



THEN HE BROUGHT  
HIM OUTSIDE AND SAID,  
"LOOK NOW TOWARD  
HEAVEN, AND COUNT  
THE STARS IF YOU  
ARE ABLE TO NUMBER  
THEM." AND HE SAID TO  
HIM, "SO SHALL YOUR  
DESCENDANTS BE.

GENESIS 12:5 (NKJV)

# GRACE

## TO ALL

### DATE

January 25 & 26

### WEEK

4 of 4

### KEY VERSE

Genesis 12:5

## SETTING THE STAGE

God used Abram to change His Story. Abraham was the Patriarch of Israel, whose story is told in Genesis chapters 12-23.

Despite God's swift judgment of sin most people ignored Him and continued to sin. But God revealed himself to Abram, who would later be renamed Abraham, and chose to use Abraham's family to be the instrument of his salvation plan for humanity. Abraham was not chosen because he was a perfect man; in fact, his life demonstrated some great flaws. But he also demonstrated great faith in God and His promises.<sup>1</sup>

We know him as Abraham with a wife named Sarah. However, before he became known as Abraham, his name was Abram. The lesson today deals with the time in his life that he was Abram and his wife was Sarai.

When God changed a person's name and gave him a new name, it was usually to establish a new identity. God changed Abram's name, meaning "high father," to "Abraham," meaning "father of a multitude" (*Genesis 17:5*). At the same time, God changed Abraham's wife's name from "Sarai," meaning "my princess," to "Sarah," meaning "mother of nations" (*Genesis 17:15*). This name change took place when God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. God also reaffirmed His promise to give Abraham a son, specifically through Sarah, and told him to name his son Isaac, meaning "laughter."<sup>2</sup>

Abram grew up in Ur, which was a cultural community where his family lived. He left Ur, not to better his life but to obey God. It is the obedience of Abram that allowed God to show grace that would build a nation and people of God for all generations.

### LESSON OUTLINE

1. God Gives Us Grace In Our Suffering
2. God Gives Us Grace In Our Doubting
3. God Declares Us Righteous by Grace, Through Faith

### THINGS TO KNOW

- About 30,000 stars are listed in the General Catalog used by astronomers and it is estimated that there are 100 billion more.

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# GRACE

## TO ALL

### Introduction

Astros fever has spread across the city of Houston these past three years! It seems wherever you are, you will find a local Houstonian sporting an Astros hat, blue and orange t-shirt, or a jersey of their favorite player. Astros pride, has of course, reached an all-time high since their 2017 playoff run to the franchise's first World Series trophy. Since that monumental moment, baseball fandom has reached an unprecedented level in our city. However, for those of us who have been here for a while, you will also quickly remember that it was not always like this. Before we became the "World Champion Astros," we were better known as the infamous "Last-ros." The franchise had six consecutive losing seasons from 2009 to 2014 and Minute Maid Park was a very cheap ticket in those days. And if you were a fan then, it was an easy time to get frustrated. Ownership and the General Manager would explain that they had a long-term vision to build a championship-caliber team. That sounded great, but their strategy was to keep the team's payroll low and consistently trade away any marketable players. They were focused on developing a new line-up from the ground up, not on retaining quality veterans. They did not go after big name free agents, instead, they invested in their farm system and focused on draft picks and developing young players. Fast forward to 2020, and I think we would all say they were geniuses making it to the World Series two out of the last three seasons. But if we could rewind the clock, we would quickly remember that there were days when we were frustrated and questioning the validity of their promises.

Today in Genesis 15, Abram is in a similar boat. In Genesis 12, God made some massive promises to this elderly, pagan man from Ur. God told Abram that He was building something special through him. He said that Abram was going to get new land, have a new lineage, and become a great nation that would bless the entire world. We can only imagine the hope and excitement that Abram must have felt after that announcement! Unfortunately, none of those things happened immediately. Ten years have passed between chapters 12 and 15. At this point in the story, Abram has no promised land, no lineage, and certainly no nation to call his own. And in today's passage, we are going to see that Abram is in distress because of his circumstances. However, Abram is going to provide a great example of faithfulness during turmoil that we can learn from. Through his testimony, we will see that God always gives grace to His people who patiently trust in His promises.

### Exposition

**GENESIS 15:1 NKJV** *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."*

Our first verse frames Abram's encounter with God as happening, "after these things." So the natural question would be, "what are those things?" Since his first encounter with God in chapter 12, Abram came across some trouble. Chapter 13 tells us about a family split. Abram and his nephew, Lot, have



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<sup>1</sup> *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Gotquestions.com.

to separate because there is not enough land for them to take care of their animals together. Lot chose the most fertile land near a city called Sodom and Abram went the other way. In Chapter 14, war began to break out. Five Canaanite cities led an uprising against the four kings of the region. This led the four Mesopotamian overlords to reassert their power through attacks across the land. Abram initially chose to stay out of it, but he had to do something when his family was brought into the battle. Abram heard that the invaders captured Lot and his family, so Abram took matters into his own hands and formed a militia with 318 of his trained men. “Abram, the general” led a decisive victory, rescuing Lot from the invaders and making his name known to the area’s kings.

