

## THE GOD WHO PROMISES

*Hebrews 11:9-16—By faith he sojourned as a stranger in the land of promise as a foreign country, having dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, of which God is the artificer and constructor. By faith also Sarah herself received strength for the conception of seed, and that beyond a seasonable age; since she counted him faithful who promised. Wherefore also there have been born of one, and that of one become dead, even as the stars of heaven in multitude, and as the countless sand which is by the sea shore.*

*All these died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them from afar off and*

*embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth. For they who say such things shew clearly that they seek their country. And if they had called to mind that from whence they went out, they had had opportunity to have returned; but now they seek a better, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he has prepared for them a city.*

Let us have a word of prayer:

*Dear heavenly Father, as we gather together here in the name of Thy beloved Son, we know that Thou art here with us. Truly we are standing on holy ground. Lord, we do remove our shoes and cover our face before Thee. We are here to listen to what Thou hast to say to us. Do open our understanding. Give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Bring us to the true knowledge of Thyself. Lord, we long to know Thee. We long to know more of Thee. We want Thee to have a full place in our life. Thou art the only One who is able to do such a work. We trust Thy Holy Spirit to do it. We believe that this is Thy will. We ask that Thou wilt answer us, in the*

*name of our blessed Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

We are considering the theme: *Knowing God*. There is no subject more essential to our lives than knowing God because it means life and death to us. There are two ways to the knowledge of God. One way is to know Him in our mind, and the other is to know Him in life. But these two kinds of knowledge are as different as heaven and earth. What we know with our mind is a false knowledge because we only know of Him. But to know Him in life is the true knowledge of God because we know Him, not just about Him.

So, I believe we all realize that there are these two different kinds of knowledge. Unfortunately, so far as the knowledge of God is concerned, we know Him with our mind much more than we know Him with our life. We realize that this is our problem. So we need to look to the Lord that He will deliver us from knowing Him just in our mind and bring us into that living knowledge of Him in life. This is the prayer of our hearts.

Our God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. We used this compound name of God to help us into living knowledge of Him. We mentioned before that the name of God reveals who and what God is. And it is by revelation from above that we come to know Him in life. He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. How He revealed Himself to these men! How He dealt with these men! How He transformed the lives of these men! How He proved Himself real and living to these men! And how He enabled these men to know Him in an experiential way!

So God is called the God of Abraham. He is called the God of Isaac. And He is called the God of Jacob.

In the lives of these men, we come to see God in a living way. By what God has done to these men, we believe that God is able to do the same to us. It is not our interest just to know Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, however interesting their life stories are. This is not our interest. Our interest is to know the God of Abraham. We want to know the God of Isaac. We want to know the God of Jacob. The reason we mention these men and go over their histories is because through their lives we see the hand of God. We see the heart of God. We see the will of God. We see what God has done to them so that we may know the same God, because their God is our God. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is our God.

So our main interest is in knowing God through these men. These men are just vessels. These men are just means to an end. We may forget them, if only we receive God, if only we remember God. So we hope that even though we seem to go over the histories of these men in detail, yet we do not want to be bogged down with these men. May these men disappear and may God appear to us. This is our prayer.

### **GOD IS THE BEGINNING**

My part is to share on the God of Abraham. We have mentioned that the first meaning of the God of Abraham is that He is the

beginning. "In the beginning God." God being the Father, He must be the beginning. So we find in the life of Abraham how God began in the beginning. When Abraham was in Ur of Chaldea, when he lived in the city of idols, when he was brought up in a family that were idol makers, you find that God called him. The God of glory appeared to him. God made a beginning in his life. God called him to come out from his land, come out of his kindred, and go to the place that God was going to show him.

In the call of God, God made a beginning in the life of Abraham. He was not to continue to live on with his old life, to live in the old way, to live under the old environment. God called him to come out and to live a life that was totally different from before. In other words, God was calling him to live a life of faith because when he left, he did not know where he was going. The only knowledge he had was that he knew God. God was calling him to come out of himself and unto God Himself. This was a new beginning in the life of Abraham, and this is the first principle of God the Father.

What God did to Abraham, He does to each one of us. It is not that we seek after God; it is God who seeks after us. He takes the initiative. His grace comes upon us. His salvation comes to us. He calls us out of our old environment, our old manner of life, our old relationships, even from our old self. He calls us out to come unto Him that we may live a totally different life.

