

# Topic

God's faithfulness

# Theme

God is faithful and worthy of our faithful­ ness to Him.

# Desired Learner Response

The learner will appre­ ciate God's faithfulness and will seek to be faith ­ ful to God.

### Materials

* Resources 1 and 7
* Notecards

God's Unconditional

Promises

# Scripture Focus

Genesis 11:31- 13:2

# Summary

After dealing with humanity in largely a universal manner (Gen. 1-11), God selected one man to whom He would uniquely relate. That man was Abram. God communicated unconditional promises to give land, offspring, and blessni gs to Abram. God then demonstrated His faithfulness by beginning to accomplish those promises in Abram's life. God's promise-keeping work hap­ pened both when Abramresponded faithfully to God and when he responded unfaithfully.

### Outline

1. **God's Faithful Selection(11:31- 12:3)**
	1. Abram 's family history (11:31, 32)
	2. God selects Abram (12:1-3)
2. **God Demonstrates Faithfulness(12:4- 20)**
	1. God's generous faithfulness (12:4-9)
	2. God's steadfastfaithfulness (12:10 - 20)

**Memory Verses** *"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee,*

*and multiplying I will multiply thee"*

*(Hebrews 6:13,14).*

**43**

**GETTING STARTED**

**Define *Faithful***

Organize learners in groups of no more than five people. Tell the groups they will have three minutes to develop a one-sentence definition of the word *faithful.* If possible, display a timer on a projection screen; it will help everyone stay on task. (Free downloadable timer applications are available online.) Have each group share its definition.

**ASK:** What are some synonyms for faithful ? *Loyal,trustworthy, true,reliable, steadfast, devoted, staunch, etc.*

**ASK:** How do we know if someone is faithful? *We observe his behaviorover ti me. We witness the completion of promised actions.*

**ASK:** Is it easier to ob serve someone'sfaithfulness w hen you are considering his actions toward people in generalor to ward one spe cific person? Why?

This lesson covers God's selection of and relationship with Abram. God com- municated unconditional promises to Abram. God then demonstrated His faithful­ ness by beginning to accomplish those promises in Abram's life.

**The Most Faithful**

God is perfectly faithful and we are called to respond faithfully to Him. Give each of your students a notecard. Instruct them to write the name of a Biblical character, excluding Jesus, who they think was the most faithful to God. Once ev­ eryone has written the name of the Bible character, instruct the students to stand and find other learners who wrote the same name on their card. Learners should form and stay in groups representing their shared answer. Once groups are formed (individuals selecting a unique name can stay by themselves), instruct the groups to briefly discuss why they made their selection. Ask a member of the group to report a summary.

**ASK:** How do we know if someone is faithful ? *We observehis behavior over time. We witness the completion of promised actions.*

**ASK:** In your opinion, what is the key to being faithful? *Depending upon God through prayer. Being committed.*

**ASK:** How does human faithfulness d iffer fro m God's faithfu lness? *God's faith­ fulness is perfectlyconstant; human faithfulness wa vers.*

This lesson covers God's selection of and relationship with Abram. God com­ municated unconditional promises to Abram. God then demonstrated His faithful­ ness by beginning to accomplish those promises in Abram's life.

**SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES**

1. **God's Faithful Selection (11:31-12:3)**
	1. **Abram's family history (11:31, 32)**

Abram, later renamed Abraham, began a move at the prompting of his father, Terah, from one side to the other of what we now call the Fertile Crescent. These verses and the preceding ones are sparse on details. Many questions arise from the text that are not answered, such as How did Abram's brother Haran die (cf. Gen.

11:28)? Was Abram or Terah the primary caregiver for Lot? Why did they decide to move from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan? These verses provide the family back­ ground for the main human protagonist, Abram, in the new section of the book of Genesis that starts with chapter 12.

**READ:** Genesis 11:31, 32. **ASK:** Are there any family details shared in these verses that hig hlight th is fam ily as exemplars of faith or godliness? (03) *No, the details are rather plain and unassuming.*

Some historic and modern commentators view the family's move away from Ur as a turn away from idolatry (cf. Josh. 24:2).

However, this is conjec­ ture from silence; it is better to leave the ques­ tion unanswered.

**ASK:** According to these verses, did Abram's fam ily experience any special circumstances that would diffe rent iate them from others? (04) *No.*

God's interest in choosing Abram had less to do with Abram than it did with God Himself. God's selection was based on faithfully continu ing His plan, not on how great a guy Abram was. In fact, selecting an unassuming guy like Abram draws our focus to God's faithfulness even more.

