

Genesis 056

Living by Divine Promise

Genesis 12:10-20

October 31, 2021

Dr. Andy Woods

Good morning, everybody. Let's take our Bibles this morning and open them to Genesis 12. The title of our message this morning is "Living by Divine Promise," which is something that God wants us all to learn. Our main character, Abram, is going to learn that here in spades. Abram is in a developmental growth stage in his walk with God, which is instructive to us, because that is where we are.

GENESIS STRUCTURE



- I. Beginning of the Human race (Gen. 1-11)
- II. Beginning of the Hebrew race (Gen. 12-50)



We are in our verse-by-verse study on Sunday mornings, going through the Book of Genesis. We have completed Genesis 1-11, which features four events: Creation, Genesis 1-2; the Fall, Genesis 3-5; the Flood, Genesis 6-9; and national dispersion, Genesis 10-11.

GENESIS STRUCTURE



- I. **Genesis 1-11 (four events)**
 - A. Creation (1-2)
 - B. Fall (3-5)
 - C. Flood (6-9)
 - D. National dispersion (10-11)



All the way through, God is tracing a promise. That promise is that a Messiah (that we now know as Jesus) is coming, and to birth that Messiah, God needs a special nation. The second half of Genesis, Genesis 12-50, which we are just starting to study, really relates to the birth of that special nation as God deals with four people—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and (how the nation is preserved in the days of) Joseph.

GENESIS STRUCTURE



- I. Beginning of the Human race (Gen. 1–11)
- II. Beginning of the Hebrew race (Gen. 12–50)



Part one of Genesis (Genesis 1-11) is concerned with four events. Part two (Genesis 12-50) is concerned with four people. We are just barely looking at the beginning of that process: God's work with this man named Abram, Genesis 12:1-3.

GENESIS STRUCTURE



- II. Genesis 12-50 (four people)
 - A. Abraham (12:1–25:11)
 - B. Isaac (25:12–26:35)
 - C. Jacob (27–36)
 - D. Joseph (37–50)

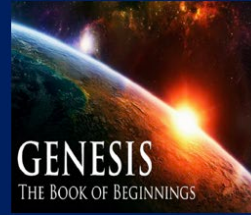


You cannot have a nation, according to God, unless you have promises. So in Genesis 12:1-3, God made eight promises to this man Abram. Those promises are the foundation of the nation of Israel, who would mediate God's Messiah to the earth. With three of those promises—land, Genesis 12:1; personal blessing, Genesis 12:2; and an articulation of a curse to those that curse Israel, Genesis 12:3—you are going to see God right here, front and center, very rapidly moving to enforce those promises.

VI. 8 New Promises

Genesis 12:1-3

- A. Land (Gen. 12:1b)
- B. Great nation (Gen. 12:2a)
- C. Personal blessing (Gen. 12:2b)
- D. Great name (Gen. 12:2c)
- E. Blessing to others (Gen. 12:2d)
- F. Blessing to blessers (Gen. 12:3a)
- G. Cursing to cursers (Gen. 12:3b)
- H. Blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3c)

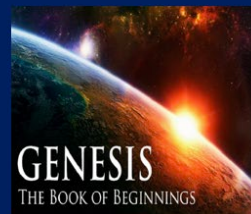


God takes these promises very seriously. And quite frankly, it is very obvious that these promises are very literal because you start seeing them come into effect right away in the life of Abram as well as the lives of his detractors. The land promise was developed in Genesis 12:7. We saw a little bit of that last week. The blessing upon Abram is going to come into focus here as we study our passage this morning, as well as the articulation of a specific curse to those who would come against God's plan and program.

Genesis 12:4-20

Abraham's Early Journeys

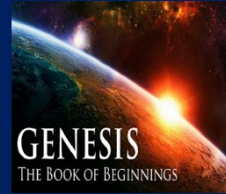
- I. From Haran to Canaan (Gen. 12:4-5)
- II. In Canaan (Gen. 12:6-9)
- III. In Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20)



Abram has done some traveling. He has moved from Canaan up north to Haran, Genesis 12:4-5. From there he has moved down south into the land of Israel, which at that time was called Canaan, Genesis 12:6-9. This is where God promised Abram and his descendants the whole land, despite the fact that it was occupied at the time by a group of diabolical and vicious people called the Canaanites.

