

“The Promise” (Genesis: In The Beginning – Pt. 4)
(Genesis 12:1-5)

- **The Manmade Mountain**

- Who’s enjoying this journey through Genesis? *Have we learned so much or what?* Every time I come back to this book, I love it more and more, because the more you discover, the more you see the whole Bible is connected to these “*In the Beginning*” stories. A few weeks ago, I gave you 2 things to hold onto as you read Genesis, remember: 1st, **This story is our story**, and 2nd, **It’s all connected**. That’s important again today, because now we begin another *foundational story* that continues through *the rest of Genesis*, and really, *the rest of the Bible*. It all starts with *God’s Promise* to a guy named “*Father Abraham...*” (**Pray**)
- Before anything else, we need to look at the backdrop of Abraham’s story, because there’s a key aspect that connects the first part of Genesis, Ch. 1-11, to the second part, 12-50. It’s called *the tower of Babel*. The word “tower” can be misleading: it’s not like the “Eifel Tower” or “Twin Towers,” it’s more like a *manmade mountain*, sort of like the pyramids.
 - You see, in many ancient cultures, *mountains* were viewed as sacred spaces: if you looked at the horizon, the place the land came closest to touching the heavens was a *mountaintop*. So, what would you do if you lived in a totally flat plain, like *Babylonia* in Gen. 11? *You built your own mountain*. If you’ve ever heard the word “Ziggurat,” that’s what this is, like a *mountain temple*. Believe it or not, the Tower of Babel would’ve looked a lot like what *Daniel and his friends* saw, much later, as exiles in this same land of *Babylon*. (**Pic 1**) In that time, King Nebuchadnezzar built a massive Ziggurat temple. It was literally a mountain made of bricks, with a stair case all the way to the top, where leaders would ascend to make sacrifices.
 - This is what’s happening in Gen. 11: *Babel* is a classic case of *humans building their way to God*, trying to *force God to come down to their level*, so they can use *God for their own agenda*.
 - But do you know what the *true story* about God says? It says that before humans were building *their own counterfeit mountains for their counterfeit gods*, the *true*

God made us in His image and made a way for us to meet with Him in a garden on a mountain. You heard that right: Eden was on a mountain. Genesis implies it was a high place, and Ezekiel 28 calls Eden the mountain of God. Eden is God's original Mountain Temple.

- God gave humans His blessing and called them to multiply and spread His Kingdom through the earth. And He gave them a test on that Mountain: the choice between *total trust and surrender to God*, or *relying on themselves and seeking their own glory*. We know the choice they made. And by Gen. 11, you see Babylon—sitting between 2 of the rivers that flowed out of Eden—and their rationale sounds a lot like Adam and Eve: ***“Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves...” (Gen. 11:4)*** We can't get back to Eden, so let's build it ourselves, let's make our names great. We know how that story ends. Guess what? Abraham's story starts here in Gen. 11: he came from this same region, *Abraham lived in the shadow of the Tower of Babel.*

- **The Promise and The Journey**

- Watch what God does in this land: He chooses a guy named “Abram.” It *exalted father*—ironically, he and his wife are 75 and 65, and they have *no kids*. This is where we get the promise that shapes the rest of Genesis, and the rest of the Bible:
- ***The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. 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.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him...***

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. (12:1-4)

- Abraham only has 14 chapters, but he's one of the most important figures in the Bible, because he's the starting point of God's covenant family and God's redemption plan. His story is the ultimate example for the life of faith. When you

look at his story, you'll find a lot of the same elements as you find in your own faith story: **God's promise comes with a calling and a journey. But that journey also comes with lots of waiting and lots of testing. And through it all, God brings blessing.**

