

The Shape of Things to Come

Chapter 9

By [David Felker](#)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 12. Genesis chapter 12. It's also printed on the prayer sheet. We are in between a summer series and a fall series; I think the fall series will start two weeks from today and our time's going to be tonight in Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 through 9.

Genesis 12 and the DNA of Redemption

And just before we jump in, something to consider - I've talked about this in here before, but something that, I think this has come with age, something that I'm enjoying and appreciating more and more is just - Buz, I'm enjoying Buz! It's just old family pictures. I think especially with the birth of my five month old son and wanting him to know who his grandparents and great-grandparents were and to be able to put a name with a face when he sees his grandmother; I love old pictures. Last Christmas my mom got me a picture of my dad from when he was in college, when he was playing in a football game, and we recently framed that and put it up in our house. I've talked about other pictures that I love before. One of the gifts that my parents gave me when I graduated from high school that is one, it's a very special gift to me, it's a picture book that I keep in my office and it's pictures of myself with family - when I was younger, and there's pictures of my grandfather, my dad's dad, there's pictures of my dad when he was younger. And one of the things that will happen as I look through old pictures is there will be pictures that will kind of stop me dead in my tracks because I will see someone smiling and they're smiling a "David Felker" smile. And what I mean is, I've always made my mom mad in pictures because I smile, it's a no-tooth smile and kind of a smirk to the side; it's this ----. And it's the kind of look that makes my mom says, "Wipe that smile off... You've got to do better than this... Don't give me that look" kind of a thing. But you know it's amazing because I'll find these pictures with my dad's dad, who I didn't know as well, with my dad's grandfather that I never knew, and exact same expressions; and yet these are men that I never knew. And so apparently there's a sarcastic no-tooth smile gene that's become part of my DNA and I do it as well. But I think we've all had the experience where you bump into a friend of your parents that's never met you before, you bump into a friend of your grandparents and they'll say, "You're the spitting image of" or "You look just like so-and-so" but we have this DNA that we show up with.

Okay, I'll just throw this out on the front end and I hope to continue to unpack this as we go through this passage, but looking at Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 is like looking at the DNA of redemption. Looking at Abraham in this passage really is like looking at the DNA of a Christian. If you think about this, think about how special Abraham is in the Bible. There are times in the New Testament where Jesus, more than once, He depicts what heaven will be like and He depicts it as being with Abraham. One time He says that you'll be there and it will be like Abraham is eating there with you. And even more than that, think about often in the Bible when God identifies Himself, often God doesn't just identify Himself as "I'm the God who created the earth; I'm the God who makes constellations." What does He say? He says, "I am the God of Abraham." Abraham - he's special; he's a big deal in the Bible. But there's also, it says in the New Testament over and over again, that if you become a Christian, if God gives you the ability to stand on His promises, that you are a descendant of Abraham - not physically, not ethnically, but spiritually. And so what we're saying is, the way that God deals with Abraham from the beginning sets the pattern, it sets the DNA for us.

And so what's the experience? Let's look. Genesis chapter 12 and before we do let's go to the Lord in prayer. Let's pray.

Father, we do give You thanks for time together, for time under Your Word. We do want to place ourselves under it and under its authority. We pray that You would work through distractions. We pray that You would work through my lisping, stammering tongue. We pray that You would work through cold hearts and that You would be at work, that we would hear Your Word and heed it. And we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

This is Genesis chapter 12 beginning in verse 1:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this

land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Amen. This is God's Word.

I wanted tonight just to look at a few things in this text. The first thing is - How do we find Abram? How do we find him? What is Abram's background? The second thing is - What makes Abram so special? What makes him kind of the Abram that we know and that is so famous in the Bible? And then the third thing is - What becomes of Abram?

I. What is Abram's Background?

And so the first thing I want us to see is how do we find Abram in the beginning. The previous verses, the end of chapter 11 - it's an important section. We have Abram's genealogy; they tell us his location. But one of the things that's important about it, we do learn something important here, that all of human history has essentially come to a dead end. Genesis 1 to 11 is a spiraling down of the human race and it's becoming more and more corrupt and evil and violent and broken and oppressed. And in chapters 1 through 11 there is one ray of hope and there is a single line, a single family tree. You might remember that in the midst of all the violence there is the family of Seth. And this is not in the text, we didn't read this, but there's something really important about Abram's background that we find in the book of Joshua. In Joshua chapter 24 as the people are now in the Promised Land and it's God speaking through Joshua and he's kind of recounting the nation's history. And this is Joshua chapter 24 verses 1 to 2 and he gives us this little fact that we would not have known if he had not said it, but he says, "Long ago your forefathers, even Terah the father of Abraham, and Nahor, lived beyond the river and worshiped other gods." And then verse 2, "The Lord took your father Abraham out of the land of the river." And so Abraham was from a family, and Abraham himself, he was an idol worshiper. And so from our perspective, from the world's perspective, at the end of Genesis chapter 11, kind of the last little candle has flickered out. All hope is gone. The last family really knowing who God is, knowing who created the world, knowing what we were built for, they were in Ur of the Chaldeans which was the center of lunar worship, and they had given their heart to idols.

