

January 8, 2006 by Steve Brandon



The Promises of God

Genesis 12:1-3

1. Land (Gen. 12:1)
2. Nation (Gen. 12:2a)
3. Blessing (Gen. 12:2b-3)

This year at Rock Valley Bible Church, we are preaching through the entire Bible. We have distributed Bible reading schedules to all of you. We have strongly encouraged you to read through the entire Bible this year. The reading for this week was Genesis 4-25. This past week, I have been praying for all of you to be reading through the Bible together as families. If you have done so, then you have read the text for our morning's message: Genesis 4-25.

The outline of Genesis is really quite simple. It is "four events, four people." The four events are (1) Creation, (2) Fall, (3) Flood, and (4) the Scattering of the Nations. The four people are (1) Abraham, (2) Isaac, (3) Jacob, and (4) Joseph. In the reading this past week, we read about the four events: The creation, the fall, the flood, and the scattering of the people to form the nations of the world. We also read about one of the four people: Abraham.

Last Sunday morning, we looked at the Creation and the Fall. This week, I only have a few comments to make about the flood and the scattering of the people. Then, we will devote all of our attention to Abraham. The reason for the flood was the wickedness of the heart of man. Genesis 6:5 states that "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And so, God destroyed the world through a flood. Lest you think that our hearts are different today, think again. After the flood, the LORD's testimony is that "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). It is only God's grace and God's promise ("I will never again curse the ground on account of man" - Gen. 8:21) that prevents the world from being destroyed again with water. (Though it will be destroyed one day with fire according to 2 Peter 3:7). We can see the wickedness of man in the story of the dispersion of the nations at the tower of Babel. They clearly disobeyed God's word to "populate the earth abundantly" (Gen. 9:7). So, the LORD had to scatter the people.

With that background, we now come to Genesis 12. For the first 11 chapters of Genesis, God is dealing with the whole world in general. But, beginning in chapter 12, we see the LORD focus His attention upon one individual. His name is Abraham. At birth, he was given the name, Abram. But, as we shall see in chapter 17, God changed his name to Abraham (Gen. 17:5). Rather than referring to him by these two names (according to what his name in any given chapter was), I'm choosing this morning to simply call him Abraham, which is what the New Testament writers do (for instance, see Romans 4:3; Hebrews 11:8).

This morning, we will focus our attention upon the first three verses of Genesis 12, because they help for us to see and understand the life of Abraham. I'm going to seek to unpack these verses, ... and pull in illustrations from the life of Abraham to illustrate them for us. In these first three verses, God will make several promises to Abraham. Our outline this morning will consist of three words which summarize these promises. (1) Land, (2) Nation, and (3) Blessing. Consider these promises, ...

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abraham, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you. And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

The magnitude of these promises is unbelievable! The whole history of the world hinges right here on God's promise to bless Abraham in incredible ways. Until this point, God's dealings with the world were quite generic. God didn't have a chosen nation. God didn't have a chosen people. However, it is right here that God chooses a nation to call His own. God determines that it will be the offspring of Abraham that will be blessed in a special way as no other family on the earth will be blessed. For the rest of the Bible, our focus will be upon the offspring of Abraham, who will grow into the nation of Israel.

Let's look at the first word in our outline this morning, ...

1. Land (Gen. 12:1)

In verse 1, God first tells Abraham to leave his homeland and go to a land, which he would be shown to him (verse 1). In this first verse, Abraham wasn't told any details about this land. He didn't know quite where it was. He didn't know how big it was. He was simply told to go. This is the point of Hebrews 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."

In verse 5, we discover that the land to which God was calling Abraham was the "land of Canaan." We are talking about modern-day Israel.

It's a small strip of property which lies to the east of the Mediterranean Sea. In verse 7, we see Abraham arriving in the land for the first time. At that time, the LORD makes clear to him that this land is the "land of promise" (Heb. 11:9). He tells Abraham, "To your descendants I will give this land" (Gen. 12:7). The early settlers of America would place four stakes of wood into the ground as boundary markers for the land that they were claiming. In verse 7, it is as if God was staking out His claim upon this strip of land and claimed it for Abraham.

This isn't the only time that this promise is made to Abraham. It's repeated again and again and again. I want to show several of them to you. First, let's consider what takes place in the next chapter of Genesis (i.e. chapter 13). This chapter tells the story of how Abraham and his nephew, named Lot separated from each other. Lot went east into the valley the Jordan (Gen. 13:10). Abraham went west of the Jordan, into the land of Canaan (Gen. 13:12). Once he arrived there, God repeats this promise to give him the land.

Genesis 13:14-17

The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you."

