

Genesis Ch12v1-Ch13v4 - Beginning With Grace

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[0 : 00] So, on the table as you came in, there's a little booklet which says Genesis 12 to 50.

You will remember that a year or so ago we did Genesis chapter 1 to 11. So, if you want to know what Genesis 1 to 11 is all about, you can go to our website and listen to all the talks there.

But we're going to be picking up the accounts, the story from chapter 12 through to the end of chapter 50. And this little booklet is a little overview of some of the main characters, some of the main points that we're going to be hitting along the way.

And I encourage you to read it just to give you an overview and it will help you in our studies. But, of course, not to be reading it now. We're going to read the Bible, which is a sure and trustworthy word.

Let's read Genesis chapter 12, starting at verse 1. The Lord had said to Abram, Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

[1 : 34] I will make you 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. So Abram went as the Lord had told him. And Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran.

He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran. And they set out for the land of Canaan.

And they arrived there. Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Morah at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, To your offspring I will give this land. So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

[2 : 39] From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

Then Abram set out and continued towards the Negev. Now there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

As he was about to enter Egypt he said to his wife Sarai, I know what a beautiful woman are you. When the Egyptians see you they will say, This is his wife.

Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.

When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh and she was taken into his palace.

[3 : 47] He treated Abram well for her sake and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys and male and female servants and camels.

But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. So Pharaoh summoned Abram. What have you done to me?

He said. Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister? So that I took her to be my wife. Now then, here is your wife.

Take her and go. Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men and they sent him on his way with his wife and everything he had.

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev with his wife and everything he had and Lot went with him. Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

[4 : 53] From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar.

There Abram called on the name of the Lord. Well, let's pray and ask for God's help. Father God, thank you for this very ancient record and account of a man called Abram and his wife Sarai.

Names may be familiar to us. Some of the accounts may be. But Father, we don't just want this to be some historical record of the past.

We trust that it is a living word speaking to us today about our lives and the God we seek to follow. So Father, would you be gracious to us so that we might learn much together. that we might discover more of your greatness your grace and your love towards your people.

[6 : 28] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, the other day panic struck our house.

The internet went down. No wifi. Well, in our modern homes and us being enslaved to wifi mobiles don't work.

The landline, because it's connected now to the internet, doesn't work. The TV and Netflix are out. The heating system goes down. It's a nightmare. There. But thankfully, as some of you will know on the back of the modem is a tiny little button that says reset.

All you need to do is just press that button in and hold it for 10 seconds and then release. And incredibly, an orange light you know what it's like, don't you?

Because you've done it all before. It begins to flash and then it turns green and then another light begins to flash and it turns green and soon you've got four bright green lights.

[7 : 40] the internet has returned. Peace resumes. Now don't you wish you had a reset button for your life?

You see, we get ourselves into such a pickle, don't we? Through our choices and decisions. When we play and act as if we are God we make a mess of our lives and everybody else around us and we long that we could just press reset and start all over again.

What is it that you want to restart? Maybe you're wanting to restart your marriage. Maybe you're wanting to restart how you've parented your children.

Maybe you want to restart with a relationship with somebody here this morning. Perhaps you want to restart your relationship with the Lord.

Maybe you're just thinking I wish I could just restart my whole life. Don't you wish you could just press that button and everything be put back again?

[9 : 06] Well, Genesis 12 is the restart that we all long for. It's the button that we all want to be able to press.

The story of the Bible so far from 1 to 11 well it began so well everything was good and beautiful. Adam and Eve the first man and woman placed in a garden of delight enjoying life and enjoying God they were blessed but they rebelled.

They sought to take God's place and live as if they were the boss and the fall out of this rebellion against God was God's cosmic curse which resulted in division between people conflict with creation and separation from the loving God who had made them and despite all of humanity's attempts to reconnect and solve everything and put everything back together again it just descended into chaos down and down in further carnage.

You see broken people like us can never fix the broken world we live in and broken people like us can't fix our own broken lives.