III. In Egypt Genesis 12:10-20

- A. Famine (Gen. 12:10)
- B. Fabrication (Gen. 12:11-13)
- C. Fulfilled prediction (Gen. 12:14-16)
- D. Fury of God (Gen. 12:17)
- E. Fury of Pharaoh (Gen. 12:18-20)



What happens here is that Abram takes matters into his own hands (Sounds like us, doesn't it?) and does something God never called him to do. He leaves Canaan and he begins to sojourn in Egypt. What we have here in Genesis 12:10-20 is Abram's sojourn in Egypt. We have a famine, Genesis 12:10; a fabrication, Genesis 12:11-13; a fulfilled human prediction, Genesis 12:14-16; and then the fury of God kicks in, Genesis 12:17.

When you see the fury of God kick in, Genesis 12:17, you should be reminded of what God said in Genesis 12:3. Then once the fury of God kicks in, the fury of Pharaoh of Egypt kicks in, Genesis 12:18-20. This is how Abram left Egypt and returned to Canaan. Notice, if you will, Genesis 12:10, as we look at the famine. Abram, at this point, is in the land of promise. Genesis 12:10 says,

"Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land" (Genesis 12:10).

So we have a famine, and we have a famine of great severity. This famine is of such severity that Abram is going to leave and he is going to sojourn in Egypt. Where is Egypt? It is down south of Canaan, south and somewhat west.



By the way, that is a trajectory that Joseph himself is going to take later on in the Book of Genesis, as he is sold into slavery down in Egypt. In fact, the whole nation of Israel is going to follow Joseph down to Egypt, and they are going to be there for four hundred years. So this brief sojourn Abram took is a foreshadowing, if you will, of more things to come.

When Genesis 12:10 says "*sojourn*," it is talking about a temporary residence. Abram never intended to stay in Egypt forever. He is just trying to get out of a problem. He left Canaan despite the fact that God had promised him Canaan, and he took this sojourn to Egypt. The problem that we see developing very fast here with Abram is that he does not trust God very much. He has a tendency, like we all do, when he gets into a problem, to try to fix his problem through human means.

This issue of supply, this issue of want, this issue of an economic downturn—that is a very real thing now for people, as Christians are losing their jobs. The middle class, to a very large extent, is being wiped out. I think a lot of it is by design and bad policies, but I will not get off into all of that. The fact of the matter is that people are now forced into employment situations where they have to choose between a job or the job. Now Christians in the United States are facing these kinds of very real economic problems.

This is what Abram was facing. The issue, though, is that God is not bound by the economy. "Oh no, pastor, we have inflation." Do you think God's worried about that? We somehow think that the economic situation of the earth places some kind of handcuffs on God, and yet it does not. God is not bound by inflation. He is not bound by the economy. And God promises to supply our needs. Philippians 4:19 says,

"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

David, in Psalm 37:25, says,

*"I have been young and now I am old,
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
Or his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).*

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:25-34, goes on for about the span of ten or more verses dealing with the subject of anxiety related to money. He says,

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little

faith! Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:25-34).

Now, there is a twenty-week sermon series just on those verses. There is really nothing I can add to those majestic words. Jesus says it all to the very common people of His day. The interesting thing about this, though, is that Abram would not stand on promises like this. What he decided to do was take matters into his own hands and meet his own needs. So he leaves the land of Canaan because there is a severe famine, in spite of the fact that the severe famine was no handicap on God, who could have easily provided Abram's needs.

Abram, at this point, has faith, but it is very baby faith. It is infantile faith. And God loves Abram too much and has too big a calling on his life to see him get away with not growing up. So you are going to see Abram forced into maturity here as Abram, at the end of Genesis 12, learns a great lesson. That lesson is this: you navigate life's problems by standing on God's promises, not by trying to manipulate human circumstances.

As I mentioned last week, there is some strong archeological evidence that this event and events like this were common. I gave you this quote from Arnold Fruchtenbaum, who talks about Egyptian authorities and relics of that time period indicating that people typically left Canaan and went into the land of Egypt to be sheltered from famines like the one we are studying here. In other words, this is how the world system worked.

Abram is just following the pattern of the world—"Everybody else goes to Egypt when a famine hits, so that is what I am going to do, even though God has promised me the whole land of Israel, and God never specifically told me to leave Canaan and go to Egypt." God speaks directly to Abram in Genesis seven times, and you do not find any reference here to Abram, by God's command, being told to leave Canaan and flee into Egypt. Abram at this point is worldly. He is trying to solve his problems through worldly means.