Here, we see God promising the land to Abraham and to his descendents. We see the promise of the land given again in chapter 15. Speaking of the land of Canaan, God told Abraham, (in verse 7)... "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." We see it again in chapter 17, verse 8. God says, "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8).

God repeatedly promised this land to Abraham and to his descendents after him. From this day forward, this land that God promised to Abraham becomes a major focus throughout the Bible. But, it wasn't only Abraham. Similar promises were made to all of the patriarchs, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Isaac was told, "Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I sword to your father Abraham" (Gen. 26:3). In a dream, God told Jacob, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants, ... Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Gen. 28:13, 15). On his deathbed, Joseph knew that the LORD would grant Israel the land, even though they were in Egypt at the time. He told his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). He was so sure of this that he told them to carry his bones into the land (Gen. 50:25).

You cannot understand the book of Exodus without understanding that it is all about God being true to his promise to bring the Israelites into the land. The book of Numbers will make no sense either, for it records Israel wandering in the wilderness in anticipation of taking the land that was promised to them. You cannot understand the book of Joshua without understanding that God had previously promised this land to Abraham. Just before the events of Joshua, God had told Moses that "this is the land which I sword to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'" (Deut. 34:4). And then, God commissioned Joshua to "go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it" (Josh. 1:11). Throughout the book of Joshua, it is clear that they would only take the land with God's blessing, for it was God who would give the cities into their hand (Josh. 9:18). Near the end of the book of Joshua, we are told, "So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it" (Joshua 21:43).

Once they had received the land that God had promised to them, it still remained important to them. When Israel came into the land, they knew that it was a sign of God's blessing. Eventually, a temple is built in the heart of this land, --- in Jerusalem. God's presence came to dwell there (Ps. 135:21). God chose to put His name in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:36). So precious did this land become to the Jewish people that they would even sing, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her skill. ... May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Psalm 137:5-6). So precious did this land become that they would pray "for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you" (Ps. 122:6).

It's not the bricks and mortar of Jerusalem that was loved. It's everything surrounding what God did for Jerusalem that they loved. It's all about the dwelling of the people of God. It's roots all trace back to God's promise to Abraham to give to him and to his descendents a land (Genesis 12:1). This theme weaves its way through the entire Bible. When the Jews were in the land, it was a clear demonstration of God's blessing upon them. When the Jews were exiled from their land, they were under the curse of God.

The Jews have always longed to be in the land. This desire continues through today. In this past generation, the Jews have been able to return freely to their land for the first time in centuries. Today, the Jews love the land so much that many of them are willing to live in the land, although it is surrounded by those who hate them on every side, who are willing to terrorize them. You won't understand what is going on today politically in the Middle East without an understanding of God's promise to give Abraham the land (Gen. 12:1).

But, the land isn't the only promise that God makes to Abraham. He also promises to make Abraham to be a great ...
2. Nation (Gen. 12:2a)

We see this in verse 2, "And I will make you a great nation." In other words, Abraham would be the father of many, many people, who would all be able to trace their lineage back to Abraham so as to be able to say, "Abraham is our father" (John 8:39).

My parents have done a pretty good job at this. They had five children, all of whom are married, and all of whom have children. Now, my parents have 20 grand-children. All of them can say, "Stan Brandon" is our father, meaning "ancestor." But, my parents haven't come close to what was promised to Abraham. He was promised that he would be the father of an entire nation!

Like the promise in chapter 12 was far from a solitary promise. On many occasions, God repeated this promise to him. Consider Genesis 13:16 (which we read earlier) when the LORD spoke to Abraham saying, "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered" (Gen. 13:16). Have you ever been in your living room on a sunny day looking closely at the some coming into the window? At that moment you begin to see the amount of dust that is swirling in the air. Attempting to count the dust particles is well nigh impossible. So a picture helps to communicate the vastness of the nation that will come from the line of Abraham.

In Genesis 15:5 we have another similar type of illustration. The LORD took Abraham outside and said to him, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" (Gen. 15:5). Have you ever walked outside at night on a clear evening and looked up at the stars? Counting them is very difficult. Should you look through an amateur telescope, you would realize how many stars there are to count. This picture communicates how large the nation from Abraham's loins will be.

Again, this promise is repeated in the first six verses of Genesis 17, ...

Genesis 17:1-6

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly." Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you."

God repeatedly told Abraham that his descendants would be many. Multiple nations would be able to trace their lineage back to Abraham. But so crucial was this promise for Abraham, that God changed his name to have ingrained in his head, that God changed his name. In verse 5 we see his name changed from Abram to Abraham. Abram means "exalted father." ("Ab" means "father" and "ram" means "high, exalted, lifted up"). Abraham means "father of a multitude" ("Ab" means "father" and "raham" means "multitude.") This had the effect of causing Abraham to remember God's promise to him often--as often as people would call him by name. Whenever anyone called him "Abraham," he would have thought about how he was to be "the father of a multitude."

