

## Genesis 12

This chapter narrows the focus of the story of Genesis. The first eleven chapters were about the history of humanity; where it came from (God created it) and how it ended up in the sorry state it now inhabits (we ignored God's loving commands). The rest of Genesis will deal with Israel; the people of God. We will discover their purpose (being agents of God's recreating work) and their problems (ignoring God's loving commands). We begin the story of Israel with Abram and Sarai.

The new story begins with an absurd, three-fold promise of God. God promises (covenants with) Abram and Sarai, that if they are willing to leave behind the safety and prosperity of Haran, where they had been living, and follow where God leads, then God will give them land, children and blessing (the blessing is both for Abram and Sarai, as well as for all the nations of the earth). This is an absurd promise because the land to which they are being led by God is already occupied, Abram and Sarai are childless and there is famine in that land. These realities hardly seem like a recipe for success. And things look even worse when Abram "forgets" God's promises and, to save himself, gives Sarai to Pharaoh as a wife (Abram is afraid that Pharaoh will kill him to get Sarai). Thus, at least for a moment, this new adventure appears doomed.

To fully appreciate this story, we need to reexamine the first eleven chapters of this book. What those chapters tell us is that God created a good world, we messed it up, but God had not given up on remaking the world the way it ought to be. Twice God "started over." The first attempt was through Noah and the second was through the people at Babel. Both efforts failed. Nothing changed. What we have in the Abram and Sarai story then, is a third attempt at "starting over" (which turns out, in the end, to be the charm). What I mean by "starting over", is that none of the characters, from Noah to Abram, had the ability to remake creation. They were merely part of the chaos. If there was to be a new creation, it would have to come about through God speaking the renewed creation into being, just as God had done in Genesis 1, when God spoke and order overcame chaos.

This is what God does in this chapter. He speaks to Abram and Sarai, calling forth in and through them the possibility of a new creation. But, unlike God's previous attempts, this time God appears willing to invest for the long, rather than the short term. We can see the long-term nature of this plan and promise when, even after Abram gives away Sarai to Pharaoh (thus risking the entire endeavor), God insures her return along with parting gifts. In other words, even in the face of human unfaithfulness, God remains faithful to God's promise to bless Abram and Sarai, and the world.

**Reflection:** Here at Everybody's Church we have something called the Five Part Story. The parts are God Loves the World, We Wander Far from God, God Calls a Family, Jesus is the Way to God and The Spirit Helps Us Live God's Love. These are the five major moves in the Bible. In the first twelve chapters of Genesis, we have encountered the first three parts, with God calling Abram and Sarai to be the family through which God will save the world, as the third. As we continue in Genesis (and the rest of the Biblical story) we will witness God trying to bring the world back to goodness and people wandering away. We will also see God keeping God's promise to not only bless Abram and Sarai's family in the face of their unfaithfulness, but to bless the world through them, even in the face of the world's unfaithfulness.

### Questions:

1. Where have you watched God do improbable things in your life?
2. Has God ever "Started over" with you? If so, what was that like?
3. How has God used you to bless others, or others to bless you?