The Book of Colossians says to us in the Church Age,

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

God, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10), wants us to go to Him with our needs, rather than trying to figure our way out of our circumstances based on how the world typically operates. We are not to be worldly in this respect.

Romans 12:2 says,

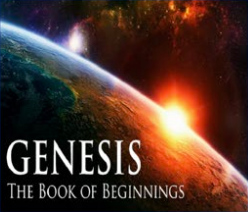
"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

"No" to worldliness. Abram is very worldly, not a big shock because he came out of Ur of the Chaldeans, the capital of idolatry of the known world. God is taking Abram away from that pagan heritage. He is teaching Abram the walk of faith. But the problem is that the mind, even though a person may be saved, is accustomed to reasoning a certain way. We are in a constant process, as Christians, to allow that thinking process to be recalibrated.

Does this ever happen to you: you get so lost that you have no idea where you are; you consult Rabbi Google—Google Maps—and it just keeps saying, "Recalibrating, recalibrating, recalibrating"? In other words, you are so messed up that it is going to take a while for even the computer to rescue you. That is where we are at as Christians. We got saved, but the mind still thinks a wrong way. So we need this mental renewal process. God is going to put us into circumstances where we mature, where we grow up. He loves us too much to see us continue on with our worldly thinking.

III. In Egypt
Genesis 12:10-20

- A. Famine (Gen. 12:10)
- B. **Fabrication (Gen. 12:11-13)**
- C. Fulfilled prediction (Gen. 12:14-16)
- D. Fury of God (Gen. 12:17)
- E. Fury of Pharaoh (Gen. 12:18-20)



The famine now turns into a fabrication. Look, if you will, at Genesis 12:11.

"It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, 'See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman;'" (Genesis 12:11).

"In fact, you are so beautiful that Pharaoh in Egypt is going to want you sexually. He is going to lust after you. And once he figures out that I am married to you, he is going to kill me."

Now, this is an amazing statement, because according to my calculations, Sarai was sixty-five years of age. How do I know she was sixty-five years of age? Well, if you go back to Genesis 12:4, Abram was seventy-five. And over in Genesis 17:17, when

Abram reached the age of one hundred, Sarai was ninety. She was ten years younger than him. So Abram was seventy-five and Sarai was sixty-five, and she was hot (Can I say that in church?). She was hot to the point where this is going to be a problem.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says concerning Genesis 12:11,

"Verse 11b focuses on Sarai's beauty: that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that you are a fair woman to look upon. The Hebrew literally reads 'of beautiful appearance. This is phenomenal in light of the fact that she was 65 years old at this time. Nevertheless, in light of her longevity, she obviously aged at a slower pace than people do now.'"¹

So if you do not look like Sarai did when you are sixty-five I would not feel too bad about it. But it is interesting that you can go on and on about her beauty, but the New Testament, when it makes reference to her beauty, never talks about her outer appearance. Have you noticed that?

Let me tell you what made Sarai, who later became Sarah, such an attractive woman. It was not so much her physical appearance, although that was clearly part of it. But she had inner beauty—true beauty. Peter, when he talks about Sarah in 1 Peter 3:1-6, says this:

"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives," (1 Peter 3:1).

I quote this because we have a lot of women and men also in our congregation that are caught in this difficulty—you are saved, your spouse is not; what do I do? The only biblical advice I have for you is right here in 1 Peter 3. Peter goes on and says,

"as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:2-4).

Now many people, legalists, will take that passage and say, "A woman is not to wear makeup. A woman is not to adorn herself. She is not to be concerned about her outer appearance." That is not what 1 Peter 3 is talking about. It is not talking about a question of exclusion. It is talking about a matter of priority. Should a woman wear makeup? I like to quote J. Vernon McGee at this point, who says, "If your barn needs painting, then paint the barn." That did not even come for me. I am quoting somebody.

The truth of the matter, though, is that when you look at a Christian woman, although she is not to neglect the outer appearance, the truth of the matter is that as far as priorities are concerned—as far as where her emphasis is concerned—she ought to be all the more concerned about inner character because that is what is going to last.

¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*, 248.

Peter, when he comments on Sarah, does not get into the whole subject of her outer appearance. He gets into the subject of her inner character.