I know several people who have changed their names. I remember having a conversation about why they did so. It has always included some type of interesting story. I have one friend, who wanted to demonstrate the equality of his marriage with his wife and so combined his last name with her last name to form a new last name. I'm sure that over the years, he has had many opportunities to tell others of his egalitarian views as a result of it. I have another friend, who found out that his grandfather had committed some type of crime. In an attempt to run away from the law, he changed his last name. When my friend found out about it and thought about it for a while, he decided to change his name back to his original family name. In his mind, it was a statement that he wanted to make clear to all that it was his desire to continue on with the family name. I'm sure that over the years, he has had many opportunities to tell the story.

I doubt that it was any different for Abraham. Certainly, for a wealthy man like Abraham (Genesis 13:2), he knew many people and the change in his name would have attracted interest. "So Abram, please tell me, why did you change your name?" Imagine Abraham's story. "I was called, 'exalted father,' but now, my name is 'father of a multitude.'" And the question would naturally come next, "So Mr. father-of-a-multitude, how many children do you have?" He would have responded with something like this: "Well, my wife is ninety years old and has been barren from her youth. But we believe that that God will give us a child. And from that child, God will raise up a nation. God has made this clear to us." I'm sure that those who spoke to him may well have thought that Abraham had lost his marbles.

But, it is precisely at this point that we see Abraham's faith shines. When God initially told Abraham that he would be made into a great nation (in Genesis 12), he was 75 years old. (We are told this in verse 4). His wife, Sarah was 65 years old. (In Genesis 17:17, we discover that she was ten years younger than Abraham). Some time later (we don't know how long), Abraham had a discussion with God about these things. He didn't quite understand how it all would work out. This conversation is recorded for us in Genesis 15:1-6.

We read that the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great" (Gen. 15:1). To which, Abram responded, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" In other words, "God, I know that you have promised to make me a great nation, but I don't have any children. I trust that you know that it's impossible for me to be the father of a great nation if I don't have any children." Perhaps God was silent at Abraham's confusion, because Abraham asks the same thing again in verse 3, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." And God responded, ...

Genesis 15:4-6

Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them " And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

At this moment, Abraham became for all of us, the father of faith. Abraham was in an impossible situation. God had promised a son to Him. But, he was nearing a hundred years old. And his wife was ten years younger than he was and as barren as could be. I know that people lived a bit longer in the days of Abraham than they do now. But, it was still the case that 90 year old women didn't give birth to children, especially those who have been barren from their youth. But Abraham believed the unbelievable. And then, God does the unbelievable. I'm not talking about giving he and Sarah a son. I'm talking about God crediting Abraham's faith as righteousness. That's what verse 6 says, "He

believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

In other words, Abraham's faith allowed God to look upon him as a righteous man. Abraham wasn't a righteous man. In chapter 12, we see him lying about his wife and deceiving Pharaoh, opening the possibility that his wife be defiled! In chapter 16, goes into Hagar, who wasn't his wife. In chapter 20, we see Abraham lying once again in deceiving Abimelech about his wife. But, when God looked down upon Abraham, His faith was considered by God to be equivalent to righteousness.

Paul comments upon these verses in Romans 4:18-22, ...

Romans 4:18-22

In hope against hope [Abraham] believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be." Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore "it was also credited to him as righteousness."

Paul tells the story of Abraham. He was told that he would be the father of a great nation. However, Abraham knew that he was old. He knew that it was impossible for Sarah to bear children. Yet, he didn't waver in his faith. Rather, he gave glory to God by believing Him to be faithful to his promises. And then Paul continues with the implications for us and our life. He wrote, "Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:23-24).

Paul was pointing out the parallel between Abraham's faith in the promises of God and our faith in Jesus Christ. What God did with Abraham, he will do also for us. God considered Abraham's faith to be righteousness. God will likewise consider our faith in Jesus Christ as righteousness. In this way, Abraham becomes the father of faith. Now, certainly, before Abraham, there were others who believed. Abel believed God and offered an acceptable sacrifice to God (Heb. 11:4). Enoch believed God (Heb. 11:5), and God took him up without dying. Noah believed God and built an ark (Heb. 11:7) and saved his family (1 Peter 3:20). But none of these men received the pronouncement of righteousness upon them for their faith. But, Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith. Thereby, his faith is a model for us, who are also declared righteous because of our faith in Christ.

