

# The Blessings of The Seed

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[ 0 : 00 ] Advent, Christians prepare for the coming of the Messiah. But Advent is tricky for two reasons. The first reason is this, he's already come.

We've missed his arrival by about 2,000 years. FYI, his name is Jesus, or Emmanuel. He arrived as a baby in a manger with shepherds and angels and wise men and gold, frankincense, myrrh, all that sort of business.

You see, Advent is kind of logically redundant because it asks us to prepare for a Messiah who's already been and gone, died, resurrected, and is in heaven today.

And so for Christians in 2021, Advent should be more about preparing for his second coming than it is about an event that happened the first Christmas.

The other reason Advent is tricky is your fault. And I don't mean that in a general, I mean literally you in the room. It's your fault because you know your Bible so well, Matthew's gospel, Luke's gospel, that Andrew and I have to come up with new ways to approach Christmas that are surprising and clever.

[ 1 : 12 ] So this is your fault. We're going to look at the promises of Abram, but I'm confident we won't be crowbarring Christmas into the Old Testament because Galatians tells us that this story was the gospel announced in advance to Abram.

You see, many Christians think the gospel begins at Christmas when angels announce it to shepherds, but actually it begins in Genesis 12 when God announces promises to Abram.

And so if you think mince pies and decorations in October is a bit much, spare a thought for poor old Abram, who started preparing for a Messiah 1,900 years before the first Christmas Day.

Our story, God makes unbelievable promises to Abram, and the question for us will be, can we trust God to fulfill his word?

It's got a double meaning, that question. There are two sides to the coin. On one hand, can we trust God to do as he says? Is he willing and able to keep his word?

[ 2 : 20 ] But on the other hand, will we trust God to do as he says? Will we believe him so much that we align our lives around these ancient promises?

They're two sides of the same trust coin. Can we trust God to keep his promises? It's a double question, both the same, two points on your handout.

And we'll see how Christmas surprisingly and cleverly fits into both. And so let's look at Genesis 12 verse 1, which is at the top of your handout.

Here are amazing promises, promises, but they seem very remote to us.

Even if we have heard of Abraham, we certainly don't recognize Abram. Promises to bless him, make his name great. What do I care about that?

[ 3 : 34 ] Why should we get excited about a gospel that started way back then? And the answer is verse 3. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

See, if you are part of all peoples on earth, which you are, then you are directly affected and included by this gospel, these promises way back then.

A promised land, a great nation, blessings for the world. In this church, we call them LOB, L-O-B, land, offspring, blessings. But we are Gentiles, aren't we?

We're not Jews. And so it's important to be clear about what God is promising for us and what he isn't. You see, plenty of churches will promise you all of God's blessings now.

But God doesn't promise us successful careers and lifelong relationships and healthy bodies. He doesn't promise us a season of double portions as I was promised when I went to Planet Shaker's church in the city.

[ 4 : 40 ] These things sound more like my promises and my plans rather than God's. In Genesis 12, I count three promises. So firstly, a land, verse 7.

To your offspring or your seed, I will give this land. Later on, God calls it the land of milk and honey, which, as I've said before, is another way of saying a land overflowing with caramel because milk and honey is caramel.

Condensed milk and sugar, honey and milk, that's caramel. See, when God goes to McDonald's, he doesn't order an Oreo McFlurry. He orders the caramel sundae.

There you go. This week, I was picturing God in the queue at McDonald's and I thought, this is the most ridiculous thing I'm ever going to say. Anyway, there you go. God's favourite flavour of ice cream is caramel, not anything else.

Land. Second promise, numerous offspring. Verse 2. I will make you into a great nation. Later on, actually, God says, there will be more numerous than the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

[ 5 : 47 ] In fact, so many offspring, God has to change Abram's name to Abraham, father of many nations. That's the second one. Third one, the blessings.

Verse 3. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Unfortunately, all of Melbourne can't be here this morning because they're all out there trying to achieve for themselves a world of blessings.

But Genesis says that ultimate life, ultimate happiness, it's tied to a promised land, great nation, and blessings from God.

His promises to Abram are unbelievably good, but they are unbelievable. You see, before we get much further, there are already obstacles in the way.

I wonder if you spotted them. So the land, which turns out to be Canaan, that sounds great. The only trouble is, end of verse 6, surprise, surprise, Canaan, it's full of Canaanites.

[ 6 : 52 ] And I guess that's like promising a Jew today, vacant possession of the West Bank in Gaza. How is God going to achieve that promise? The many offspring, that seems pretty good.

The only trouble is the end of verse 4, because Abram is 75 years old. So I'm around 45 years old, and sometimes when our son Samuel is being particularly cute, Rachel and I talk about going around again and having a fourth baby.