"but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:4).

I am here to tell you that our society is the exact opposite. There is almost no teaching on this today, and very young women are being forced into some sort of caricature that they see on TV or see online, and they try to measure up in terms of physical beauty. Almost nobody is mentioning that "Yeah, physical beauty, that is a great thing. But God considers character, or inner beauty, far more significant."

Peter goes on in 1 Peter 3:5:

"For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear" (1 Peter 3:5-6).

That is how you are going to win your unsaved husband to Christ: through a gentle and quiet spirit; not a cantankerous, argumentative, in-your-face approach. When he sees that gentle and quiet spirit in you, he will be drawn to Christ, and consequently, your message to him will not just be a message of words. There will be a message of character that matches the words. Once the words match the character, now you have a platform.

So when Peter talks about Sarah, he is not getting into the physical beauty part of it. He is getting into her inner character, which is what the church should be emphasizing today in a culture that worships youth and beauty. Paul talked about this dilemma in 2 Corinthians 4:16:

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying,..." (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Have you ever been to your high school reunion? Have you ever seen all the heroes that are now zeros? Have you noticed that everybody is fat and bald?

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Paul, when he started to decline physically, did not lose heart. How many people become suicidal when they do not look the way they used to—particularly the stars and starlets, whose whole self-image and even their career and revenue is built on how they look? What do you do when your looks are not what they used to be? Paul says,

"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are

seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Paul is not saying, "Discard physical appearance." What he is saying is, "When you compare the two, more emphasis should be placed on inner character and inner beauty, because that is what is going to stand the test of time." You cannot hold onto the looks department. Proverbs 31:30 says,

*"Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).*

That was Sarah. There are a lot of very, very beautiful women and very handsome men—I see them on Instagram—and they have almost no common sense. They are completely flaunting themselves in some of the most provocative ways that you can imagine. Proverbs 11:22 talks about that. It says,

*"As a ring of gold in a swine's snout
So is a beautiful woman [or man, we could add] who lacks discretion"
(Proverbs 11:22).*

There is something to say here about Sarah's appearance, but that is not the biblical emphasis. The biblical emphasis is on her character: who she was on the inside, her walk with the Lord, the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Now, that is beauty. And if a man who used to be an unbeliever sees that in his wife, now you have a message to proclaim to him, because the words match the character.

Leaving Scripture verses in his lunch box every single day is probably not the most effective method of evangelism. It is working on your walk with the Lord, meditating on His word, asking the Lord to internally change you, even as you decline physically—those things will get someone's attention. This is the emphasis of Peter.

Sarai's beauty is so profound that Abram has a concern. You see his concern expressed there in Genesis 12:12:

"and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live" (Genesis 12:12).

Now Abram is not just sinning it up here. This is actually what happened at that time. He knew the ancient Near East. He knew these Egyptian rulers and monarchs could have any woman that they wanted, and he understood that any competitors were quickly killed. So Abram is expressing a concern. What he does, unfortunately, is he develops a solution out of the arena of his own carnal mind. This is how Abram is having to grow through this. God is allowing Abram to experience this to teach him a lesson: you are to live by divine promises, not by trying to manipulate your circumstances.

You see Abram's so-called solution, human solution, in Genesis 12:13:

"Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you" (Genesis 12:13).

"Let's just tell a lie. Except that it is really not a complete lie. It is just a half lie." In Genesis 20:12, where this whole thing happens again, Abram explains that Sarai is his half-sister. You would think Abram would learn his lesson, but he does not. He repeats the same error later on in the book.

That sounds like us, doesn't it? This is the growth process that we are in. God is interested in maturing us, and He will keep putting us through the same lesson—I am speaking from experience—over and over and over again. Maybe the facts will change and the circumstances will change, but it is the exact same lesson that you should have learned five years ago—ten years ago—fifteen years ago. God has too great a calling on your life to see you keep making this mistake.

So Abram is going to make this mistake again. But in Genesis 20:12 he says,

"Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife;" (Genesis 20:12).

Abram becomes an expert in the partial truth, the half-truth—not "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God," but part of the truth, an aspect of the truth. Abram probably thought to himself, "It is not a bald-faced lie. It is partially true."