Well in Genesis 12 we have the restart that we all need and it begins with a man called Abraham.

[10 : 41] Later on he'll become called Abraham. Three things we want to learn from what we read this morning. Very simply new beginnings old problem God's grace.

grace. Okay? New beginnings old problem God's grace. So first the new beginnings.

New beginnings always start with God's word. That's why we look at his word every Sunday. Verse 1 The Lord had said to Abraham go.

Go. Remember back to Genesis 1 verse 1 In the beginning God and God said and it was so God spoke the beginning of the world into existence with his voice and now through his voice God speaks again to a man called Abraham.

He speaks a word that is going to bring about a new beginning a new creation. And at the heart of this word was a promise to bless.

[12 : 06] A word of blessing. Look at verse 2 God said to 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. blessing. Well who's he going to be a blessing to? Well look at the end of verse 3 and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

God spoke a promise to bless Abraham who in turn would be a blessing to all the nations and all peoples of the world. Now this promise of blessing is certainly not new.

it's an outworking of a promise that God had made right at the very beginning. Go back with me to chapter 3 Genesis chapter 3 there it records for us how man had rebelled and God's curse on the world God's curse on humanity and in the middle of the curse God makes a promise that is going to shape history and the entire world from this point onwards.

Chapter 3 verse 15 God is speaking to Satan the one who has brought disruption and disorder and God says I will put enmity between you Satan and the woman and between your offspring and hers he will crush your head and you will strike his heel a son is promised to bring blessing instead of curse look what he says to Satan at the end of verse 15 he will crush your head he that is a seed from the woman a son is going to come who will inflict a blow that will ultimately crush Satan's head so that the curse will be broken and so that blessing could flow to the world now back to chapter 12 so into the mess and the brokenness of humanity

[14:32] God once again intervenes and speaks a word of blessing to the son of a woman his name is Abraham a word that is going to bring about this new beginning that I will bless you and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you it's like God has hit the restart button Abraham is the means of bringing this blessing from God to the world it's as if that flashing light has turned green and everything is being reset so it's a word of blessing but it is also a word to obey a word to obey he may speak a word of blessing but Abraham must do what God says verse 1 again the Lord had said to Abraham go from your country your people and your father's household to the land

I will show you verse 4 so Abraham went as the Lord had told him verse 5 he took with his wife Sarai his nephew Lot all the possessions they had accumulated and all the people they had acquired in Haran and they set out for the land of Canaan and they arrived there Abraham it seems is a new kind of Adam a different one he does what he's told he's an obedient son God said and he did it it all seems rather simple doesn't it obey God and you will be blessed that's it that's all we need to do God reminded him of his commitment verse 7 the Lord appeared to Abram and said to your offspring I give you this land so Abram built an altar there to the

Lord who had appeared to him everything was looking good in fact in some ways isn't it very similar to the garden of Eden man and woman Abram and his wife Sarai living in God's place enjoying his blessing and living for God's glory it's like another green light has come on the reset button is doing its job now if we're to know this new beginning and this fresh start that we all long for it means taking God at his word doesn't it that we too like Abraham would obey what God says now admittedly as we read through scripture sometimes we find what God says hard and difficult sometimes we might think no I know a better way or

I'm not quite sure this is for me sometimes it doesn't make quite much sense but we must always obey what God says as the author to the Hebrews reminds us you can follow it on your screen 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 sometimes we don't quite understand God's ways but we always obey because as we obey we experience God's blessing in our life we experience the new beginning that we long for very simple isn't it just obey God's word but with this new beginning comes a very old problem

Abram it seems is very settled in his new home the reset button is beginning to take shape things are looking up all seems to be well until his faith comes under testing look at verse 10 a test of faith verse 10 now there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe now we might applaud Abram might we for taking his family to safety I mean they've got nothing to eat it seems to be the right thing to do but is it leaving the land that has been promised to you a land where you will be blessed well it just might be the best decision