I'm sure you've done the same. But then we remember that Samuel wakes up at 5.30 every morning, and that by dinner time, Rachel and I can barely keep our eyes awake. And we remember how old we feel.

And I can tell you here, at 45, we are done. If anything happens here, it'll be an immaculate conception. We are done. No more kids for the Hendersons.

I'm 45. Abram is 75. Anyone 75 in the room or older? Fancy having a baby at your age? Good luck to you, I say.

[ 8 : 02 ] We'll pray for you. What's more, more sadly, Abram's wife, Sarai, she's 65. She's barren. She can't have any kids.

Sad stuff. How is God going to get one baby, let alone a whole nation, out of these two pensioners? Land, offspring, blessings.

Blessing sounds great. Blessing to the nations. The only trouble is, Abram's world is under the curse of Adam. The only thing that unites people in Abram's time is that everyone dies.

Unbelievably good promises, but at this stage, they are unbelievable. See, here are three promises to hang God's faithfulness on.

Can we trust him to fulfill his word? And part of the answer is repeated throughout our passage because God keeps saying, I will show, I will make, I will give, you will be blessed.

[ 9 : 04 ] See, God is the one doing all the doing. You see, the other patriarchs, Adam and Noah, they were told to be fruitful and multiply. It was up to them. But here for Abram, God says, I will, I will, I will, I will do all the doing.

And we're not really told much about Abram. He just sort of appears as a random guy out of nowhere in the Bible. And I think that is deliberate because I think the author is saying, if these amazing promises are to be achieved, God will have to be the one to do it, not this random guy. Who we know nothing about. I realize here in Australia that we believe in being self-made, self-reliant, individual achievers and all that.

But promises to bless us for ultimate life for us, I'm actually kind of relieved that they're not in these hands and in your hands.

It's actually a relief that God is the one who will do all the doing. The other reason we trust God to achieve is in verse seven.

[10:15] The Lord appeared to Abram and said, to your offspring, I will give this land. This is the verse that's quoted by Paul in Galatians chapter three.

It's at the bottom of your sheet. You see, the Galatians were desperately trying to get into Abram's family because after all, to your offspring, I will give the land.

The only trouble is the Galatians were mainly Gentiles like us. And so to break their way into Jewish heritage, they started following Jewish laws, such as circumcision.

After all, what did all the sons of Abraham have? Circumcision. And Paul corrects them in verse 16 at the bottom. He says, the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

Scripture does not say and to seeds with an S, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person. You see, God only ever meant one offspring of Abraham, one seed, one person who is the Christ.

[11:24] The plan is that one day Abraham's greatest grandson will show up and initiate and originate and bring all of his blessings through into the world.

And if you want any part of Abraham's blessings, put your trust in Jesus. And on that first Christmas day, God delivers a baby who brings about his greatest grandfather's unbelievable promises.

You see, before Christmas is anything, it's a demonstration that God can be trusted. It's a real event in history to hang his faithfulness on.

When he grows up, Jesus' death and resurrection will mend the relationship between a cursed world and the God of blessings. He will open the way to a promised land, a new creation even.

And he will extend the invitation to anyone who puts their trust in him. And so all that's left for us is the other side of the coin.

[12:30] Can we trust God to do as he says? Are we willing and able to put our trust in him? And for us, Abram is the man to watch.

The Bible calls him the man of faith, doesn't it? In this story, God essentially says, go, and Abram went. But notice Abram's level of trust, verse 1.

Go from your country, your people, your father's household, to the land I will show you. In other words, immigrate from your homeland to be a foreigner. And I look around the room and I see a few people I know who have immigrated to Australia.

Lots of people have done verse 1. But most of you probably knew something of what Australian life was like. Most of you probably knew what you were getting yourself into. Most of you might have had a family member paving the way, giving you a place to live when you arrived.

But with Abram, he just takes God's word for it. Act now based on my word for a future you can't fully see.

[13:38] And there's lots of detail showing Abram's level of faith. Verse 4, Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. For anyone 75 and over, okay, you don't want a baby, how would you fancy moving country at 75?

You see, 75 years old is when you're supposed to settle down and relax and retire. Not up and move, packing things in boxes and heading to be a foreigner at your age.

Most people, don't they, they move from a poor country to a prosperous country. They move for good opportunities. But notice Abram goes the opposite direction.

In verse 5, he risks, he takes his family, all his possessions, everything they accumulated in Haran. And he sets out to be a foreigner in the land of Canaan.

Verse 6, he travels right through the land, right to a land that's full of Canaanites. That's a sign of danger and warning. It's not a safe journey.

[14:45] He's a foreigner. Verse 8, the place where Abram finally pitches his tent is so small it doesn't even have a name. You know when country towns in Australia are so small, you can't, the only way to describe them is by what they're near.

like Muckleford in Victoria. Anyone know Muckleford in Victoria? Good. At the 745, someone knew where it was and I said, put your hand down. You're ruining my illustration.