Rescued from the Soul-Killing Prison of Idolatry

This is the famous quote, John Calvin - "Our hearts are idol factories." It wasn't that Abraham wasn't a worshiper; he was worshiping. He had godified something. He had worshiped something. He had fixated on something but it

wasn't the God of the Bible. And there's an expression that even we can use in our circles, we certainly hear this in the church, it's a phrase that's actually not used in the Bible the way that we say it, but we'll talk about that we "asked Jesus into our heart." That phrase is not in the Bible but the Bible does use that phrase about something else. In Ezekiel chapter 14 verse 3 it says that the Israelites, that they're not just bowing down to statues, they're not just bowing down to Baal, this harvest and fertility god, but that they have now, according to God, they have taken these idols into their hearts. They've taken the idols into their hearts and deep down it is worship. And that's how we find Abram. Until God does the work that He loves to do, He calls Abram to Himself, it's almost as if - I did this illustration in Vacation Bible School. The kids liked it; I don't know if y'all will like it as much as the kids - but it's almost as if, if you think about Google Earth and you can type in your address and it will give you the globe and then the continent and then the country and the region and apparently someone has been outside of your house taking pictures because it will show you your house. If you think about Abram it's almost as if there's the globe and then the continent and then the region and then just Abram farming probably and worshiping idols like everyone else and God burst onto the scene and God saves Abram.

And just from that little bit, think about this - what DNA is being established? What do we see here? I've heard a minister say before "A Christian is not primarily someone who does great things for God but a Christian is primarily someone for whom God has done great things." And if you are here tonight and you do believe these things and you're trusting God at His Word and you're resting on the promises of the Gospel, if that has happened it's not because you had the good sensibilities and morality to go find Him and make yourself acceptable to Him, it's because like Abram He has burst into your life. Okay that's one thing that we certainly see here with Abram. My parents did everything they could to put Christianity before me in an attractive way and to explain it to me. But unless I embraced Christ and unless God came in and disturbed me and humbled me and shook me up and I embraced the Gospel I would have been just a nice idol worshiper all of my life. And I'm from a wonderful family. If you think about Genesis 1 to 11, the wicked people and the good people, they all needed to be saved from the bondage of idolatry and sin. And our hearts are enslaved and addicted to idols. We're worshiping and attracted to things that are killing us. And unless God bursts onto the scene and saves us and calls us out of that, we do not have hope. And so that's how we find Abram. That's the first thing that we see here.

II. What Makes Abram So Special?

The second thing - how did Abram become so special? How did he become the Abram that we know? And the answer is, that God starts giving him promises. Look at some of the promises. He says things like verse 2, "I will bless you. I will make you a great family. I will make you a great nation." And we know how the

story turns out but he doesn't. These promises are over the top. Verse 3, "You will be blessed. Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed." He says numerous times, over and over again, he says "Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, as numerous as the sand on the seashore." I've heard a minister before preaching on this passage and he said "The promise is not that you'll have a family tree; the promise is that God will give you a family Milky Way, that He will give you a beach where every grain is one of your descendants." And so I think it's interesting about the promises at this point; this is a familiar story to a lot of us but these promises at this point are impossible. And so God is calling Abraham to believe promises that are impossible.

For example, "I'm going to make your name great. I'm going to make you into a great nation, Abraham," despite the fact that his wife is old and they don't have any children. And so my mental picture even when Abraham is getting some of these promises - think about the promise when he says in verse 7, he says, "to your offspring I will give this land." He said at the end of verse 6 that the Canaanites are in the land. And so I'm thinking, if I'm Abram when I'm hearing these promises, "So that Canaanites are in the land and so there's people in the land and houses in the land and probably weapons in the land and weapons that people use on people like me in the land and this doesn't seem to add up." If you think even in addition to that, notice please the first sentence in chapter 1 it's left open-ended. God says, "Go from your country, from your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." And so this really is tough. It's not, "Abram go - latitude, longitude, twenty-five miles, third exit, take a right and a left and ten feet down is where you need to go." That's not how God is giving these promises.

Trusting God and Walking by Faith

And I think here's what we want. This is kind of how we are. We want God to show us where He's taking us. We want Him to show us exactly what He wants us to do and where He would have us go and we want Him to make it clear to us. It's very easy to have a mental map of what you're wanting God to give you and to follow Him in order to get Him to give you that. We don't want just God's Word that He'll be with us but we want Him to show us the end from the beginning and prove to us that He can be trusted. That's what we're like. I was recently listening to Tim Keller in a lecture and he was talking about J.R.R. Tolkien and he was talking about *The Lord of the Rings* books and the difference in the trilogy and *The Hobbit*. And he said that the thing you have to keep in mind is that *The Hobbit* is an adventure but that *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is a quest. And he went on to say that *The Hobbit* is a book for children, it's more light-hearted, it's an adventure. An adventure is a "there and back again." It's an exciting thing that you choose and you go and you have your adventures and you have your thrills and it splices up your life, but then you come home again and pick up your life where it left off. He says an adventure is a "there and back again." And then he says a quest is not something you choose; it comes to you. And so there's a

sense of requirement. You're called to it because of what's involved but you never really come back from a quest. And a quest you either die for the quest or if you do come back you're so changed that you never really come back; you're never the way that you were because it's that radical. And he went on to say that Christianity is not an adventure; it's a quest. It's not a "there and back again" but it's a quest.