## CALLED BY HIS GLORY

Thank God He takes the initiative. From the very beginning He shows us that He is the Father. And He calls us by His glory. He does not just call us according to our condition. We know what our condition was. We know that we were sinful, that we were under the wrath of God, that we had no hope, and we were destined for eternal death. But thank God, He saved us. He saved us out of our sins and He saved us unto heaven. We are very grateful for that. But God is not satisfied because He called us by His glory. He called us into something that will satisfy Himself. We have said before that God is glory. So when God calls us, He has to call us to satisfy His own glory. What a glorious calling we have! It is an on-high calling; it is a holy calling. He calls us that we may share and enter into glory. Whom He has predestined, whom He has chosen, He called. Whom He has called, He justifies. And whom He has justified, He glorifies.

When God called Abraham, He called him to glory, and it is the same way He deals with us. So do not limit what God has done. Let us have glory before us.

The way to respond to the call of God is by faith. We look away from everything. We look away from our environment. We even look away from our feeling. We just look steadfastly upon Him. By faith, Abraham obeyed; and may this be the same with us.

By faith, Abraham sojourned in the Promised Land as a stranger and sojourner. As you read the Bible, you see there is a

difference between what is recorded in Genesis in the Old Testament and what is recorded in the New Testament in Hebrews 11 or Romans 4 concerning Abraham's life. In Genesis, the Holy Spirit gives us the actual history of the life of Abraham. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual history of Abraham. In the Old Testament the life of Abraham is presented to us in his real, actual, life. But in the New Testament God reveals to us what grace has done to this life. In the Old Testament you find many of the failures and weaknesses of Abraham. In the New Testament you find it is all faith and victory. It does not mean there is any discrepancy in the word of God. It only means that the Old Testament shows the real life of Abraham, but the New Testament shows what grace has completed in that life.

### **GOD IS ALSO THE END**

When the God of glory appeared to Abraham, we need to remember there is a little difference between the record in Genesis and in Acts 7. In Genesis 12:1 when it says, "And Jehovah said to Abram," in the original it says, "Jehovah had said to Abram." "And Jehovah had said to Abram, Go out of the land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will shew thee." It seems as if what God said to him happened in Haran. But according to Acts 7, in the testimony of Stephen, he said, "The God of glory appeared to Abraham when he was in Ur of Chaldea."

As a matter of fact, it was when Abraham was in Ur of Chaldea that God appeared to him. God called him to leave his native land and his kindred to go to the place that God would show him. Did Abraham obey? On the one hand, we find that when Abraham saw the God of glory, he was so attracted by God's glory, he was willing to leave all the past behind. He did have the faith to rise up and to follow God. But when you read the record in Genesis 11, you find that it was Terah, his father, who took Abraham, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot out of Ur of Chaldea to go to Canaan. But they stopped midway and stayed in Haran.

So we need to know exactly what happened. The glory of God appeared to Abraham. The call came to Abraham and Abraham was willing to obey. God took the initiative. Unfortunately, Abraham consulted with flesh and blood. Evidently he talked with his father. We do not know exactly what happened, but we can imagine. When Abraham told his father that the God of glory had appeared to him and God was calling him to leave his native land and his kindred to go to the place where God was leading him, his father must have said to him: "You must be mad. How could God appear to you? Probably it is a dream. How can you leave everything behind? That is so unreasonable. And you do not even know where you are going."

Evidently his father must have tried to persuade him not to do such a foolish thing, but Abraham was very firm in his conviction. He said, "God did appear to me. I have seen His glory and I am

blinded to everything else. I am willing; I am determined. This is what I must do.”

The father loved his son, and maybe after much discussion, finally, the father said, “All right, if you really want to leave, I will go with you.” He took over the initiative, instead of God taking the initiative. “In the beginning God.” But now there was a shift. Terah took over the lead. It was not Abraham who took his father with him; it was Terah who took Abraham. Terah did not have the vision. He did not see the glory of God. He had not heard the voice of God, but he took the initiative. And no wonder, instead of going all the way, he stopped midway because to him that was enough.

Do you remember another man, that young man Saul? He was on the way to Damascus on a special mission. He was going there to seize upon those who were disciples of our Lord Jesus to bring them to Jerusalem to sentence them. But on the way to Damascus, God met him. The Lord Jesus met him on the way. He saw the righteous One, he heard His voice, and he surrendered his life. God was calling him to a different life. God was turning him around. And this young man was so convicted he determined to go this way. So you remember his second question was: “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

This young man said in Galatians 1, “It has pleased God to reveal His Son in me.” When he received this revelation, he said, “I do not consult with flesh and blood. I will go to Arabia.” There, for

about three years, he re-read the word of God in the light of Christ, and what a difference it made.

