

**FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 11 (11:31 – 12:20): Some Summary Thoughts:**

The story of the flood in Genesis 6-9 introduced God’s first covenant (relationship based on pledge or promise) between Him and His people – a covenant with all of mankind through Noah and his sons, promising that God will cease waging war against life on the earth (9:8-17).

In chapters 12 – 17, God calls a human representative (Abram) and initiates a second covenant, this time “promising” two things especially – **the gift of ‘seed’ (descendants)** who will become a great nation for the purpose of blessing nations, and **the gift of land** (12:2-7; 15:1-21; cf. 17:3-8, where the covenant is physically ratified by the identifying mark of circumcision). This second covenant will be repeated to Isaac (26:3-5) and Jacob (28:13-15). It serves as the basis for the next two Old Testament covenants: the gift of law (Exodus 20-24) and the gift of kingship (2 Samuel 7) to God’s people – Israel. But Abram’s task will not be without obstacles:

- With respect to the promise of numerous descendants, we recall that Sarai his wife is barren (11:30). Abram is childless and appears to have no prospects for that to change.
- With respect to the land, the text tells us that this “promised land” already has inhabitants – Canaanites (social groupings of various ethnic groups engaged in commerce).

Still, the theological center for the book of Genesis is found in Chapter 12 which is our subject of study today. God calls Abram to leave Haran and “*go to the land I will show you*” (12:1). He promises “*to make you [Abram] a great nation...*” (12:2). Additionally, God promises to bless “*all peoples of the earth*” through him (12:3). Abram’s response is noteworthy:

- (1) First he believes in and fully embraces God’s promise which is evidenced by his behavior. After hearing God’s Word, Abram cuts himself loose from anything that could hinder his “call.” Then, without questions or arguments, he trustingly, faithfully travels to the land inhabited by Canaanites (vv. 4-5). After arriving, Abram and his entourage traverse the land.
- (2) Second: during his sojourn in the land, God appears to Abram at his first stop near Shechem and promises: “*To your offspring [seed] I will give this land*” (vv. 6-7). Upon hearing God’s reaffirmation that his descendants will inhabit the place, Abram’s immediate response is “worship”: “*he built an altar there to the LORD*” (v.7).
- (3) Third: Abram travels further into the land to Bethel and Ai and there Abram again builds an altar and worships the LORD. Scripture declares “*he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD*” (vv. 8-9). By these actions, Abram not only demonstrates his allegiance to God who has called him, but he dedicates the territory to God whom he worships by building an altar to Him.

These several themes will continue to play themselves out in one form or another as the narrative progresses. The “*promised land*” will be given to the “*promised seed*,” who will become a *great nation* and thus a *blessing to the nations* – even though the Canaanites now possess the land and Sarai is barren! Despite these apparent obstacles, Abram *trusts* and *worships* the God who is the Promise maker.

Abram is no sooner reasonably settled into the land when a famine forces him and his entourage to go south to Egypt – the land of the Nile. The interaction between the Pharaoh and Abram becomes the first real test of a part of the promise. Abram’s decisions in Egypt (12:10-20) certainly has a strong basis in the realities of that time: powerful people exercised power at will over others. Pharaoh had the power. But Abram’s decision also may have had something to do with thinking among peoples of that time that “a god” is usually localized. Perhaps, as was the apparent norm, this God that called Abram can only exercise power in the land that he has declared to be promised? Certainly, Abram has started well in his new relationship of trust with God, but he also has lots to learn. Thus, this narrative has everything to do with God’s protecting the *promised seed*. Pharaoh blesses Abram, only to receive affliction in return. In reality, Abram’s actions, rather than being a blessing to Egypt, have been more of a curse! Clearly, Abram has much to learn about the true source of his blessings and how his actions may need to be tempered to conform more to his “call.”

He also needs to learn more about God! As they journey together, God will begin to correct this situation by incrementally revealing Himself to Abram in more aspects of His Persona. In chapters 13-14, for example, Abram and Lot separate and Abram must rescue Lot. Upon his return home, Abram encounters the King of Salem, Melchizedek, (14:19-24) and hears of and then acknowledges God as “*El Elyon*” (God Most High, Maker of Heaven and Earth). In subsequent chapters, apparently as Abram has need, God will further reveal Himself in other dimensions of Himself.