[19:55] I mean who knows if he had stayed perhaps God would have provided for him why not we're not really quite sure the text doesn't give us all the answers but whatever the rights or wrongs of his move down to Egypt what happened next was going to be a real test of faith you see there was a problem it was a kind of good problem but it had consequences his wife was very beautiful and that meant a threat to his own life not only was it going to be a threat to his life but it meant a threat to all of God's promises remember what God had said back at verse 2 I'm going to make you Abraham into a great nation and I'm going to make your name great and I'm going to bless all the peoples of the world through you so if something happens to

Abraham the promise of blessing goes out the window if Abraham gets the chop the blessings are done so Abraham comes up with a plan doesn't he verse 12 when the Egyptians see you they will

say this is his wife then they will kill me but will let you live so here's the plan say I say you're my sister so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you what a clever idea it seems rather smart doesn't it given the circumstances because what he feared actually came to pass news got round to Pharaoh that there's a beautiful woman in town and Pharaoh just might like her and so Sarai was taken as

Pharaoh's wife and Abraham the pretend brother was spared in Abram's eyes the promise of blessing was kept alive because if anything had happened to him well the blessing would be gone what else was he to do but when was lying an okay thing to do since when has it been right to push your wife into the arms of another to save your own bacon no Abram wasn't smart at all this isn't faith this is fear this isn't undeniable love for his wife Sarai this was love for self perhaps what he should have done was to take a step back and lead his wife in prayer

Sarai let's pray dear God you are the one and only true God you've made a promise that all nations will be blessed through our family so as you keep your promises to us help us to be faithful and trust you whatever the threat amen now before we start joining in the jeers and the booing of Abram let me speak to the husbands and to the men including myself don't think we're much better isn't it all too common a trait that we're quite happy to sacrifice our wives for our own sake for our own comfort and our own pleasures to do our own thing how many of us as husbands live up to the calling husbands love your wives as

Christ loved the church and gave himself for her we are to love our wives and to lead them well because God calls us to obey it you see for Abram once there was a test of faith it exposed his heart of failure Abram's lack of faith and disobedience had terrible consequences look at verse 17 the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai yes Pharaoh was at fault one is enough for being a wife you don't need more but the account makes it very clear that

[25 : 11] Abram was not an innocent party verse 18 so Pharaoh summoned Abram what have you done to me he said why didn't you tell me she was your wife why did you say she is my sister so that I took her to be my wife why did you lead me astray why did you tell me all these lies now then here is your wife take her and go you see instead of bringing blessing to the nations Abram was bringing curses to the nations this is not reminiscent of an earlier account in Genesis where God has spoken to another man Adam I will give you all that you need everything that you need I'm going to bless you but you must not eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil trust me I know what

I'm doing I made the world I made you well Adam stood back didn't he he knew better he knew what was best for himself and his wife he didn't take responsibility he failed so it turns out that Adam the son of a woman the Adam was not so much good after all and neither was Abraham the son of the woman is just another failure instead of bringing blessing to the nations through his obedience he has brought curses to the nations through his disobedience it's like the green lights have gone red again everything is flashing and warning we need an altogether different kind of reset if we are going to enjoy and know a longer new beginning so new beginnings old problems and God's grace you see new beginnings have been a common theme through Genesis you might remember God started with Adam but it ended in a curse God started again with Seth but it ended with a flood upon the whole world and God started again with Noah and it ended with them building a tower and God scattering all the people now it starts with Abram and it ends with well not as we expect look at chapter 13 verse 1 so Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev with his wife and everything he had and Lot went with him Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and in gold God has continued to bless this failing falling man it seems

God is not about to give up surprisingly and shockingly God does what we don't expect him to do he responds in grace in fact what God does is he takes Abram back again to the beginning notice to where he travels verse 3 from the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel remember Bethel we read about it in verse 8 of chapter 12 to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar there Abram called on the name of the Lord you see it's as if God takes Abram by the scruff of the neck and drags him back to the beginning where it all started God is determined to show