So brothers and sisters, we need to know God our Father. We need to know what is meant by: God is the beginning. God, being the beginning, does not mean that He is just limited to the first step and then He leaves it to us to know how to go on. We know the name of God is the beginning and the end. He is not only the beginning, He is also the end, and He is all that is in between. So, "in the beginning" does not mean just at the start. It means the beginning all the way to the end. And this is something that we sometimes do not understand. This is one meaning of the Fatherhood of God.

When God begins, He is responsible for all that follows. He has to be the first in all things. He is the first; He is the last. He is the Alpha; He is the Omega. All the way you have to acknowledge Him as the beginning and the end. This is the Fatherhood of God.

### **ABRAHAM CONSULTS WITH FLESH AND BLOOD**

When Abraham was called to this life of faith, he did not know this principle. He consulted with flesh and blood. He allowed man to take over the next step, and when this happened, the obedience was not complete. He did go out of his native land; he did leave many of his kindred. But his father's family, including his father and his nephew Lot, went out with him. It was not a complete obedience of faith. Because of that, they stopped in the middle. We do not know

how many years they stayed in Haran, but even in Haran Abraham began to accumulate more wealth. And during that period there was no appearing of God; there was no word from God. But thank God, He again took the initiative. There was nothing Abraham could do. Once he took that wrong step there was nothing he could do to correct it. But again, the mercy of God came to Abraham. God removed his father. And I believe it is then that Genesis 12 begins.

“And Jehovah had said to Abram.” Most likely God spoke to him the second time. God just repeated what He had said before, but maybe He just added something to it: “And from your father’s house.” It is as if God said, “You have not left your father’s house. You need to leave your father’s house.” In the record here you find God gave him promises. He not only called him by glory, but God gave him promises. He said, “I will make of thee a great nation, and bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. And Abram departed as Jehovah had said to him” (Genesis 12:2-4).

Brothers and sisters, when the God of glory calls us, we are not supposed to consult with flesh and blood, because if we do, immediately our way will not be straight. Consulting with flesh and blood does not just mean consulting with someone else because we ourselves are flesh and blood. In other words, when God calls us, we should not consider or consult with our own self. Nor should we inquire of other people, because if we do, people will take up the

initiative or we ourselves will take over to fulfill God's call. It is only by the grace of God. So we need to surrender ourselves to God so completely, depending upon His grace, because once we consult with flesh and blood, we will not be able to obey fully.

### **THE GREATEST AND PRECIOUS PROMISES**

But thank God, in spite of our weaknesses, how often He in His mercy rescues us and brings us back to where God wants us to be. He gives us promises to encourage us.

In II Peter 1:3-4 it says, "As His divine power has given to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us by glory and virtue, through which He has given to us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

In verse 3, you find He calls us by glory and virtue. But in verse 4, you find He has given to us the greatest and precious promises. Why has He given us these greatest and precious promises? It is by these greatest and precious promises that He encourages us and He strengthens us in our faith that we may become the partakers of His divine nature.

Is it not true with us today? God calls us by His glory, but He knows how weak we are, so He reinforces His calling with many promises. And these are the greatest and precious promises. What

are these promises? He not only gives us life, but He promised that He would give us the Holy Spirit. Can any promise be greater than the Holy Spirit?

You remember, on the night of our Lord's betrayal His disciples were sorrowful. And the Lord said, "I do not leave you as orphans. I am coming to you. I am coming in the another Comforter. And He will not only be with you, He will be in you; and He will never leave you. We will come and dwell in you. I will give you My own name. When you pray to the Father in My name, you will be heard. I promise you that I will intercede for you without ceasing to save you to the uttermost. I promise that I will come back and receive you that where I am, there you will be also." Then He promised us the kingdom. These are all the greatest and precious promises.

All these promises of God are given to us to encourage us to walk this life of faith, to enable us to leave the corrupted world behind and to be partakers of His divine nature. What had happened to Abraham now has happened to us. How much God is like a father! This is the heart of the Father. The Father loves the Son, and out of His love He wants His Son to receive everything. Because of that He promises, He provides, He gives everything.

So how do we know God as Father? We know God as Father through His promises. What a great Father He is because His promises are the greatest and the most precious. He provides everything that we need on our journey of faith.

