

Genesis 12:1-9 – “Answer Faith’s Call”

Text: Genesis 12:1-9 (CSB)

1 The LORD said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. **2** I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. **5** 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. When they came to the land of Canaan, **6** Abram passed through the land to the site of Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. (At that time the Canaanites were in the land.) **7** The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your offspring.” So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. **8** From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. He built an altar to the LORD there, and he called on the name of the LORD. **9** Then Abram journeyed by stages to the Negev.

Key Background

- **The Pivotal Transition:** Genesis 12 marks one of the most significant transitions in Scripture—from the universal history of all humanity (Genesis 1–11) to God’s particular plan through one man and his descendants (Genesis 12–50). After dealing with all nations at Babel, God now chooses one man, Abram, through whom He will ultimately bless all nations. This is the beginning of the Abrahamic Covenant, foundational to all of Scripture.
- **Abram’s Background:** According to Genesis 11:27–32 and Joshua 24:2, Abram came from Ur of the Chaldeans, a sophisticated city in ancient Mesopotamia (near modern-day southern Iraq). Though his family worshiped other gods, Abram himself was a man of faith—much like Noah before him (Genesis 6:9) and evidenced by his nephew Lot, who is later called righteous despite his many failures (2 Peter 2:7–8).
- **Already in Haran:** When Genesis 12:1 records God’s call, Abram is already in Haran (Genesis 11:31–32), having left Ur with his father Terah. Acts 7:2–4 reveals God first called Abram while still in Ur. So Genesis 12:1 may be a renewed call after his father’s death, or a summary of the original call. Either way, Abram must leave his father’s house and complete the journey God commanded.
- **The Threefold Separation:** God’s call requires Abram to leave three things: (1) “your land”—geographical security and familiarity, (2) “your relatives”—social connections and family network, (3) “your father’s house”—immediate family and inheritance. Each separation becomes progressively more personal and costly. Faith requires leaving comfort zones, familiar surroundings, and even family ties when they conflict with following God.
- **The Destination: Unknown:** God calls Abram to “the land that I will show you” (v. 1). The destination isn’t revealed upfront—Abram must trust God’s guidance step by step. Hebrews 11:8 emphasizes this: “By faith Abraham obeyed when called to go to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going.” Faith obeys before seeing the complete plan.
- **Seven-Fold Promise:** God makes seven promises to Abram (vv. 2–3): (1) “I will make you into a great nation,” (2) “I will bless you,” (3) “I will make your name great,” (4) “You will be a blessing,” (5) “I will bless those who bless you,” (6) “I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt,” (7) “All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” These “I will” statements show this is God’s initiative and God’s guarantee—unconditional promises based on God’s faithfulness, not Abram’s performance.
- **Great Nation Promise:** “I will make you into a great nation” (v. 2) is remarkable because Abram is 75 years old, his wife Sarai is barren (Genesis 11:30), and they have no children. Humanly speaking, this

promise is impossible. God delights in accomplishing His purposes through impossible situations to demonstrate that fulfillment comes from divine power, not human ability.

- **Name Made Great:** Contrast this with Babel: “Let us make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4). Babel sought self-glory through human achievement and was judged. God promises Abram, “I will make your name great” (v. 2). The difference: Babel grasped for fame; Abram receives it as a gift. When we seek our own glory, we’re scattered. When we trust God, He exalts us according to His purposes. Abram’s name is indeed great—revered by billions (Jews, Christians, Muslims).
- **Blessing to All Nations:** “All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (v. 3) is the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant. This promise reaches its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, Abram’s descendant, through whom salvation comes to all nations (Galatians 3:8, 14, 16). God’s plan was never just to bless Israel but to bless the whole world through Israel’s promised seed—the Messiah.
- **Abram’s Obedience:** “So Abram went, as the LORD had told him” (v. 4). No recorded questions, negotiations, or delays—just obedience. At age 75, Abram leaves everything familiar to follow God’s call. This is the faith commended in Hebrews 11:8—trusting obedience without demanding all the answers upfront. True faith moves in response to God’s word, even when the path is unclear.
- **Lot’s Inclusion:** “Lot went with him” (v. 4). Abram brings his nephew Lot, despite God’s call to leave “your relatives” (v. 1). This partial obedience later creates problems (Genesis 13–14, 19). Lot becomes a source of conflict and compromise. The lesson: incomplete obedience to God’s call often leads to unnecessary complications and difficulties.
- **Accumulated Possessions and People:** “All the possessions they had accumulated, and the people they had acquired in Haran” (v. 5) indicates Abram’s wealth and influence. He wasn’t a poor wanderer but a wealthy man leaving prosperity for an unknown land. Faith isn’t just for the desperate; sometimes it means leaving success and security to follow God’s call.
- **Arrival in Canaan:** “They set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan” (v. 5). The repetition emphasizes completion—they actually arrived. Abram’s faith was proven by finishing what God started. He didn’t stop halfway but persevered to reach the promised land.
- **Canaanites in the Land:** The parenthetical note “(At that time the Canaanites were in the land)” (v. 6) highlights a problem: the promised land is occupied by pagan peoples. God’s promise isn’t immediately realized. There’s a gap between promise and fulfillment, requiring sustained faith. The Canaanites’ presence tests Abram’s trust: will he believe God despite current obstacles?
- **Shechem and the Oak of Moreh:** Shechem was a significant location that would feature repeatedly in Israel’s history (Genesis 33:18–20, Joshua 24:1, 25–26, Judges 9, 1 Kings 12). The “oak of Moreh” may have been a local worship site. Abram arrives at a place already associated with religious significance, though pagan at this time.
- **The LORD Appeared:** “The LORD appeared to Abram” (v. 7). This is a theophany—a visible manifestation of God. God doesn’t just speak from a distance but appears personally, confirming His presence with Abram. This divine encounter strengthens Abram’s faith and clarifies the promise: this specific land will belong to his offspring.
- **Promise to Offspring:** “I will give this land to your offspring” (v. 7). Abram still has no children, yet God promises the land to his descendants. This requires faith in two impossible things: (1) that Abram will have offspring despite his and Sarai’s age, (2) that these descendants will possess a land currently occupied by others. Both promises will take centuries to fully accomplish.
- **Building Altars:** Abram builds two altars—one at Shechem (v. 7) and one between Bethel and Ai (v. 8). Altars were places of sacrifice and worship. By building altars, Abram: (1) claims the land spiritually before possessing it physically, (2) worships the true God in a land of idolatry, (3) marks his journey with worship, making his pilgrimage an act of devotion. Wherever Abram goes, he establishes worship of Yahweh.
- **Calling on the Name of the LORD:** “He called on the name of the LORD” (v. 8). This phrase indicates public worship and prayer (Genesis 4:26). Abram doesn’t worship privately but openly declares his allegiance to Yahweh in a land full of pagan Canaanites. His faith is visible, public, and unapologetic.
- **Living as a Sojourner:** Abram “pitched his tent” (v. 8)—he lives as a temporary resident, not building permanent structures. Hebrews 11:9–10 explains: “By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of