Abram and us that this new beginning that we all long for can only happen as a result of God's grace at work in our life so three things I want us to see about God's grace at work in our life first God's gracious call by going back to the beginning we are reminded of God's gracious call you see

as Abram settles down in amongst his people and puts his tents up and begins his life again he's reminded that he is only there because of God's grace remember chapter 12 verse 1 the Lord had said to Abram go from your country your people and your father's household to the land I will show you it was given to him by God and while not in this text the author of

[30 : 31] Joshua reminds us of what Abram was like when he was first called he wasn't found reading his Bible in church or going to the local prayer meeting he was a pagan worshipper of other gods there was nothing special about Abram when he was called nothing in his family background nothing about his religious practice the only thing that was going for him was that he was a rebellious sinner who was neither looking for God nor wanting God God but God intervened by grace and changed his life forever and that's how God begins with you and I he doesn't wait for us to be interested he doesn't wait until we need until it's deserved he calls us when we are nobodies and nothing isn't that what we were reminded of by the apostle Paul Alex began with it this morning brothers and sisters think of what you were when you were called but when

God first intervened by his grace in your life not many of you were wise by human standards not many were influential not many of us were of noble birth but God chose who the foolish things of the world to shame the wise God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong so that none of us can boast we need to come back to the beginning we need to start with grace second by going back to the beginning we are also reminded of God's gracious promise this flicker is not helpful there we go gracious promise as he settles down with his family in familiar surrounds he is reminded once again of all of God's promises promise because every promise that God made was underwritten by God just have a look at verses 2 and 3 with me God says I'll make you into a great nation and what I will bless you I will make you great and you will be a blessing I will bless those who bless you I will I will don't ever underestimate God's promise don't think that God is somehow waiting in frustration twiddling his thumbs waiting for us to buck up and become the kind of people he wants us to be no what God promises to do in us he will accomplish and he will fulfill nothing and no one can hinder or crush God's promises not even our own sin and we need to learn that lesson sometimes our faith is tested but only so that we can see that it depends on God's grace to me it's never dependent on my strength or my faithfulness or how good I am but God making promises that he always keeps and never fails to fulfill we need to come back to the beginning we need to start with grace third by going back to the beginning we're also reminded of God's gracious sacrifice look at verse 4 he returns where his tents had been earlier and verse 4 where he had first built an altar and there Abram called on the name of the Lord you see this altar that he made might have been just a few stones piled upon each other but its significance was the foundation for his life you see altars was where sacrifice took place it was where Abram came and did business with God where he would come and confess his sin where he would sacrifice an animal in that solemn act he recognised that something someone had to die in his place for Abram it was an act of faith that in time God would provide the perfect sacrifice and as we read through the pages so we come to that perfect obedient son Jesus Christ and his death for us on the cross and there dying on the cross we find one who is only able to deal with all of our guilt and shame of the past all our secrets that we keep dragging along with us all our failings and all our falling you see grace is what we all need and the only way to experience it is to go back to the beginning back to the cross back to

[36 : 22] Jesus and there our sins are forgiven and our lives are made completely new and there we hear God take us afresh as his people and he gives us the call and he says to us to go go into all the world and make disciples of all nations go and be a blessing to all peoples and tell them about the wonderful grace of God in Christ grace is the reset button we all need this is where we begin this is where we start and it's available to us today through Christ as it overflows to us what do you want to restart about your life it starts with grace let's pray

Lord God thank you thank you for your patience thank you for your kindness thank you that you do not treat us as our sins deserve thank you that you are faithful forever thank you for the grace that has been shown to us poured out to us through your son Jesus Christ thank you that in you all our past is dealt with and we are given a new way to live so help us as we now go into our community as we go to people who do not know of the blessings that you have that we would share of your grace that they would know that your mercy reaches even then help us

Lord we pray in Jesus name Amen we're going to sing together a song that reminds us of God's grace to us who has called us who's changed us and now sends us to go as his people to bring his

blessing I could be entsprechend .
able by to bring you to bring