan for the redemption of humankind. God follows His command to Abram with a series of promised blessings. Note the three times that God obligates Himself to Abram with the phrase “I will (do),” which is *ʾasah* in the Hebrew (aw-SAW). God promises to (1) give Abram a child from which a nation will come; (2) make Abram’s name renowned; (3) bless Abram personally; (4) bless Abram to be a blessing to others; (5) bless nations that bless Abram; (6) curse nations that choose not to be a blessing to Abram; and finally, (7) provide a means for all the nations of the earth to be blessed through Abram. These blessings, taken collectively, become a reversal of the curses pronounced by God at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). At Babel, men came together to build a city so they could shem (Heb. “shame”) or “make a name” for themselves. Through Abram, however, God established His own means by which someone would achieve renown and “become a nation,” which translates in the Hebrew as *gowy* (GOOwee). What a person tried to accomplish through his or her own efforts, God would do through Abram as a divine gift. However, these promises of blessing were conditional. Abram must trust God with faith, believing that God will do as He has promised. The obedience would see Abram become *barakah* (ber-aw-KAW), Hebrew for “the source of blessing” for all humankind. God also wanted Abram to understand that He would be with him, and the nation that would flow from him in a very special way. God will bless those who bless Abram, but God will also “curse,” in Hebrew *ʾarar* (aw-RAR), those who chose not to be a blessing to Abram or the nation that was to have its origin in him. History has borne out the reality that God’s promise to Abram was not made lightly. At the Red Sea, God destroyed the armies of Egypt because of the way Egypt treated the Jews. Those nations that flowed from Ham, but found themselves at odds with Israel, were either destroyed or reduced to a minor state by God. These nations included the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Amorites, to name a few.

**4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him: and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.**

So Abram departed. Until this point, no indication is given that Abram has done anything at all to commend himself to God. But now he acted. In obedience to God’s “spoken” word, which in Hebrew is *dabar* (daw-BAW), and implies a command, Abram left Haran.

The writer of Hebrews (11:8ff) informs us that it was on the basis of Abram’s belief in God’s word that he acted and this belief expressed by action was accounted to Abram for faith. We can appreciate the faith that Abram demonstrated. At 75 years of age, he was relatively old. Additionally, Sarai (his wife) was barren and incapable of producing a son for Abram. Still, Abram trusted God that he would be blessed personally with prosperity, land, and an heir. Further, Abram trusted God that through him the whole world would also be blessed.

**5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. 6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.**

Lot's father, Haran, was dead. He died while the family resided in Ur of Chaldees. It is likely that Abram took his nephew into his own home after his brother's death because he and his wife were childless. In the ancient culture of that day, families that were childless were considered to be out of favor with the gods. Sarai's barrenness then was, no doubt, a source of shame and embarrassment for Abram. Still, in response to God's command, Abram takes Sarai and Lot with him. In addition to his nephew and wife, verse 5 records that Abram also took his servants, "substance" or "possessions" (NIV), translated in Hebrew as rekuwsh (rek-OOSH) and implied material goods as well as animals. They set off for Canaan. When God first called for Abram's father, Terah, to leave Ur of Chaldees and venture to an unnamed land, the patriarch only made it as far as Haran. This time Abram entered Canaan and traveled to Sichem and the plain of "Moreh" (Heb. Mowreh, mo-REH, meaning "teacher"). Moreh was home to a great oak tree used as a place of worship by the pagan priests of Canaan. It was located near the heart of the land of Canaan and was probably a place where the Canaanite priests came to instruct their people in the worship of their gods. By venturing so deeply into Canaan, Abram was signaling his intent to remain obedient to God's instruction. He would not be returning to the life of comfort and security that he had once known.

**7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.**

It took a lot of faith on Abram's part to pack up his family and possessions and cross into the land of Canaan on the basis of a promise from God. To this point, God had not revealed to Abram what land He was going to give the patriarch as a possession for his obedience. Abram had been proceeding purely by faith. However, his faith was rewarded at Moreh when God took on human form and "appeared" (Heb. ra'ah, raw-AW) to Abram. This type of personal visitation by God is called a "theophany." The purpose of this theophany was for God to confirm the promise He had made earlier to the future patriarch. Abram was to be given land for possession, and in fact, the land on which he was standing was to be that land. However, God now makes clear that the land will go to Abram's descendants, even though Abram is childless at the time of God's promise. In a repeated expression of his faith and as an act of worship, after the visitation, Abram erected an "altar" (Heb. mizbeach, miz-BAY-akh), to the true God upon that site. The altar demonstrated that Abram believed God, even though he did not know at this point in the Scripture it would be 500 years before his family would be in possession of the land.

**8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.**

Probably in an act of great wisdom, Abram left Moreh. The altar he had "builded" or "established" (Heb. banah, baw-NAW) would serve as an indication that Abram was staking a claim to the land on behalf of his God. Now he would need a place within Canaan to call home. After leaving Moreh, Abram journeyed deeper into the southern portion of the land of Canaan and temporarily settled upon a mountain, built another altar, and worshiped his God.

**9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.**

There would be no turning back for Abram. After God's visit and the view of the "promised" land from the heights of the mountain, Abram now knew what his future looked like. Abram removed himself

from the mountain and headed further south into Canaan. His life would now become the life of a nomad. By stating in verse 9 that Abram "journeyed" (Heb. *naca`*, naw-SAH), the writer of Genesis is indicating that Abram continually moved about. Abram's wanderings in the desert of Canaan, awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises, would serve to strengthen the future patriarch's developing trust and faith in God.



# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Genesis 1:1-31

## **Tuesday**

Genesis 3:1-6

## **Wednesday**

Genesis 4:1-12

## **Thursday**

Genesis 6:9-22

## **Friday**

Genesis 8:1-12

## **Saturday**

Genesis 3:1-19

## **Sunday**

Genesis 12:1-9