

A Tale of Two Cities

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[0 : 00] As confusing as some of the genealogies can be, this is the Word of the Lord. And it's the Word that God has for us this morning. And I thank you guys for doing your best to read that.

It amazes me sometimes when I listen to the audio Bible and they read that like anything else. And it's pretty amazing the skill that they have. Some people say that the world only has two types of people.

You guys have heard this, I'm sure. However, they say that there's followers and leaders. There's dreamers and doers. The users, the creators.

And of course, all the people who say that and divide the world into these two categories think that they belong to the latter category. The people who create, the entrepreneurs, the visionaries, the doers and go-getters of this world.

But Genesis 10-12 envisions a far more fundamental category that divides the world. It teaches us that we're all city builders. We're all building cities. And we're building one of two cities.

[1 : 04] Either the city of man or the city of God. And which city we're living for changes everything about our lives. And what this passage teaches us is that God calls us to be sojourners journeying toward the city of God.

Not settlers in the city of man. We are called to be sojourners journeying toward the city of God. Not settlers in the city of man. So we're going to talk about it in those terms.

First, we'll talk about the city of man, chapters 10 and 11. Then we'll talk about the city of God in chapter 12. If you look at the list, the genealogy in chapter 10, verses 1 to 32, if you count them up, the number 7 stands out as prominent.

There's a lot of number 7s in this list. So Japheth has 7 sons, according to verse 2, as well as 7 grandsons. Egypt is said to have 7 sons. And more importantly, all the sons, all the nations here descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

If you count them up, it adds up to 70. And 70 is a traditional round number used by Jews and Jewish writers to refer to a large number of descendants. You see that in Genesis 46, 27.

[2 : 19] All the persons of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt were 70. You see that in 2 Kings 10, 1, it says Ahab had 70 sons in Samaria. So the fact that this is not supposed to be an exhaustive list, but rather kind of a symbol, a representative number, is seen in the fact that repeatedly it says that the nations spread from these people groups.

So all the nations of the world came from these groups. So 70 is really the representative number. It's not an exhaustive list, but it does represent the whole world. All the nations of the world came from this group, descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

And in the midst of this so-called table of the nations, there is this group that is particularly prominent. It's the Hamites, the sons of Ham. And the reason for that is because, as you remember from the end of chapter 9, Noah blesses Shem.

And Shem, the descendants of Shem are what we know as the Jewish people. It's Shemite is where we get the word Semite, right? Semitic people. And then the descendants of Ham, the most prominent of them is Canaan.

So Canaan is the son of Ham that Noah curses for dishonoring him by making a spectacle of his nakedness. When he was drunk, he got drunk and got naked. His son Ham dishonored him by making a public spectacle of him.

[3 : 36] And so he cursed Ham's son Canaan. And that was included in that narrative to show us, to tell the Israelites that it is their God-given destiny to go and conquer Canaan, that that's the land that God has given to them.

And so that's why, because these nations descended from Ham have a particularly close relationship with Israel, they're given particular attention in this genealogy.

And that's why in verse 19 it tells you exactly what the boundaries of Canaan are. So the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma, and Zeboim as far as Lasha.

These are the boundaries. Why does the Bible include that? That doesn't mean anything to us, it seems, as we read it. Why is it there? Because to the Israelites, the original audience who's hearing this, reading this, for them, this is their instruction.

This is the land. These are the boundaries. It is your job to go and conquer it, because God has given it to you. And even in the list of the Hamites, one particular individual stands out.

[4 : 41] If you look at verses 8 to 10, it says, Cush fathered Nimrod. He was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord.

Therefore, it is said, like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Iraq, Akat, Kalna, in the land of Shinar.

Now, the fact that Nimrod is described as a mighty man is not necessarily a compliment, because if you remember, the last people who were described as mighty men, heroes, were the Nephilim, right?

The people who, the human daughters who intermarried with angelic beings, fallen angels, and gave birth to Nephilim, who were known as heroes, warriors, men of renown.

Now, there isn't an explicit connection made here between them and Nimrod, but the fact that he's described as mighty men, it does have nuances that are not good. And he's described as a mighty hunter before the Lord.

[5 : 43] The phrase before the Lord doesn't mean that he was a godly hunter, that he hunted before the Lord. It's just a superlative. It means that there's no one under heaven that was a hunter like him. So he was the mighty hunter before the Lord.

And so it seems, I mean, that makes sense, right? I mean, if someone is a warrior or a hero, it translates well to hunting, like game. So he seems to have been there. And these two characteristics, being a mighty warrior on the one hand and being a great hunter, were the two traits that were most prized in Mesopotamian kings.

And so he's kind of being, Nimrod is here being described as kind of the ideal kind of pagan king, the ancient Near Eastern king. And it seems that he was quite an influential and powerful king, because he says that he went on to found some of the major nations and kingdoms in the ancient Near East.

And the most relevant for us, of course, is Babel. It says he's the one that started Babel in the land of Shinar. Babylon is very possibly the earliest foundation of Mesopotamia and certainly the most prestigious among all the kingdoms in the ancient Near East.