It is so interesting how we have the ability as fallen people to justify and explain away our sinful actions. My mind works overtime trying to explain away my own sinful habits, even coming up with spiritual reasons why I blew it yet again. This is the kind of thing that is happening to Abram, and this is the progress of unbelief. It is always the same: you make Choice A because of unbelief, leaving Canaan for Egypt, and now you have to make Choice B, because unbelief is like a snowball. It continues to grow.

Now you are finding yourself doing things to cover up for the first decision that you made in unbelief and disobedience, when the whole thing could have been solved if Abram had obeyed God, ignored the world's system, stood on God's promises, and said, "It does not matter if there is a great famine in Canaan. God is going to provide for me because that is what He has promised to do." But Abram does not do that. He takes the world's way out.

Once you go that direction, now you have to come up with something else, and there is suddenly a downward staircase that keeps going down and down and down. Nobody wakes up one day and says, "I am going to become immoral." The way to immorality, according to a famous quote (I cannot remember who said it), is always paved through gradual compromises. Satan wants you to make Compromise A because he knows if you make Compromise A it will become Compromise B—it will become Compromise C—it will become Compromise D. This is Abram in his infant faith.

Look at David. David, in 2 Samuel 11, made a decision to have sex—adultery—with a married woman. He thought in 2 Samuel 11 that the whole thing was said and done. Except that she came back and she said, "I am pregnant with your child." "Whoops, did not count on that." Watch David there before he is confronted by Nathan the prophet. Watch the spin doctor doctrine going on in his mind as he is trying to cover up what he did.

He commits a second sin: he lies about it. He commits a third sin, first-degree murder, against Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite. You say, "How did he get to that level of murder?" Well, Satan did not get him up one morning and whisper in his ear, "Go commit murder." It was "Go commit adultery," Satan understanding that adultery is going to lead to lying, and lying, if it does not work, is ultimately going to lead to murder.

That is how immorality works. The path to immorality is always paved through gradual, general compromises. Satan is so good at convincing us that we can negotiate the compromise—"I can handle it." The truth of the matter is that if you could negotiate with sin, if you could contain sin, why in the world did Jesus have to pay such a horrific price to fix our sin problem? The nature of sin must be such that sin is more potent, more powerful, than we can possibly imagine.

The deception is that you can contain it, that you can control it. I am here to tell you, beloved, that you cannot control sin. It is too big for you. But the deception is that you can handle it. That deception moves into another compromise, and another compromise, and another compromise. This all started because of fear. Abram is afraid. When you are afraid, whether it is fear of famine or fear of Pharaoh, in your state of fear, you will not make good decisions.

Proverbs 29:25 says,

"The fear of man brings a snare,..." (Proverbs 29:25).

Proverbs 28:1 says,

*"The wicked flee when no one is pursuing,
But the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1).*

Second Timothy 1:7 says,

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity [or fear], but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Do you know that your Bible says 365 times, "Do not fear?" Hey, that is one time for every day of the year. That is pretty neat. Every single day of your life, you should wake up and you should listen to the voice of God and the Word of God which say, "Do not be afraid, because when you are afraid, you will start to make bad choices." This is what is happening to Abram here.

This fabrication leads into a fulfilled prediction. This is not a divine prediction. This is something that Abram predicted would happen because he knew the totalitarian nature

of the ancient Near East. Exactly what he thought would happen happened. You read about that there in Genesis 12:14-15. It says,

"It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw the woman was very beautiful. Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house" (Genesis 12:14-15).

This reminds me of Job 3:25, where Job, in his trials, says, "The very thing that I was most afraid of has happened" (paraphrase, Job 3:25). This is what has happened to Abram. He is in disobedience. It is obvious that he is in disobedience. But look at Genesis 12:16:

"Therefore he [Pharaoh] treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels" (Genesis 12:16).

Abram kept getting rich. He already was rich. He was getting richer despite disobedience. Why in the world was Abram getting rich despite disobedience? Because of Genesis 12:2, earlier in the chapter: the Abrahamic promises, which will become the Abrahamic Covenant, where God promised personal blessing to Abraham. Is that a promise that is conditional or unconditional? It is obviously unconditional because Abram's obedience was not at work here. He was disobedient, and yet he kept getting more and more wealthy.