* 1. **God selects Abram (12:1-3)**

Genesis introduces God's speech to Abram with the past perfect *had said.*

This indicates that God had previously communicated these words to Abram. This wording communicates a slow development in Abram's initial belief, making the following words all the more surprising.

**READ:** Acts 7:1-4. **ASK:** According to Stephen, when did Abram first hear from God? (OS) *While Abram was in Mesopotamia in Ur.*

**ASK:** What does Abram'sde lay in obedience by settling in Haran commu­ nicate about Abram's level of faith? (06) *Abram was not fully obeying God's*

*d irection.His faith was not strong.*

Desp iteAbram's reluctance to fully obey God, God st ill selected Abram to be the one through whom God would continue His plan and reveal Himself to the world. God's choiceof Abram was not based upon Abram's special ability to obey God. In fact, he seems to havebeen reluctant to obey. God's choice of Abram was not based on a legacyof generational faith in the true God. At best his family members were recent converts from idolatry. God's choice was based on His gra­ cious and loving character. God's faithfulness to already communicated promises,

such as the promise of a Satan defeater (Gen. 3:15), would be advanced through the choice of a sinner, Abram.

God's plan transitioned to one man when He commanded Abram to leave his family and go to a land that God would show him. In the first eleven chapters of Genesis, God's interactions with humanity are largely universal in scope. God's selection of Abram began a new manner of God interacting with humanity. God selected one person, and ultimately his descendants, through whom God would continue His plan and reveal His character.

**READ:** Genesis 12:1- 3. **ASK:** What did God promise he would do for Abram? (Q7) *God promised to make Abram* a *great nation, to bless Abram, to make Abram's name great, to bless those wh o blessAbram,to curse those who dishonor Abram, and to bless all the families of earth in Abram.*

**RESOURCE:** Disp lay resource 7 to summ arize God's covenant with Abram.

**God's Covenant , with**

**Abraham** /•

**Genesls u :1- 3**

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**Blessing** ■***;:.i::;:::;i::::.,***

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**ASK:** What makes a nation great? (Q8) *Wealth,* a *growing population, good laws, freedom, power.*

God made several promises to Abram. The first promise was to make Abram into a great nation. Given the barren condition of Abram's (11:30) and Abram's old age of seventy-five (12:4), this is a truly remarkable promise. It indicates both

that God would make Abram into a great nation numerically and a nation of great significance. The Bible later reveals this nation is the nation of Israel.

The second promise was to bless Abram. The word *bless* appears five times in Genesis 1- 11. In contrast the word appears five times in Genesis 12:1- 3. God's blessingof Abram and his family is a major component of God's unique dealings with this family. God promising to bless Abram is a commitment to prosperity, family growth, success, and physical protection. Some of these aspects are made clearer in the promises that followed.

The third promise was to make Abram's name great. This did not mean Abram would simplybe famous, although that did happen. This promise meant Abram's name would be highly regarded. He would be a man with good character. God's purpose for this promise was for Abram to be a blessing to others. He became a blessing because of what God did through him. This promise is less about how great Abram became and more about God's greatness seen through Abram.

The fourth promise had a positive and a negativeside.God promised to bless those who bless Abram and curse the one who curses or dishonors Abram. Abram's unique status of being graciously chosen by God made Abram a spe­ cial conduit for God's activity in the world. Treating Abram well was analogous to treatingGod well, and people therefore received God's blessing. Conversely, mistreatment of Abram reflected a mistreatment of God, resulting in appropriate consequences.

**ASK:** God used the plural when talking about blessingand the singu lar when talking about cursing (Gen. 12:3).What might this communicate ab out God? (Q9) *The wor dingof blessing "those who bless" compared with cursing "him*

*who curses" is* a *subtle communication of God's wil l to extend grace rather than punishment. He wan ts to bless more than He wants to curse.*

The final promise communicated the universal implications of God's choice of Abram. Through this one man and his progeny, all the families of the earth would be blessed. God promised to deliver humanity from Satan through a de­ scendant of Eve (Gen. 3:15); that descendant, Christ Jesus, eventually came from this specific family.

God's selection of just one man focused the revelation of God's character and

continued His plan for the redemption of mank ind. God's characteristics became clearer through His dealings with Israel than they would have been if He had con­ tinued to deal primarily with humanity in general. God selecting Abram and then providentially and supernaturally working in and for him reveals God's ownership of everything and His ability to do as He pleases . So Abram became the pivotal person in God's dealings with humanity.

