

3.

The Lord God's Covenant with Abraham

We first meet Abram in Genesis 11:26-32. We learn that Abram originally came from Ur in Mesopotamia and was the son of Terah. Abram's father, Terah, decided to move with his family from Ur to Canaan but ended up settling in Haran, which is well short of Canaan. We read in Joshua 24 that "Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the river and worshiped other gods" (Josh. 24:2). Then in Joshua 24:3, the Lord states, "But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan." The "land beyond the river" would be Ur in Mesopotamia, on the other side of the Euphrates. So we read that God was sovereignly at work in Abram's life, even while he was a worshiper of idols in Ur.

We first read of an explicit meeting of the Lord and Abram in Genesis 12:1-5. The first recorded words to Abram are a command from God, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). Here the Lord orders Abram to do something which would have been very radical and risky in the ancient world, to leave his people and his land. There were no relocation departments, highways, or police to ensure safe and convenient travel. This was a command to step out into the great unknown and much potential danger and away from all known security. The Lord did not present this as one option among others; this was something Abram had to do.

However, the Lord did not command Abram to venture into the unknown, without at the same time, giving him promises to hold onto. In fact, the Lord follows His unequivocal command with wonderful assurances of a blessed, prosperous and happy future in which the Lord Himself would be Abram's shield in the world. In so many words, the Lord promised that whatever blessings Abram was experiencing in Haran would be multiplied one hundredfold, in land, people and fame. The Lord promised him, "I will make you into a great nation and I will

bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). It is apparent that Abram took the Lord at His Word, because we read in verse 4, “So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.”

The Lord graciously provided Abram with wonderful promises in order to enable him to obey what would have been a very difficult command. But Abram had to believe the promises, because if he would not trust the Lord by taking Him at his Word, then he would not have been able to obey God’s command to go, because it would have been far too risky. But Abram did believe, and it was his faith in God’s promises that enabled him to obey as we read in Hebrews 11:8, “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.”

Here we see once again, a relationship with God that is characterized by privileges and obligations. What was Abram’s obligation? What was required of him? It was required of him that he leave his home and family. This was commanded of him. What was the privilege that Abram would enjoy? Wonderful blessings! A happy future that would be more than he could imagine. How was Abram to enjoy these wonderful privileges? By meeting the obligation of obeying the Lord when he spoke.

Here we are able to discern the same covenantal relationship that God had with Adam. The only difference between the two is that Adam had everything to lose in not meeting the obligations, while Abram had everything to gain. The Lord’s covenant with Abram was God’s gracious covenant on the other side of the fall into sin. Abram was called *out of* idolatry and condemnation by the promises of God’s blessing and protection and provision, while Adam fell out of God’s blessing and protection and provision. For both, meeting obligations was the key to enjoying the privileges. And for both as well, faith in God’s promise to them was key in being able to keep their respective obligations. For Adam, it was a promised curse, “you will surely die,” since there was nothing more for Adam to gain. Abram, however, was given promised blessings.

As we saw earlier, Adam and Eve fell because of unbelief. They did not take the Lord God at His Word. And here we see Abram entering into God’s blessing by faith. He stepped out of the security of what was known and into obedience by standing on God’s promise of a

land that he could not see. Though the outcome was much different, the relationship between the Lord and Abram and Adam was the same—it was covenantal. But we are not yet finished with Abram since there is much more to this story.