In fact, Abram took on female servants from Egypt. Now, that is important, because in Genesis 16, we are going to run into somebody named Hagar, who was an Egyptian maid. Well, how did Hagar get involved here with Abram? Genesis 12 is explaining it. In Genesis 15 we are going to run into a key character named Eliezer of Damascus. Well, where did this guy come from? He joined Abram's household when Abram was up in Haran. The story is adding details of things that are going to get fleshed out later on in the Book of Genesis.

The covenant that God has with Abram is unconditional. It is obvious here the promises are unconditional. God is not saying to Abram, "You have to do X, Y, and Z to be blessed." He is saying to Abram, "The foundation of the nation of Israel will be based on an unconditional set of promises." More on that in just a moment.

There is a mindset that humans are stuck in: we think that godliness is always equatable to wealth. "Gee, I am increasing financially. I must be in God's will." "Gee, I am decreasing financially. I must be out of God's will." That is how we think. You can see very fast here that that equation is a complicated one. It is a tricky one. It does not always work out the way we think it should. You cannot automatically equate wealth with godliness and lack of wealth with ungodliness.

In fact, the wealthiest church that we know of in the New Testament is a church named Laodicea. Read what Jesus says to that church. It is very obvious that they did not get in that position because of their godly behavior. So be careful with taking an American gospel and dragging it into your own personal life, thinking that somehow success is

equated with godliness, or the opposite. You can see that very clearly just by studying the Bible verse by verse.

The fulfilled prediction now moves into the fury of God, not against Abram, but against Pharaoh. Look at what it says in Genesis 12:17:

"But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife" (Genesis 12:17).

Why does this happen? Because that is what God said would happen at the beginning of the chapter. In Genesis 12:3 did not God clearly say,

*"And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3).*

How do you read that? Is that real? Is that literal? It sure looks pretty literal to me. Pharaoh came to take Sarai against Abraham's marriage, and God brought not just plagues, but great plagues. And it is plural. It is not a plague. It is plagues, plural. And they are great on Pharaoh.

What does it say here in Genesis 12:17? God struck Pharaoh's whole house with great plagues. Why in the world would God do that? Because God says, "I told you I would do that back in Genesis 12:3, and you did not take Me at My word, did you? Now watch it work out in real time and in history." By the way, what were these plagues? We have no idea because the text does not say.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this:

"The text does not state exactly what these plagues were, but according to rabbinic tradition [and we are not certain that this tradition is right; but there it is in ancient Judaism] they were leprosy. According to Rashi [a famous Hebrew interpreter in Jewish tradition], the plagues were a debilitating skin disease that made sexual intercourse impossible."²

Maybe that is the reason that when all is said and done, Sarai is returned to Abraham unmolested, untouched. Maybe that is the reason that this happened the way it did. Fruchtenbaum goes on and he describes how this covenant has to be unconditional. He says,

"Although it was Abram who sinned, God still intervenes because the Abrahamic Covenant is indeed unconditional...The key observation here is that indeed the Abrahamic Covenant has now begun to work in earnest: Pharaoh was cursed for cursing Abram, and Abram was blessed in spite of his wrong actions. This all shows evidence that the covenant [Genesis 12:1-3] is unconditional."³

² Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*, 250.

³ *Ibid.*, 250-51.

I do the call-in KHCB show with Pastor Jim Collins on the last two Thursdays of the month, and I think it was either last week or the week before that someone called in and said, "Why should we care about the Jews? Look at all the problems the Jews are causing all over the world. Look at how they are the ones leading us into this vaccine mindset. Look at how they are the ones putting ankle bracelets and travel restrictions on people. It is almost as though the nation of Israel is leading the charge into the New World Order. How should we respect Israel because of that?"

Genesis 12 was fresh in my mind because I had been preparing this passage for you, and I said, "You had better respect the Jews and you had better treat them properly, because God will curse or bless people, or He will curse or bless nations, regardless of what the Jews are doing." I would not think that way if the Abrahamic Covenant were somehow conditional, but it is very clear that it is unconditional.

You do not have to support or like everything the nation of Israel does. God sure did not. Read your Old Testament and you will see that pretty clearly. But there needs to be in the mind of a Christian a healthy respect for the Jewish people and the nation of Israel, because they are the ones who have the unconditional promises or the unconditional covenant.

What does Paul say in Romans 11:28? He says, as unbelieving Israel was persecuting the church, "Currently they are your enemies, but they are beloved on the part of the patriarchs." Do you think our world needs to hear that message in light of the BDS movement, where the whole name of the game is boycott, divest, and exercise sanctions against Israel? Do you know that even as I speak mainline denominations are involved in that? I want no part of it, because I want to be on the right side of God.