1. **God Demonstrates Faithfulness (12:4-20)**
	1. **God's generous faithfulness (12:4-9)**

God immediately demonstrated His faithfulness to Abram by bringing him into the land He had promised to him while Abram was in Ur (Gen. 12:1). Despite the passage of many years and Abram's initial failure to obey, God was faithful to His word. Abram found out specifically from God what was implicit in verse 1:

God was not only taking Abram *to* a land , but He was also *giving* Abram the land. God as Creator has the right to do whatever He wants with His creation. God gave the land to Abram to serve as a platform from which He would demonstrate His character through Abram's descendants for generations.

**READ:** Genesis 12 :4- 9. **ASK:** What *impossibilities* w ou ld God have to over­ come by giving Canaan to Abram's descendant s? (Ql O) *God would somehow have to kick the Canaanites out and give Abram* a *son in his old age.*

After Abram arrived in the land, he reciprocated God's faithfulness with faithful ness of his own. The Lord appeared to him near Shechem and reiterated His promises concerning the land. Abram responded by building an altar to the Lord (12:7). Abram then moved through the central portion of the land, building another altar between Bethel and Ai (12:8). He went on to go through the southe rn

The acronym LOB is a helpful way to remember the key aspects of God's unconditional promises communicated to Abram in Genesis 12 : *L* is for *Land,* 0 is for *Offspring,* and *B* is for *Blessing.*

*Negeb (Negev)* means "south" in Hebrew. Abram journe yed within the land from north to south.

region (129: ). No doubt he was interested in seeing both what the land was like

and who lived there.

* 1. **God's steadfast faithfulness (12:10-20)**

God's providential protection of Abram despite Abram's own poor decisions high- lights God's consistently faithful character. God keeps His promises no matter what.

**READ:** Genesis 12:10. **ASK:** What do you suppose Abram thought of the land once the famine arrived? (Ql 1) *Perhaps he questioned if it had any true value, or perhaps he wondered if there might be a better place to inherit.*

**ASK:** What might a person in his situation be tempted to conclude about God's faithfulness? (Ql 2) *That God cannot be faithful because His abilities are limited: Hegave the land but couldn't keep it fruitful.*

Abram's ruse of presenting Sarai as his sister rather than his wife is part of a trio of similar yet distinct stories involving Abram and eventually his son (cf. Gen . 20:1-18; 26:1, 7- 17).

The language of Sarai being taken into Pharaoh's house does not necessitate sexual

relations

(cf. Gen. 34:2; 38:2).

The promises God gave to Abram were a tremendous blessing. But the promises were valuable only because *God* made the promises. Abram's rela­ tionship with God made the promises meaningful. When the famine came, the land didn't look like such a great place to live. But knowing the Lord was near, that He had graciously made Abram unconditional promises, and that He was in control of His creation should have given Abram contentment and peace.

Instead, he left the land for the abundance in Egypt. Apparently he did so of his own volition.

Nearing Egypt and being fearful for his own safety on account of his beautiful wife, Abram devised a plan to present Sarai as his sister rather than his wife. This ruse was based upon a half-truth. Sarai was in fact the daughter of Abram's father but by a different mother (cf. 20:12).

Just as Abram had thought, the Egyptians found Sarai beautiful. Abram's planned worked for a time. Members of Pharaoh's court, however, soon took notice; they took Sarai into Pharaoh's house. Although the text does not provide the details of Abram's thoughts upon these events, it is likely that Abram was not anticipating this level of consequences to his actions.

**BIBLE STUDY:** Organize your learners into pairs. Instruct the pairs to read Genesis 12:10-20 and to note the various ways God protected and blessed Abram and Sarai. (Ql 3) *He provided for their needs despite their departure from the land. He protected Sarai from harm. He caused Pharaoh to give Abram material goods and send him away unharmed.*

**ASK:** When have you been surprised by the intensity of the consequences from your faithless actions? (Ql 4)

**ASK:** How did God demonstrate His faithfulness toward you despite your poor decisions? (Ql 5)

Pharaoh gave lavish gifts to Abra m. Perhaps he intended them as bridal gifts for what he viewed as a betrothal. The gifts included sheep for their wool and mea t, donkeys for their burden bearing, oxen for their hard work, and camels for transportation. Domesticated camels were rare in Abram's day. They indicate that the gifts were particularly luxurious.