## **ABRAHAM LEAVES HARAN WITH LOT**

Abraham, being encouraged, went out of Haran. And yet the Bible says, “And Lot went with him.” I personally feel there is a little difference here, because in chapter 11 it was Terah who took Abraham and Lot. This time God spoke to him again reminding him of his father’s house. To me, I feel most likely Abraham was going to obey God fully at this time, but Lot determined to go with him. It was not Abraham who took Lot with him; it was Lot who decided he wanted to go, too.

The name *Lot* means, “veil.” Lot was a veiled person. He did not have vision. He did not have a firsthand knowledge of God. He did not know God. He was a veiled person. He just followed. Lot wanted to follow Abraham, but how far could he follow? And if he followed Abraham it was really a problem to Abraham. But since Lot was his nephew, Abraham found it very difficult to refuse.

## **DEPENDING ON THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD**

Lot went with Abraham, and they began to travel to Canaan. When they arrived there, the Bible says the Canaanites were there. God had said, “Go to the place where I am going to lead you.” Maybe in the mind of Abraham, certainly God was going to lead him to a place of glory, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land all ready for him. But unfortunately, when he arrived, there were people

living there, the Canaanites. The seven tribes of Canaan were the most wicked people at that time. They were very vicious. There were giants among them. They were so evil that God was going to destroy them, and Abraham found them there. When Abraham arrived there, being new in this life of faith, he probably would have been very disappointed.

So you find it says in chapter 12:7: “And Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land.” In other words, Abram needed encouragement. He needed to be reassured. It is as if God said, “There is no mistake. I am going to give you this land and I will give this land to your seed.” Abram believed in God, and he built an altar.

By all outward appearances, it seemed to be a contradiction. God was calling him out of Ur of Chaldea into the place the God of glory would prepare for him. But what did he see? It was a place even worse than Ur of Chaldea because a worse people occupied that place. But there was no mistake. So God encouraged him. God appeared to him and said, “Unto thy seed I will give this land.” And Abraham believed, and he built an altar.

Often, in our journey of faith, we will meet situations that seem to be contradictory to the promises of God, but God makes no mistakes. We are encouraged, and if we have faith and are not governed by sight, we believe that what God has said will come to pass. Faith is believing in the faithfulness of God. Faith is not sight.

It is not feeling. Faith does not depend upon us. Faith is depending on the faithfulness of God. Abraham believed in God.

## **TWO PROMISES TO ABRAHAM**

But there were many trials. While he was in the Promised Land, he lived in tents, because he was a stranger and a sojourner there. Think of that! By faith, Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as a stranger and a sojourner. He lived in tents.

There are two things that God promised Abraham. One was the land. God would give him the whole land of Canaan to be his inheritance. The other promise of God was a seed. These are the two greatest promises that God had given to Abraham, but he started out with none. He had neither a seed nor a land. He did not even have one son because God shut up the womb of Sarai. He did not even have a piece of land. The only piece of land that he later possessed was the cave of Machpelah and the field he bought from the Hittite to bury the dead. Throughout his life, he did not possess a piece of land, only that burial place. Yet, these were the promises of God to him, and based on these promises he sojourned in the land.

There was famine in Canaan and he was tempted into going to Egypt. We will not go into the details, but by the grace of God he was brought out of Egypt and returned to the Promised Land. However, then something happened. Because of his failure in obeying God—not because of his success in following God—he

accumulated lots of wealth. He accumulated wealth in Haran and then in Egypt. He accumulated lots of sheep and cattle, bondmen and bondwomen. And this became a problem for a sojourner, a stranger in the land.

### **LOT AND ABRAHAM SEPARATE**

Unfortunately, Lot, who followed him, also accumulated lots of wealth. Because they had so many flocks, the land where they were was not enough for them. They did not quarrel, but their herdsmen began to quarrel, and they quarreled in the sight of the Canaanites. There was no testimony. Finally, Abraham said to Lot, "This land is not enough for us. You make the choice. If you go to the east, I will go to the west. If you go to the south, I will go to the north." And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the land of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was like a garden of Eden. It was like Egypt from where they had just come. So he made the choice. He chose the best.

Naturally speaking, since Abraham was the uncle and Lot was the nephew, Lot should have given the priority of choice to his uncle. But there was greediness in Lot because he was a man of flesh; he had no vision. He had to grasp things by himself. He could not afford to let God give. So, without any natural courtesy at all, he chose what he saw.

But look at Abraham, a man of faith. He knew God had promised him. No matter what other people may choose, it was his. He could afford to be humble.

After Lot left, God appeared to Abraham and said, "Lift up your eyes. Look at the east and west, north and south. All you can see is yours." Then God said, "Your seed also will be like the dust of the earth."