As you read on in Genesis, you realize that Abraham was justified (i.e. considered righteous) by God before he was circumcised. (He was justified in chapter 15, but not circumcised until chapter 17). As you continue in your Bible reading, you will realize that Abraham was justified by God without keeping the law. (It's not until midway through the book of Exodus that we see the law). These are no small points. It means that we are saved from our sin apart from law-keeping, circumcision, or any other religious works that we might do. Keeping the law didn't justify Abraham in God's sight. Circumcision didn't justify Abraham in God's sight. It was Abraham's faith that justified him in God's sight. It is the same for us today. We are justified by faith in God's promise. We haven't been promised to have a nation come from our loins. But, we have been promised that our faith in Christ will be reckoned to us as righteousness. "By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in God's sight" (Rom. 3:20). But, "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Rom. 3:28).

At this point in my message, there are many other things that we could bring out in the life of Abraham. I would like to tell you about the implications of this promise coming before the law was given (Gal. 3:17). I would like to tell you about how Abraham is the father of all who believe, circumcised and uncircumcised (Rom. 4:1) would like to address the issue of how the righteous acts of Abraham fits into his justification (i.e. James 2:23). I would like to speak about the promise to Abraham's seed (Gen. 3:15). But, I must move on.

We have seen (1) Land, (2) Nation, and now we come to ...
3. Blessing (Gen. 12:2b-3)

Beginning halfway through verse 2, God says to Abraham, "I will bless you, and make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you. And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Five times in these two verses is the word, "bless" or "blessing" or "blessed" used. It is the key to this passage. God tells Abraham that he will be blessed (verse 2). His name would be great. He will be a blessing! So far does this blessing go that the one who blesses Abraham will be blessed. The one who curses Abraham will be cursed. This simply means that if somebody speaks or does something favorable toward Abraham, so also will good come to them. But, if somebody speaks or does harm against Abraham, so also will harm come to them. Such is an indication of divine favor upon Abraham.

This abundant blessing of God simply means that God will cause Abraham's activities to go well. It did. In Genesis 13:2 we read that "Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver and gold." God has so blessed the house of Abraham that there was no room in the land for his livestock as well as Lot's livestock. Abraham said to Lot, "Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left" (Gen. 13:9). Though Lot chose the most fertile land, Abraham was blessed far more abundantly than Lot was. He blessed him with hundreds of men, who were his servants, born in his house (Gen. 14:14). Abraham was blessed with the ability to rescue Lot when he had been taken captive by the kings in war (Gen. 14:12).

God blessed Abraham in his faith. But, God also blessed Abraham in his disobedience. When deceiving Abimelech concerning Sarah, his wife. God stepped into the situation and made sure that Sarah wasn't defiled (Gen. 20:6). And when we departed from the house of Abimelech, he was given a thousand pieces of silver! This is the blessing of God. God blessed Abraham in abundance. Near the end of his life, Genesis 24:1 says, "The LORD had blessed Abraham in every way."

The blessing of Abraham didn't stop with Abraham. Abraham would be so blessed that his blessing would extend far beyond his own family

(and even beyond his own great nation). Notice the last phrase of verse 3, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." In other words, God was going to so bless Abraham that the impact of this blessing would be felt in the entire world! Paul uses these words here to speak about how this came to be. He wrote (in Galatians 3:8) that "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.'"

We have here in Genesis 12:3 the preaching of the gospel! That is, the good news that God has brought salvation beyond the Jews to us Gentiles as well. Paul tells us in Galatians 3:14 that it is "In Christ Jesus [that] the blessing of Abraham [has] come to the Gentiles" (Gal. 3:14). So, please realize this morning, that as you experience the blessing of believing in Christ this morning, you are blessed only because God, in His grace, chose to bless Abraham. From the start of the Jewish nation, God had the Gentiles in mind!

The book of Revelation records for us the fulfillment of this blessing. In Revelation 5, we see Jesus, the Lamb of God, standing in heaven before the throne of God. He comes and takes the scroll from the hand of God the Father, and the 24 elders in heaven fall down to worship Jesus, saying, "Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The elders are worshipping Jesus Christ, because He purchased people from "all the families of the earth" upon the cross by His death. When Jesus died upon the cross, He was purchasing men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, many of whom weren't even born at the time.

Please realize today, dear people of God, that the blessing you have received in Christ by faith was because of a promise that God made to Abraham 4,000 years ago! God promised great blessing to Abraham, which would result in a nation, through whom the Messiah would come. And 2,000 years, later, the Messiah finally arrived and brought blessing to all the families of the earth. It's an amazing blessing! It's a blessing that has affected the whole world. It's a blessing that has come to us today in Rockford, Illinois.