The proximity of this account to Genesis 12:1- 3 indicates these gifts were a blessing from God. This does not mean that God approved of Abram's actions. God was acting graciously in giving Abram what he didn't deserve.

God providentially afflicted Pharaoh with great plagues (12:17). That might seem unfair to Pharaoh, but he was not innocent. The text communica tes that Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's house against her will. So even though Pharaoh gave lavish gifts, he was still doing harm to Sarai.

**ASK:** How do God's actions in judging Pharaoh demonstrate His faithfulness to the promises communicated in Genesis 12:1-4? (Q16) *God cursed Pharaoh when he mistreatedAbram and his family.*

God righteously judg e d Pharaoh and in turn Pharaoh correctly rebuked Abram. Abram's silence confirms he knew his actions were indefensible. Pharaoh had Abram and Sarai se nt out of Egypt.

**READ:** Genesis 12:1O; 13:1, 2. **ASK:** How did Abram's station in life change while in Egypt? (Q17) *Abram went from in need due to the famine to very rich (Gen. 13:2).*

Genesis 13:1 and 2 conclude the Genesis 12 accounts. These important verses communicate that Abram was greatly blessed in Egypt. The same He­ br ew word translated *severe* in re ference to the famine in Genesis 12:10 is used in 13: 2 to describe Abram as *very rich.* To ph rase it li tera lly, Abram became *severely* rich in Eg ypt. His livestock gains can be attributed to Pharaoh's gift.

However, Abram likely earned the gold and silver mentio ned through business dealings in the land.

We don't have Abram's response to this incident, but we can still come to

some conclusions about what he learned from reviewing what we do know. God promised Abram land and blessing. Yet Abram left Canaan apparently of his own volition and concocted a plan to try to protect himse lf from Pharaoh. When Abram's plan blew up in his face, he must have realized that he lacked the abili­

ty to control his life and circumstances. His poste rity was at stake in that his wife was in Pharaoh's house. If he asked for Sarai back, he believed Pharaoh would put him to death. Abram's plan left him in a ja m that only God could help him out of. God brought the plagues on Pharaoh to bring about Sarai's deliverance.

And God gave Abram riches to take back to Canaan to provide for his needs during the famine.

The plagues and riches both commun icated to Abram that God is faithful and

thereforeworthy of his trust. It was as if God was saying, *Abram, I will take care of you. See how richly I blessed you even though you got yourself into a terrible bind? You need to trust Me.I am in control, and I will always be faithful to you. Stop trying to ensureMy promises will be fulfilled .*

**READ:** Ge nesis 26: 1- 4. **ASK:** Years later,what did God tell Isaac to do in response to a seco nd famine in Canaan? (Q18) *God told Isaac to not go to Egypt but to stay in the land God promised to bless Isaac in the land*

God's message to Isaac helps us see what God wanted Abram to do. God wa nt­ ed both men to stay put and to trust Him because of the promises He ha d made to them (Gen . 26:2, 3). His promises were contingent on *His* faithfulness (Heb. 6:13, 14).If they doubted His promises or tried to help God keep them, they were in essence doubting God and questioning His abilities and faithfulness. In the end, Abraham trusted God (26:5) and became an example of faith for believers today (Heb. 11:9). That process will be the topic of th e next few lessons.

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## The Bad and Good

Genesis 12 contains two accounts of God demonstrating His faithfulness in ac­ complishing the promises He gave to Abram. In the first account, Abram respond­ ed appropriately by faithfully worshiping God. In the second account, Abram showed a lack of faith in God as he tried to take matters into his own hands.

**ASK:** Describe a time when you responded wrongly to God's faithfulne ss. What were the contributing circumstances or motivations that tempted you to respond as you did? (019)

**ASK:** Describe a time when you responded correctly to God's faithfulness. What actions evid enced your correct response? (020)

## Faithful Responses

**ASK:** How would you finish the following statements? (021) God has demonstrated His faithfulness to me by . . .

I will in turn demonstrate faithfulness to God by . . .

**ASK:** What specific action steps will you take this week to put your commit ­ ment into action? (0 22)

## Summary and Memory Verses

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**RESOURCE:** Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 5 or use the following: Be faithfu l in respon se to God's faithfulne ss.

Encourage learners to memorize Hebrews 6:13 and 14. Give them an opportu­ nity to say the verses in class next week.