In fact, my wife and I were involved in a church in the Dallas area. We did not agree with everything happening in the church, but we stuck it out until they did this: they brought in a missionary speaker who, from the pulpit, condemned the state of Israel and said, "Israel is not a work of Isaac. Israel today is a work of Ishmael."

We are going to study Isaac and Ishmael down the road. But when they said that, they were saying that the modern state of Israel has nothing to do with God, but is a work of man—it is a Zionist plot—it is a Zionist conspiracy. I was not hearing this from CNN or some liberal cable outlet. I was hearing it from the pulpit of my own church. And I said to my wife, "That's it. We cannot stay here. We cannot endorse this place with our finances and our presence because they are on the wrong side of God."

So this issue is something we need to think through very carefully. That, by the way, is why you can never get rid of Israel in your theology. Jeremiah 31:35-37 indicates that if you want to get rid of Israel, then you need to get rid of the sun and the moon and the stars, because God here says, "As long as the fixed order exists, Israel will always be a nation before Me" (paraphrase, Jeremiah 31:35-37).

God made that statement through Jeremiah, when the nation of Israel was involved in some of the sickest forms of sin that you can imagine. They were taking their own children and putting them into a fire to satisfy a pagan deity named Molech. How low

can you go? And yet, in the midst of that, God says, "As long as there is sun, moon, and stars, Israel will always be a nation before Me," because of what we are speaking of here: the unconditional Abrahamic promises.

The fury of God now turns into the fury of Pharaoh, where Pharaoh says to Abram, "What have you gotten me into? Why didn't you tell me the truth?" Notice, if you will, Genesis 12:18-18. It says,

"Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife?...'" (Genesis 12:18-19).

Pharaoh did not even know he was sinning against God, and yet God brought discipline and judgment on Pharaoh. Why would God do that? Because the promises are not conditional—that is why. The promises are unconditional. At this particular point, Pharaoh says three things to Abram, halfway through Genesis 12:19 and finishing with Genesis 12:20:

"...Now then, here is your wife, take her and go.' Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him" (Genesis 12:19-20).

Pharaoh says three things to Abram: "Number one, take your wife." Most commentators believe that she was returned to Abram unmolested. There is a lot of this kind of thing going on in Genesis—things involving the wombs of women. Why should we care? Why does it keep bringing this up? It relates to Genesis 3:15: that womb is going to create a line leading to Jesus. That is why Genesis keeps talking about pregnancies and unmolested or molested women—because it is tracing a promise, the promise of Genesis 3:15, which we read about some time back in our study.

So "Number one, take your wife," Genesis 12:19. "Number two, get out of here. Go." The truth of the matter is that Abram should not have been there to begin with. You know, the nice thing about God is that when you step out of His will, He has some interesting ways of getting you back into His will. Have you noticed that?

You might want to converse about that sometime with Jonah, who was told to preach to Nineveh, which is in the east. Just look at a map. He went to Tarshish, which is in the west. He went exactly the opposite way. You could not get a fellow more out of the will of God than Jonah. And God says, "Well, we will fix that." You know how that story ended: the fish vomited Jonah onto the dry land.

In Jonah 3:1 you read some words that have, to a large extent, become some of my favorite words in the whole Bible. Jonah 3:1 says,

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time,..." (Jonah 3:1).

Is anybody happy about that? You step out of the will of God, but God does not give up on you. He has ways of redirecting you. "Then once you go through this growth phase,

Jonah, are you ready to do My will?" And God says, "There are only two words you need to know in reply: 'Yes, sir.'" There are a lot of "Yes, sir"'s going on there from Jonah 3 to the end of the book, because this is how God grows us up. You step out of His will; He will put circumstances into place to get us headed in the right direction.

So, "Number one, take your wife. Number two, go. And number three, I am going to give you an escort to get out of here. That is how badly I want you out of here, because this God is real with these plagues, and I need Him to stop." Look at Genesis 12:20. It says,

"Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him" (Genesis 12:20).

What belonged to him? Possessions that increased in Egypt. One of the things that now belonged to him was the handmaiden Hagar, who is going to become a dominant figure, as I said earlier, in Genesis 16. So even as Abraham is leaving with this escort, he is getting even richer. How could that happen? It does not make any sense. It does not even seem fair.