At every trial, God increased his promise. When Lot took away the better part of the land, God promised Abraham all the land. When he had no seed, God promised his seed would be as the dust of the earth. Every time a trial came, every time the promise increased. This is the Fatherhood of God.

In our life of faith, whenever we are met with a trial, if we do not try to stand on our rights, if we trust in Him, every time there will be a fresh promise to us. There will be an increase in the promises. Thank God for that!

### **ABRAHAM REJECTS THE OFFER OF THE WORLD**

Then you find there was the battle between the four kings and the five kings. God used Abraham to deliver his nephew. He was met by Melchizedek, and Melchizedek gave him wine and bread. Melchizedek reminded him that the victory was not by his own power. It was the Most High God that gave Abraham victory to prepare him to reject the offer of the king of Sodom. He did not want

to exercise the right of victory. He should have had all the spoil; that was his right. But he willingly gave up his right because he knew he was blessed by God. He would not be blessed by the world. He would not let Sodom say they made Abraham rich. He depended totally upon God. Thank God.

This is another kind of temptation when we are in the way of faith. Sometimes we are tempted by the world. By the grace of God, we may have a great victory, yet the world tries to tempt us. By the grace of God, reject the offer of the world. If we are rich, we are rich by God.

### **ABRAHAM'S LET DOWN**

After this victory, in Genesis 15 you find Abraham was afraid. Often, after a great victory, there will be a great let down, as if you are exhausted. When Abraham sat down and began to review the past, he said, "What have I done? I have only a little over three hundred trained servants, and I have defeated four kings. What if they come back and take revenge? What can I do?"

In our walk of faith, oftentimes by the grace of God we gain a great victory, but after that you may find there is a letting down. So you review what has happened. You thought it was you who did it, and how can you do it a second time? You begin to fear. So God appeared to Abraham again. "After these things the word of Jehovah

came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

Look at Abraham. Instead of believing in God right away, God had to say, “I am your shield. I am your great reward. You rejected the offer of the king of Sodom. How can it be compared with Me being your reward? Why are you afraid?”

Abraham said, “What will you give me seeing I go childless and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.” Abraham began to be very talkative. He said again, “To me Thou hast given no seed. And behold a son of mine house will be my heir.” We would say, spiritually, he was at a low ebb. He began to question God: “What will you reward me? If you reward me, who is going to inherit it? You have not given me even a son. And the one in my house, my steward, Eliezer of Damascus, will inherit everything.” (He got Eliezer when they sojourned in Haran.)

Can you imagine how low Abraham’s spirit was? But how gracious God was! God told him, “This shall not be thine heir, but he that will come forth out of thy body shall be thine heir.” But God knew that to promise Abraham by word was not enough. So God led him out of the tent at night and said, “Look up. See if you can count the stars. Your seed shall be as the stars of the heaven.” And Abraham believed in God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

How fatherly God is! He knows our frailty. How He condescends Himself to our level in order to lift us up! Brothers and sisters, I see the Fatherhood of God there.

### **GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

It is the same thing with the land. Abraham at that time was not able to believe, so God made a covenant with him. A covenant is a contract; it is legally binding. It is more than just a promise. It is a promise put into a legal binding. In other words, it cannot be broken. For God to covenant with man is unthinkable because what God says is true. His word is dependable. But because we are so weak and we are so undependable, God condescends to our level. He binds Himself in a covenant: "This I promise to do. Not only do I promise, but I bind Myself under a legal binding. There is no escape for Me if I do not do it." Think of that! That is the love of God. And because of that, Abraham's faith was strengthened. He was able to believe that indeed God would give him that land.

God gave Abraham these two promises and, increasingly, you find God strengthened these promises. Later on, after they had sojourned in the land for ten years and Sarai still could not give birth, she finally suggested, "Let's help God a little bit." Sarai gave Abram her slave girl, Hagar, whom she got in Egypt. Whatever you get from the world in your failure, you find there will be a problem there. Then, through Hagar, when Abram was eighty-six years old, he got

Ishmael. Again, you find there is a problem. So, we need to experience Him more in our lives and learn to trust Him fully.

Let's have a word of prayer:

*Dear heavenly Father, we do praise and thank Thee, Thou has not only called us by Thy glory, but Thou hast given us the greatest and precious promises, that we may be partakers of Thy divine nature and escape the corruption in the world by lust. We pray, Lord, that as Thou dost lead us in this way of faith, that we may, by Thy grace, experience Thee more and more, that we may be brought to the place that we can trust Thee fully. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*