So, in chapter 15, one might wonder why would Abram be so afraid that God had to reassure him? In part, it could be because Abram is simply exhausted. He is coming off an emotional roller coaster ride where he and his family risked their lives in battle. Perhaps he is also afraid that the kings may come back and attack him again. God miraculously protected them in the battle, but how does he not know if they will return with reinforcements for a second round? To make matters worse, Sarai is still barren. Not only does he not have a land of his own, but he also does not have a promised son. God sees that Abram is tired and frustrated, so He reveals Himself to him with a comforting message, “*Do not be afraid, Abram.*” God’s words remind us of our first point.

## 1. GOD GIVES US GRACE IN OUR SUFFERING

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Throughout scripture God made His presence known in big and small ways. Whether it was by a pillar of fire or a still small voice, the presence of God is a reminder of His grace towards us. God’s solution to Abram’s problems is to grace him with His presence again. This is because God’s powerful presence has a way of restoring and renewing our hearts.

How can God’s voice renew us? *Psalm 16:11* explains, “*You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy.*” When we spend time in the presence of our Creator, we are able to experience a fullness of joy that cannot be found elsewhere. This joy is often the best medicine for our lives, especially in a season of suffering. God knows this to be true, so He reveals Himself once again and gives Abram two comforting messages:

**First, God says, “I am your shield.”** He reminds Abram that He is there with him and will continue to protect him in this season of waiting. God is offering **immediate grace** in the valley. He sees Abram’s weaknesses but says that He is there to make him strong. Paul understood that our moments of weakness actually serve as our greatest opportunities for intimacy with the Lord. He writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “*And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*”<sup>10</sup> *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

**“God’s remedy for Abraham’s fear was to remind him who He was. Your life is only as big as your faith, and your faith is only as big as your God. If you spend all your time looking at yourself, you will get discouraged, but if you look to God by faith, you will be encouraged.”<sup>3</sup>**

God promises to meet us in our weakness and sustain us in the valley. Isaiah 41:10, “*Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*”

**Second, God says, “I am your exceedingly great reward.”** God reminds Abram that He is not only his protection but also his reward. God is effectually saying, “hang in there, I’ve got something great waiting for you!” God is reminding him that all of the things He promised in Chapter 12 will still come

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<sup>3</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary Volume 1*, p. 67.

to fruition. Abram is just struggling to keep his eye on the prize since he is tired of the valley. Have you ever found yourself in that same situation? Where you are in a season of waiting and wanting to see God fulfill His promises in your life? In those moments we too must set our eyes on the **future grace** that is awaiting us. God's words must have later resonated with Abram because we are told in the New Testament that *"he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10). By faith, Abram did not just look towards his future earthly rewards, but he also looked towards his future heavenly reward. We should learn from Abram's example and focus on that future grace, as it will fuel our present obedience.

Look at Genesis 12:2-5,

**GENESIS 12:2-5 NKJV** *"But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup> Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."<sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."*

As good as God's pep-talk was, Abram is still dejected. He hears God reaffirm His promises, but he is still troubled by his present circumstances. After all, God had told him that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16), but right now he is in his 80's with a barren wife and no children. He even points out that his servant currently serves as the heir to his house. During the patriarchal period, a man with no children often adopted a servant to provide for his burial and inherit his estate, taking on the role of an heir. Abram is brutally honest with God and shares his questions and concerns. But this does not disappoint or anger our Lord, instead, God uses it as an opportunity to minister to His servant, Abram. This leads to our second point today.

## 2. GOD GIVES US GRACE IN OUR DOUBTING

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God tells Abram that he will indeed have an heir from his own lineage. There will be no need for an adopted son or servant. But then God displays His amazing grace and patience to Abram. Instead of leaving it at that authoritative message, God helps Abram understand by taking him for a walk outside. He invites him outside at night so that he can show him something that will alleviate his doubts: the stars.

Why show him the stars? First, **the stars communicated how BIG our God is**, as Creator of those stars (Genesis 1:16). God challenges Abram to try to count them. Abram is overwhelmed in the moment by the power and majesty of the sky before him. Abram knows that the sea of stars did not get there by chance, but our Sovereign Creator designed each one and placed it according to His will. Abram cannot get his mind around the vastness of the sky and he felt very small next to it. He probably felt in some ways like David when he said, *"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,<sup>4</sup> What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?"* (Psalm 8:3-4). The stars remind David and Abram that God is in control. God is showing Abram that if He can create that beautiful nighttime sky, can He not also create a son for your household?