It does not matter what we think, what our little standard of equity is. It is what God said that matters. God said it as clearly as it could be said in those promises in Genesis 12:2: "I will bless you." Well, so what? Who cares? Here is the lesson that comes out of it: Abram must learn that he survives not by human strategy as he thought, but by divine covenantal protection. That is what he has to learn. That is why I have entitled this message "Living by Divine Promise."

Beloved, as God is my witness, it is the same lesson He is trying to teach me, and it is the exact same lesson He is trying to teach you. We think that we are saved by grace, therefore, we can live by works. Yet it does not work that way. Zechariah 4:6 says,

"... 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

You live, not by might, not by power, but by God's Spirit. It is counterintuitive. You will spend your whole life as a Christian learning this lesson over and over again, because it does not comport with how we are raised or taught. Galatians 5:16 says,

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

"Boy, these desires of the flesh are killing me, Lord. I am going through self-help programs. I am exercising all kinds of energy in the flesh to get things under control in my spiritual life, and it just seems like I can never get the upper hand." Well, the reason is that we have not paid attention to Galatians 5:16, which says,

"...walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

Somebody once said that the Christian life is difficult. That is not true. The Christian life is not difficult—it is impossible. God wants you to live the impossible, so He has given

us resources to do that. This is what Abram is having to learn through this whole experience. "Yeah, but what if I blow it?" Well, here is the nice thing about it: as I speak, you are held in the double grip of grace, according to John 10:27-29, where Jesus said,

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish;..." (John 10:27-28).

The Greek is very strong there: "never perish," a double negative ("ou me" [οὐ μή]) followed by the word "aion" (αἰών), which means "forever." "They will never perish, forever!" is the way it should read, but sadly it does not in many English translations.

"...and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

By the way, you cannot even snatch yourself out of God's hand. Did you know that?

"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:29).

You are not just in the Son's hand—you are in the Father's hand. You are in the double grip of grace. If you make a mistake, as Abram has made (at least two, by my count, major mistakes), the grace of God covers you. Second Timothy 2:11, 13 says,

"It is a trustworthy statement [in other words, take this one to the bank]:... If we are faithless, [sounds like us; sounds like Abram], He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:11, 13).

That is why the Word of God came to Jonah a second time, even though he did not deserve it. This is why Abram is becoming wealthy, even though he did not deserve it. What got you in the door is the grace of God, unmerited favor. And beloved, that is what keeps you in the door, not human performance. That is not to look lightly on sin. I am just giving you a positional reality.

Galatians 3:3 says,

"Are you so foolish?..." (Galatians 3:3).

Is that what we are like when we are trying to live the Christian life through our own power? Is that how God looks at us—as foolish? Is that how God was looking at Jonah and Abram and Peter (who denied the Lord three times), as they tried to live the Christian life through the energy of their own flesh? God has an assessment: it is moronic—it is idiocy—to do that, because the Christian life is not difficult: it is impossible. It was never designed by God to be lived on the basis of human strength.

"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).

Abram was trying to perfect his life via the flesh, through human manipulation. And oh my goodness, is the learning curve going up right here for him. It is not going to work that way.

Jeremiah 17:5 says,

*"Thus says the LORD,
'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind
And makes flesh his strength,
And whose heart turns away from the LORD'" (Jeremiah 17:5).*

A person trying to live the life of God through human power is not only foolish, and is not only thinking that they are to live differently from how they started with God, but they are actually under a curse. Beloved, God loves you too much to see you keep living under a curse, so He allows you to bottom out, and then when you bottom out, His grace is so profound that He finds you and He directs you back to where He wants you. I just say, "Praise the Lord."

So that is how Genesis 12 ends. Abram is no longer in Ur of the Chaldeans. He has gone to Haran, and then he has spent time in Canaan. He had to learn a lesson here in Egypt. And the nice thing about Abram is that you are going to see him learning from a lot of these lessons, and you are going to see growth in him, particularly in the next chapter. He is almost a different guy in Genesis 13.

With some people, it does not matter what they go through—they never learn. Do not be that way with God. Let God deal with you the way He wants to. Just say to yourself, "Well, 2021 was not the greatest year for me, but 2022 can be different as I learn to rest in the resources of God."