promise... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Abram’s tent-dwelling life reflects faith that this world is temporary and God’s ultimate promise is eternal.

- **Journey to the Negev:** Abram continues moving south to the Negev (v. 9), the dry southern region of Canaan. His journey through the land demonstrates both exploration and trust—surveying what God has promised while living by faith that it will one day belong to his descendants.

Questions from the Story

1. What does the LORD command Abram to do (v. 1)? What three things must he leave?
2. Where is Abram being sent (v. 1)? How much information does God give about the destination?
3. What promises does God make to Abram in verses 2–3? How many “I will” statements are there?
4. What does God promise about Abram’s descendants (v. 2)? Why is this remarkable given Abram’s situation?
5. What does God promise about Abram’s name (v. 2)? How does this contrast with Babel’s goal in Genesis 11:4?
6. What role will Abram play according to verse 2? What does “you will be a blessing” mean?
7. What does God say about those who bless or curse Abram (v. 3)? What protection does this provide?
8. What is the ultimate promise in verse 3? Who will be blessed through Abram?
9. How does Abram respond to God’s call (v. 4)? What does his response demonstrate?
10. How old is Abram when he leaves Haran (v. 4)? What does this tell us about faith and age?
11. Who goes with Abram (v. 4)? How does this relate to God’s command to leave “your relatives”?
12. What does Abram take with him (v. 5)? What does this reveal about his wealth and status?
13. Where do they go (v. 5)? Does Abram complete the journey or stop halfway?
14. Where does Abram first stop in Canaan (v. 6)? What is significant about Shechem?
15. What important detail is noted about Canaan at this time (v. 6)? What challenge does this present?
16. What happens to Abram at Shechem (v. 7)? What does God reveal?
17. What specific promise does God make about the land (v. 7)? To whom will it be given?
18. What does Abram build at Shechem (v. 7)? Why is this significant?
19. Where does Abram go next (v. 8)? What geographical markers are mentioned?
20. What does Abram do at his second stop (v. 8)? What two actions are recorded?
21. What does “pitched his tent” suggest about how Abram lives in the land?
22. Where does Abram journey next (v. 9)? What does his continued movement indicate?
23. Why does God call Abram to leave his land, relatives, and father’s house? What does this teach about the cost of following God?
24. How does the unknown destination (“the land that I will show you”) test and reveal genuine faith?
25. What does Hebrews 11:8 teach us about Abram’s faith in obeying without knowing where he was going?
26. How does God’s promise “I will make your name great” differ from Babel’s “let us make a name for ourselves”?
27. What does the promise about blessing “all the peoples on earth” reveal about God’s ultimate plan for redemption?
28. How does Galatians 3:8, 16 explain that the blessing to all nations is fulfilled in Jesus Christ?
29. Why is Abram’s immediate obedience (“So Abram went”) significant, especially at age 75?
30. What problems might arise from bringing Lot, despite God’s call to leave relatives? (See Genesis 13–14)

31. How does the presence of Canaanites in the land test Abram's faith in God's promise?
32. What does building altars throughout the land demonstrate about Abram's priorities and faith?
33. How does Abram's tent-dwelling life (temporary residence) reflect his faith in God's eternal promises?
34. What does it mean that Abram "called on the name of the LORD" publicly in a pagan land?
35. In what ways does Abram's call require us to evaluate our own willingness to leave comfort zones for God's purposes?
36. How should God's promise to bless those who bless Abram (and his descendants) shape how we view and treat the Jewish people today?
37. What does this passage teach about waiting for God's promises when there's a gap between promise and fulfillment?
38. How does Abram's example challenge us to obey God even when the path forward is unclear?