Muckleford in Victoria is south of Bendigo and north of Ballarat. It's the only way to find it by describing what it's near. It's so small. Here, Abram, he pitches his tent with Bethel on the west and

Ai or Ai on the east.

See, he leaves Haran, a place that's been good to him, a homeland where he prospered and heads to a patch of dirt at his age. Every act of faith has Abram moving the opposite direction to what the world expects or probably what he wanted to do in his old age.

You see, the example of Abram is a man who's not too set in his ways to realign his whole life around God's word.

[16:07] And at that first Christmas, I wonder if you realize that Jesus makes a remarkably similar journey. You see, Jesus was also safely in his father's household, in his homeland as it were.

He was prominent and prosperous and God called him to leave, leave it all behind and be a foreigner so to speak. God even sent him to the same tiny town with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

It's called Bethlehem. Same town. You see, the first Christmas follows Abraham's journey of faith. They're remarkably similar. Act now based on God's word for a future you can't fully see.

And if Abraham's the example of faith, will we trust God the way he did? You see, I wonder if part of the problem is that God operates to a different timetable.

You see, his promises involve babies and moving country when Abraham is 75 not 25. It's 1900 years before the Christ eventually turns up.

[17:24] It's opposite in time to what anyone expects. What's more, he still hasn't answered any of my prayers one year, two years after COVID.

We are still not fully back to normal as we were back two years ago. After five years, some of my family members still show no interest in Jesus.

After ten years, my marriage is still struggling with some of the same issues. After 45 years, I'm still battling some of the same sins. It's clear that God's timing is opposite to mine.

It would be easier to trust him if he operated to my timetable and not his. I wonder if part of the other problem with trusting God is that he works to his own plans and not mine.

You see, our plans don't involve the election of certain politicians left or right. Our plans don't involve an endless Greek alphabet of coronavirus strains or constant visits to the hospital or our kids struggling the way some of them do or the Anglican diocese being such a mess or our finances being only adequate or our health catching us up or old age certainly catching us up the way it has.

[18:50] It would be easier to trust God if his plans were identical to our own but he seems to operate according to his own agenda.

Abram is a hero of the faith because he trusts in God's timing he trusts in God's plans even though they were totally going in an opposite direction to what the world expected or what he probably wanted in his life he acts now are based on God's word for a future he can't fully see that's faith isn't it and it's staggering because compared to us Abram barely knew anything about Jesus he knew barely anything about God but it didn't stop him aligning his life around these ancient promises clearly for Abram it was never too early to start getting ready for Christmas the coming of a king and as the Bible goes on God will add to Abram's promises more and more so that by the time we get to Moses it includes a law and provisions for relationship by the time

David arrives God will add a king and a house forever by the time Jesus arrive the promises will include forgiveness of sins and the gift of the spirit and even though we're on the other side of history to old man Abraham we know so much more about God's promises and the Bible the pattern of faith remains the same leave everything in the world behind for a future you can't fully see based on my character your trust in my word in fact Jesus says something very similar he says if anyone would come after me let him deny himself take up his cross and follow me and stepping out in faith like Abraham will involve putting God's agenda his timing his plans God's agenda above our own it will mean reminding yourself that God is in control

God is in charge that his ways are best even when the world seems to have gone mad it will mean moving the opposite direction financially as you perhaps decide to support five mission partners ten mission partners with your Christmas bonus with your holiday money and so you go without stepping out in faith might mean going in an opposite direction socially as you end a relationship that has been at the end of the day nothing but toxic to your walk with God stepping out in faith means putting all your hopes in a new creation a new promised land rather than this one it involves anything that elevates God's agenda above our own and don't worry if you miss out on any blessings the people of faith are the children of Abraham they are the ones who inherit his blessings you won't miss out on anything at the end of the day we've seen so much of

God in action in the Bible in our lives so much that says he can be trusted that his ways are good even if at times we can't always understand them like Abram we're never too old to realign our lives around God's calling his promises and of course his word in that sense it's never too early to get ready for the coming or the advent of a Messiah let's pray that we be like Abram father God we thank you that you are the one who can be trusted that you always keep your word that even though promises seem unbelievable you find a way to fulfill them father please would we trust you the way Abram did help us to trust you even if that means going in an opposite direction financially or socially please father would we trust in your timing your plans ahead of our own help us to trust that your ways are good even when we can't see it and father thank you that we've got a whole [ 23 : 34 ] Bible a whole lifetime a testimony of promises kept to us and so please father help us to be like Abraham help us align our lives around your promises we ask we ask amen and who happen to about increase to coraz fear to ■ Johan