But **the stars also communicated how BIG God's plan was for Abram**. God had told Abram that all the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). He's reminding him of that promise when He says that his descendants will outnumber those stars. There are about 30,000 stars listed in the general catalog used by astronomers, but scientists claim that there are billions more.<sup>4</sup> God is trying to show

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<sup>4</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Weirsbe Bible Commentary*, p. 68.

Abram how massive Abram's influence would be one day. Through Abram, the lineage of Israel would be created. And through the lineage of Israel, the Messiah would come into this world. And through the Messiah, the doors of heaven would be opened to the Jew and the Gentile alike. Abram was the amazing starting point, and God is trying to show him the scope of the finish line. He is saying one day, every person who walks in faith with our Triune God will trace his or her origin back to Abram. We are told Abram's eyes and heart are awakened to this monumental reality, as our scripture says:

**GENESIS 15:6 NKJV** *"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."*

Kenneth Matthews explains: "As a consequence of Abram's belief, the Lord 'credited (Hb hasab) it,' that is, his faith, as 'righteousness' (Hb sedaqa). The term 'credited', also translated 'reckoned' or 'counted,' means 'to assign value'; in this case the Lord assigns Abram's faith the value of righteousness."<sup>5</sup>

**Note:** Sarai, the wife of Abram, had doubts too. Hagar was the servant of Sarai. God had promised Abram many descendants, but, ten years after the promise, Sarai was still unable to have children, and they were both on the verge of becoming too old to have children at all. Sarai chose to give her servant Hagar to Abram, in accordance with the custom of the day, so that Sarai could have a child through her (*Genesis 16:2*). Ishmael was Hagar's son, and later Sarai would give birth to Isaac, a picture of God's grace. Abram and Sarai took matters into their own hands, trying to 'help' God out in this scenario. However, God did not forsake His promise to them, and still blessed them according to the promise. Ultimately Abram placed his faith in God, and God placed His righteousness on Abram. This leads us to our final point today.

### 3. GOD DECLARES US RIGHTEOUS BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH

The Bible is clear that righteousness is not something we can obtain through our own efforts.

Paul reminds us of this truth when he explains that no one is righteous and we all have fallen short of God's glory (*Romans 3:10, 23*). Further, he explains that any effort to earn righteousness looks like rubbish to our Holy and perfect God (*Philippians 3:8*). Because of that, our hope for salvation has to come from outside of ourselves. Grace is our only hope.

Abram placed his faith in God and His perfect redemptive plan. Because of that declaration of faith, God declared him righteous. Why would God do that? Because our faith is the thing that pleases God the most (*Hebrews 11:6*). God is not looking for our stuff, it is all His anyway (*Psalms 24:1*). He is looking for our trust and our love. This comes through a faith-based relationship with Him. When we respond in that way, God credits us as righteous and holy.

In the same way, you and I can be made righteous today through our faith. Paul says, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (*2 Corinthians 5:21*). Jesus Christ knew no sin but took on our sin when He was nailed to the cross. He did this so that we might be able to take on His perfect righteousness through faith. Martin Luther called this "the great exchange." Jesus took on our sin, and we get to take on His righteousness. The key that opens the door to that amazing transaction is simply our faith. When we trust in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, God looks at us just like He did for Abram, and declares us righteous.

One of the basic lessons in "the school of faith" is: God's will must be fulfilled in God's way and in God's time.<sup>6</sup>

Genesis 15:6 is quoted twice by Paul (*Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6*) and once by James (*James 2:23*) to confirm justification has always come by faith.

<sup>5</sup> *The New American Commentary, Vol 1B, p. 167.*

<sup>6</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Weirsbe Bible Commentary*, p. 68.

This is amazing because Abram was a pagan man with plenty of unrighteousness in his heart. But when he placed his faith in God, the Lord no longer saw him as a sinner destined to death. He saw him as righteous and destined for eternity with Him. This same offer is available for you and me today. It does not matter what sins have entangled your life. Through Jesus Christ, there is an offer of grace to all through faith in Him.

## HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

We live in a culture of wanting and expecting everything to happen quickly. When we get impatient over a microwave cooking dinner in two minutes, there is an issue. And I say that as a confessional.

God's timing is perfect, which means His timing is not always our timing. He is perfect and we are not.

The story of Abram reminds us that God has a purpose for each of our lives. His plan, our purpose is our theme this year. God's plan was to use Abram to build a nation. It did not happen overnight or in a course of weeks or even months. But it was years in the making, and the nation that Abram gave birth to still exists today. God fulfilled His promise by showing grace to Abram even after Abram doubted and took matters into his own hands.

God's grace is one of patience, forgiveness, redemption, and righteousness. The good news today is that salvation is available to all, just as it was to Abram, by grace, and through faith.