- Think about God's promise: He's going to make this childless couple into a great nation. He's going to bless them (like Adam and Eve, and Noah). And He's going to protect them. Not only are they going to be blessed, *but they will be a blessing*—all families, all nations of the earth *will be blessed through them*. The people of Babylon said, *"Let's make our name great,"* but God says to Abraham, *"I will make your name great!"*
- But in order to walk into the promise, they will have to take *a journey*—and it's going to take *lots of trust*: in your old age, to leave behind everything you know, your homeland, your family, your "retirement plan," your security. The promise is *huge*, but the stakes are huge too. Amazingly, Abraham obeys.
- It's a lot like Jesus calling His disciples: He shows up in their familiar—their towns, families, jobs—and He says, *Follow Me*—which means, leave behind everything you know and step into a whole new life with me—*trust me*. And they do! It's the same when Jesus calls you and I: at some point, we have to decide that we will lay everything down, and let him redefine our lives.
- Now, get this: when Adam and Eve left the Garden, it says *they journeyed East, out of Eden*. When Abraham journeyed out of his land to Canaan, do you know what direction they went? *West! Back toward Eden*, that's the direction to *the Promised Land*, that's the direction of *the life of faith*.
- Hebrews highlights this contrast between Babylon and Eden: **"By faith Abraham made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country...For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."** (Heb. 11:9-10) This is the choice: which city will you live for? God's Kingdom, or the world? Babylon, or Eden?
- **The Waiting and The Testing**
 - But here's the challenge: even though this calling comes with *lots of blessing*, it also comes with lots of *waiting* and lots of *testing*. Because the waiting and the testing

help forge us into the kind of people God can partner with to bring about His purpose. That's what God's after, people He can trust to walk with Him and surrender to His will. And even though Abraham and Sarah are genuine *heroes* of faith, *they fail so often!*

- They face *many obstacles* on the journey: times of famine, battles from surrounding leaders, conflicts in their family, the uncertainty of how God will actually make good on His promise. And through it all, perhaps the biggest: *waiting on God's timing*. Do you know how long they waited from the time God called them to the time their miracle child was born? *25 years!*
- Time and again, in the fear of the unknown, they resorted to taking matters in their own hands, trying to bring about the blessing themselves. *And it just made everything worse!* Do we ever do that? *Force God's blessing, make it our own way?*
- Still, God brings good even through their failures, and He keeps renewing His promise. Because even when we're fearful and faithless, *God is faithful and faultless*. The biggest test of all comes late in the story, after Isaac. Where? *On a mountain*.
- **The Mountain of the Lord**
 - ***Some time later, God tested Abraham...God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."* (Gen. 22:1-2)** We know that God totally opposed human sacrifice.
 - We know He had no intention of actually doing it. We know it was a test. We even see clues that Abraham knew it was a test. But he still had to face the brutal fact of laying *everything on the altar*—the source of all his hopes, his dreams, his future, of God's plan. *Abraham had to put it all back in God's hands*. God of course, didn't make Abraham follow-through, but He did ask for *complete surrender*. A ram was provided as substitute, and they worshiped God *as living sacrifices* on the Mountain.
 - This is one of the most important stories in the Bible, and it's echoed all over the N.T.! Paul had it in mind when he wrote: ***"He who did not spare his own Son,***

but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32) John had it in mind when he wrote: ***“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” (1 Jn. 4:9)*** And even Jesus had in mind when He said: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16)***

- Everything comes full circle in God’s story, because *this story is our story*, and *it’s all connected*. God placed Eden *on a Mt.* And God tested Abraham *on a Mt.* And God gave the Law to Moses *on a Mt.* Then, *Jesus* was tested *on a Mt.* And *Jesus* gave His greatest teachings *on a Mt.* And *Jesus* gave up His life as a sacrifice on a tree *on a Mt.* And finally, *Jesus* gave His disciples the Great Commission *on a Mt.* His followers are sent out, redeemed by His sacrifice, to bring God’s blessing and salvation *to all nations*. This is why you and I are here, standing in the blessing Adam and Eve lost, that Jesus bought back for us.
- We’re here now, because of God’s Promise *to a flawed, yet faithful couple named Abraham and Sarah*. They are living proof that this life of faith isn’t just for exceptional people: it’s for ordinary, messed-up people, who are willing to surrender their lives to God.
- If you do, He will take your imperfect life and He will make up the difference with His grace. He will perfect your story *through the journey*, all it’s ups and downs, all the waiting and testing. And as we trust Him and surrender to Him, He will bring you in the fullness of time *back to the beginning*, back to Eden, to be with Him. *All because God first loved us, and no matter what we do, He will not give up on His plan.*
- It’s so easy to make the same mistakes as Abraham and Sarah: to grow impatient and decide we’ve got it figured out on our own. ***What is your mountain of testing? Will you give Him your total trust today? Will you surrender your life completely to Him? Instead of trying to make your own way, would you lay it all on the altar to receive all He has for you?*** This is the way of blessing, this is the way back to Eden. And this story is our story. If we follow Jesus, He’ll take us there. *Let’s pray.*