Hebrews 11:8 summarizes Genesis 12 like this, that God said to Abram, "Get out," so he went out not knowing where he was going. And if you think about Abram's life this is not the story of Abram. God says, "Get out," where? "To the place where I will show you." He says, "I will give you a son." How? "I will show you later. Just trust." He says, "Take your son up on the mountain, sacrifice your son." Why? "Just trust. Just follow." And that's kind of the story of Abraham's life and that's Christianity, that we walk by faith, not by sight, that we look not to the things that are seen but to the unseen. And Abram here, I think, also sets the stage for us. God has made great promises to you, Christian. God said, "When you walk through the fire I will be with you." He says, "If you confess your sins, if you confess your sins He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He says, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." He gives us these promises and then He calls us to believe them. And I think this is important. Here is our DNA being established. God comes to His people and makes promises, and then this is very important, He gives them the ability to believe them. To believe these unseen, over-the-top promises is not a natural ability; God has to grant the faith. That's why our prayer should be, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief. Help me believe and rest on Your promises." So that's the second thing.

III. What Becomes of Abram?

The third thing is what becomes of Abram. And just two things here. The first thing is that his life gets harder. It doesn't get easier; his life gets harder. And the second thing is that he becomes a worshiper of God.

Life Gets Harder

And so the first thing here - Abram's life gets harder. And I don't know if any of you caught this at the end, but the last couple of verses as Abraham is leaving everything that's familiar - he's leaving his kindred, his father's house, all of his possessions - in verse 9 it says, "and Abram journeyed on." His life is harder, it's more unsettled, it's more inconvenient. And I say all of that - I wish, or part of me wishes that I could stand up here and say that if you take God at His word life will be easy and life will be more comfortable and life will be more safe. And we know that that's not true. God can turn the whole applecart upside down. If what you want is predictability and convenience God will stir the pot and things will change.

I want you to notice something here. "I will bless you," verse 2, but why? He says "that you may be a blessing. That the families and the people of the world will be blessed through you." And so Abram is called. He becomes a Christian. And that means that he has changed and he's not making decisions on the basis of "What's most comfortable to me?" It would be most comfortable for him to stay home. You know he's not making decisions on the basis of "my needs and my plans and my goals." I've been thinking about this, even as we've had so many missionary reports this summer, and even thinking about some of the people that have gotten up there and even this last week with the Internationals Ministry report. When people really throw themselves into ministry, whether that's a short-term mission trip, whether that's Neighborhood Christian Center, Internationals Ministry, whether that's ministering to a neighbor that's suffering, someone in your neighborhood, most people will say that in that setting is where I'm most uncomfortable but I feel the most useful. And the call of God works like that. To the degree that you're willing to get out of the familiar and the safe and the comfortable, to that degree God says, "I will bless you in order that you may be a blessing." And so Abraham does that and his life gets harder.

Abram becomes a Worshipper of God

And the second thing, and we'll end with this - Abraham becomes a worshiper of God. And so he was a worshiper of other gods, he's now a worshiper of the God of the Bible. And I think it really begs the question, "How do we become real worshipers, real heart worshipers?" And I'll close with this story. I heard this story a few years ago. At Oxford University in England in the 1960's one of the colleges in Oxford is New College - and David can fact-check this stuff for us and let us know if this is true - but in the 1600's, the early 1600's, New College was founded and the dining hall of the common room in New College had these beautiful, old, English oak beams. And in the 1960's, whoever was kind of in charge of this noticed that there was wood rot in one of the beams. And so this was very precious wood; it's not the kind of wood that you can go to Lowe's and buy. "Where are we going to get this?" And the story goes that one of the university archivists caught wind of this and he went to the university officials that were freaking out and he said, "We already have your wood." And the university officials were saying, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "There was a grove of English oaks planted years ago, hundreds of years ago, on campus. And that wood is for this common room." And you can imagine the university officials. I mean I'm embellishing here but you can almost imagine them kind of leaning up against the trees saying, "Where are we going to get this wood? Where is this going to come from?" And it was there the whole time. That's what you call planning ahead! But it's been there the whole time.

The Promises of God fulfilled in the Cross

You know we're not going to see God probably in this life but there's a tree upon which God hung His own Son seen by eye-witnesses who were changed by it,

and some who were not, but that cross is the assurance for people like you and people like me that when God gives us these impossible, over the top promises that He will do it, that He will keep His promise. And my prayer is that for whether it's for the first time or the millionth time tonight, and may that be our prayer as we enter into prayer time, that God will enable us to rest in His promises, to believe what He says, and to lean on His Word. And so let me pray for us and then Kelly will come on up.

Father, we give You thanks for Your Word. Thank You for time together. Thank You that in Your wisdom that You brought us here tonight, that You have steered our decisions and our circumstances so that we're all here together. We pray that You would grant us rest in Your promises and we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

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