But, please notice that this blessing comes upon Abraham because of God's grace. Of all the people that God could have blessed, God chose to bless Abraham. God could have chosen to bless Haran, Abraham's brother (Gen., 11:27), but He didn't. God could have chosen to bless Terah, Abraham's father (Gen. 11:26), but He didn't. God could have chosen to bless Nahor, Abraham's grand-father (Gen. 11:24), but He didn't. God could have chosen to bless Serug, Abraham's great grand-father (Gen. 11:22), but He didn't. There were many others who walked the planet who God could have chosen, but He didn't. God chose to bless Abraham. Why? We have no reason ever given why God chose to bless this man with such great blessings. The only thing that we know of Abraham before this blessing was given was that he was an idol worshiper, along with his family (Joshua 24:2).

God selected Abraham by the mere pleasure of His grace (Gen. 12:1) Those who struggle with the doctrine of election need to really think long and hard about God's dealings with Abraham and then, with the nation of Israel. There was nothing in Abraham that caused God to choose him to be the one through whom world-wide blessing would come! In fact, from what we know of his character, he wasn't such an upright guy. But, from this point forward in history, God focused His attention and His affection upon one nation, the nation of Israel, which came from the loins of Abraham. There was one nation that received the special blessing of God, and it wasn't the United States of America. It wasn't Egypt or Persia or Spain or England or Russia. It was Israel. It was those who have come from the physical line of Abraham, which eventually came to be known as "Israel" (Gen. 32:28). Those who were born into Abraham's family were the focus of God's blessing for 2,000 years.

Most of those who resist the doctrine of election do so from logical grounds. They think that God must give everyone an equal opportunity for salvation or, they reason, God is unjust. But, this clearly wasn't the case for the Old Testament. During that time, God was selective in His love. It was the nation of Israel that received God's blessings. For 2,000 years, God set His affection upon the Israelites in a special way. Everything that God promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 came true. They increased in number and became a great nation. By the third generation from Abraham, the number of people in the family numbered 70 (Gen. 46:27). Some four hundred years later, their numbers pushed well over a million people. [\[1\]](#)

God gave the land of promise to them. When these people were slaves in Egypt, they cried out to the Lord. We read in Exodus 2:24, "So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He delivered them from slavery and brought them finally into the land that He had promised to give to Abraham (Joshua 21:43). But such wasn't the case for other nations. Many nations never heard of the true God, and perished in their sins. The angel of the Lord came against the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.

This is how God works. His love is selective. It's not because Israel was righteous (for, in fact, they weren't). It was because God promised to love Israel that He loved Israel. Deuteronomy 7:7-8 tells of God's choice to love Israel. He said, "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." God sovereignly chose Israel by the mere pleasures of His grace. A few chapters later, Moses reminded Israel of God's dealings with Israel.

Deuteronomy 9:4-6

Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, "Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land." ... It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.

The story of the Old Testament is a story of how God chose a people for Himself. He decided that he would guard and protect these people. God blessed those who blessed the Jews. God cursed those who cursed the Jews. We could come up with story after story after story of how

those that blessed Israel prospered, and how those that cursed Israel were cursed. God's love for Israel was selective.

We are saved in the exact same way. It's not because of our righteousness or things that we have done, but it is according to His mercy that He saves us (Titus 3:5). When you put the full teaching of Scripture together, you see that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to come to faith in Him (Eph. 1:4). God predestines us to salvation (Eph. 1:5) out of the pure kindness of His will.

Here is the great news of the gospel of Christ. It's precisely because God chose Abraham, that we, today can be reconciled to God. Without His sovereign election of Abraham, there would be no nation of God. There would be no Messiah. There would be no salvation. We would still be dead in our sins. But, in Abraham, all the families of the earth are blessed. When Jesus came to earth, He established a New Covenant to extend the promises of Abraham beyond the Jews to the Gentiles who believe. If today finds you failing to believe in the all-sufficiency of Christ and His sacrifice, I call you today to repent of your sin and trust in Christ.

When God makes a promise, it is sure to come to pass. God promised blessing to all the families of the earth. He was true to that promise. God has promised that all who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ will be forgiven of their sin. Do you have Abraham-like faith to believe this promise? If so, God reckons your faith as righteousness. This is the crux of the gospel. Through the work of Christ, we are considered holy in God's sight through faith. This is what we celebrate as Christians. We celebrate that the promises of God to Abraham have come to us in the New Covenant.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 8, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] In Numbers 1:46, we have recorded 603,550 men who were able to go to war. Add the other men and the women to this number and you have over a million people in Israel at the time of the Exodus from slavery.