

The Promise & Abraham



God's Promise

God's promise to Abram (Abraham)¹ is first recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. It is repeated (in some form) on at least four other occasions (*Genesis 13:14-17; 15:4-5, 18-21; 17:2-8, 15-16; 18:18-19; 22:17-18*). The promise is also repeated to Abraham's son Isaac (*Genesis 26:4-5*) and grandson Jacob (*Genesis 28:13-15; 35:11-12*).

1. Read Genesis 12:1-3. In these verses, what does God promise Abram? How does God's promise apply to us today?
 - God will make him into a _____ (12:2a; 18:18), and God will bless him.
 - God will make his name great, and he will be a _____ (12:2b). God will bless those who bless him, and curse those who curse him (12:3a).
 - All _____² on earth will be blessed through him (12:3b).

2. How will all peoples (or nations) be blessed "through Abraham" (12:3, 18:18)? In other words, whom will God use to bless the nations? Read Genesis 22:17-18.
 - Abraham's _____.³

📖 *Genesis 22:17-18: The LORD said to Abraham, "I will surely bless you and make your descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendents will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."* (NIV)

The Response of Faith

Genesis 12-25 (the record concerning Abraham) is primarily about God – His promise & His "providence" (that is, His guidance of events to fulfill His promise). But Abraham's response is also very important. Abraham is considered to be one of the greatest examples of "faith." Hebrews 11:8-19 provides a concise summary of Abraham's faith.

3. How would you define "faith?"⁴

¹ The name "Abram" probably means "the father is exalted." Later, Abram's name is changed to "Abraham," which means "father of many" (Genesis 17:5).

² "peoples" ("families, clans"). Elsewhere, the promise is that all "nations" will be blessed (18:18; 22:18; 26:4).

³ The ultimate fulfillment of this promise is revealed in the New Testament (Galatians 3:16, 8-9, 26-29).

⁴ The word "faith" is not frequently used in the Old Testament. Other words (especially "trust") are used to convey the same idea. In the New Testament, the word "faith" (πίστις, *pistis*) is used very frequently. The word "believe" (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) comes from *pistis*. Biblical "faith" is confident belief and trust in God. Christian faith is not "blind faith." It is a faith based on sufficient evidence to be firmly persuaded, even if some of the things believed are future or unseen. Also, this faith is not based on human intellect alone, but is enabled by God's grace. The ultimate object of Christian faith is God himself.

? How is “faith” described in Hebrews 11:1?

📖 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”
(*Hebrews 1:1, NIV*).⁵

4. What did Abraham do that demonstrated his faith? (See the next page.)

- Read Hebrews 11:8-10. He gave up the “security” of the familiar to obey God.
- Read Hebrews 11:11-12. He trusted God to fulfill His _____ even though it seemed impossible.⁶
- Read Hebrews 11:17-19. He was willing to offer his only son as a _____.⁷

5. What helped motivate Abraham to persevere in faith (remain faithful)?⁸ How does this apply to Christians today?



6. How does Abraham’s example of faith relate to the description of faith in Hebrews 11:1? What is the basis of his faith? What is the basis of the Christian’s faith today?⁹

Questions for Personal Reflection

- Do I believe the promises of God given in the Bible? Why or why not? (The promise to Abraham has application to us today). Have I responded in faith? If not, why?
- Am I willing to obey God even if it means giving up comfort and so-called security?
- Do I really trust God to be faithful to His promises even when things look impossible?
- Am I willing to give up *anything* that God commands me to give up?
- Am I willing to do *anything* to serve in God’s program to bring blessing to the world?

📖 “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 *Corinthians 4:18, NIV*).

⁵ This is not a formal definition of “faith,” but is one description of biblical faith. The NASB says, “Now faith is the assurance (ὑπόστασις, *hupostasis*) of things hoped for, the conviction (ελεγχος, *elenchos*) of things not seen.” Though the Old Testament heroes of the faith understood that the fulfillment of the promises was future, they acted as if the realization was already present, because they were so convinced that God could, and would, fulfill what He had promised. “Physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things; faith is the organ which enables people to see the invisible order” (F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Grand Rapids, 1990), p. 277. The NIV and NASB translate *hupostasis* and *elenchos* as subjective. Others (KJV, NKJV) translate them as objective. For example, “Now faith is the substance (reality, realization) of things hoped for, the evidence (proof, demonstration) of things not seen.” That is, faith gives reality to objects of hope (Lane, 325).

⁶ “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6; Romans 4:18-22; Galatians 3:6)

⁷ James 2:21-23. Abraham reasoned that God could raise him. Genesis 22:5 says, “we will come back to you.”

⁸ See Hebrews 11:10, 14-16; 12:22; 13:4. It was a future hope based on the promise of God.

⁹ The basis of Abraham’s faith was God and His revealed promise. Likewise the basis of our faith today is God and His word. God has spoken to us through His written word, and He is faithful to His promises.

The Faith of Abraham

Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19 (With background passages from Genesis)

Genesis 12:1: The LORD said to Abram, Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. (NIV) Abraham left when he was 75 years old.

Hebrews 11:8-10: By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to a city with foundations,¹⁰ whose architect and builder is God. (NIV)

Genesis 18:10-14: At least 24 years after the promise (Gen 12:1-3), the promised child (Gen 15:2-5; 17:15-21) had not come. Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." (NIV) Abraham was 99 and Sarah was 89 years old.

Hebrews 11:11-12: By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. (NIV)

Genesis 22:1-2: Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering¹¹ on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (NIV) Of course, God intervened and stopped Abraham, and provided a substitute (a ram) for the offering (Gen 22:6-14).



Hebrews 11:17-19: By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (NIV)

¹⁰ "city with foundations" – a firmly founded, permanent dwelling place, in contrast to tents; "the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22); "the unshakable kingdom" (12:28) – what we call "heaven."

¹¹ It seems strange that God would instruct Abraham to sacrifice his child. The Law (later given by God) strongly prohibited child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). However, God had no intention that Abraham should actually go through with the sacrifice. It was simply a test of Abraham's faith (Genesis 22:12).