And the word Babel means the gate of the god. You can see their human hubris in the way they named the city. In other words, they're saying this is the closest you can get to heaven.

[6 : 58] This is the gate of the gods. This is where the gods dwell and come. And so they're saying this is the mightiest civilization. And so Babel in the land of Shinar is where we turn to in chapter 11.

Verses 1 to 2 begin this way. Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

They migrated from the east. This expression actually means toward the east. That's how it's translated in chapter 13, verse 11, about how Lot journeyed east.

And that makes more sense geographically as well. So they're not coming from the east, but they're going toward the east. And if you think about it that way, then you also, it makes connections to what happened earlier in chapter 3, 24, chapter 4, 16, where Adam and Eve are banished from the garden of Eden to go toward the east, further east.

And then Cain likewise is banished from the land to go east of Eden. So the people, humanity is constantly traveling east, away from the presence of God, the garden of Eden. And Babylon is another example of that.

[8 : 06] And after they have settled, the people decide to build for themselves a city and a tower. Verses 3 to 4. And they said to one another, come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.

And they had brick for stone and vitamin for mortar. Then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens. And let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be

dispersed over the face of the whole earth.

Now, this is well crafted, literally. So if you read the words in Hebrew, a lot of the same consonants as the word babble, so the B sounds, the L sounds, and the P sounds that sound like B, just all over this passage.

So it's almost like right when these guys start to talk, they start to babble. Everything that they say, it sounds like babble. And the babble, the word, it also sounds very much like the Hebrew word for folly.

So it's describing these literary devices that are being used to portray the Babylonians as full of folly and babbling, the hubris. And so in the words, they're saying they're bringing a city and a tower.

[9 : 17] That's an example of a hand diatist. It's basically a literary device. It's a figure of a speech when you use two different words connected by an and to convey a single concept.

So, for example, when we drink a cup of coffee and we say, oh, that's nice and hot. So two separate words, nice and hot. But we don't mean that the coffee is nice and that it's hot separately. No, we mean that it's hot to the nice degree.

That's what we mean, right? So two words form a single concept. And that's what a city and a tower mean. So we could better translate it as a city tower or maybe a towering city.

They're building an entire city. This is an urbanizing enterprise. And you can tell even just from the narrative that that's how those two words are being used. Because if you look at verse 8, after God's punishment, it simply says that they left off building the city.

And the tower is not mentioned. So they form the same idea, same concept. They're building up a city that reaches to the heavens. And they're saying that basically, you know what? You think the gods only dwell in the heavens?

[10 : 20] We can dwell there too. We are the Babylonians and we dwell in the gate of the gods. But it's kind of reminiscent of Cain, right? Because Cain's the first one to build a city. So he's exiled, banished by God to fruitless labor and wandering.

And in order to counteract that curse, he builds a city so that he could survive, right? Now, just like Cain, then these Babylonians are also building this city, building this towering city.

Not for good reasons. They're building it without any reference to God whatsoever. In fact, their goal is just like Adam and Eve's when they reach out and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that were forbidden to them.

Their goal is to become like God, right? So that's what you see here. It says, let's build a towering city with its top in the heavens, right? So it's a sacrilege, really, what they're doing.

And then they say they want to make a name for themselves. That's the goal. And to protect themselves from being dispersed over the face of the whole earth. So in other words, they want two things.

[11 : 24] They want glory and they want security. So humanity is once again seeking to usurp divine prerogative. It's God who is glorious and it is God who is prerogative to provide and protect the people he created.

Yet they are taking things into their own hands. And so God deliberates within the Godhead and then decides to intervene as he did with Adam and Eve. And the story of Babel is structured chiasmatically, again, like the story of Noah.

So it has corresponding elements in the two halves that match each other. And verse 5 is the centerfold of that structure. It's the hinge where the story begins to turn and it says this, And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built.

Now, it's easy to miss this. But if you read that again, this is just dripping with humor and irony. Right? Because these guys are building this great towering city saying, We'll reach the heavens. The top will reach the heavens. And then, but that towering city is so small and short and insignificant that it's barely visible to God that he must come down in order to see it.

[12 : 39] That's what's going on. He says, The Lord came down to see the city and the tower. That's the ultimate insult to what the Babylonians are doing. And the Lord issues his verdict and meets out his punishment in verses 6 to 8.

And the Lord said, Behold, they are one people and they all have one language. And this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down. And they confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth. And they left

off building the city.

Now, at first glance, it might sound like God feels a little bit insecure. Right? Or threatened by what humanity's limitless potential. But that's not at all what's going on. And verse 5 should give us a hint that that's not what's going on.

Because the Lord God has to come down to see it. Right? What's going on instead is very similar to what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden. Remember, they take of the tree of the knowledge, good and evil, eat. But then God says, Lest they also take from the tree of life and then live forever.

[13:42] Right? He banishes them. God's concern is that they will live forever in that state of alienation from God. Separation from God. In that sin. So he banishes them. And their mortality lives as a perpetual reminder of the fact that something in the world is not right.

That they need to be reconciled to God. Restored to him. To have eternal life that they were created for. So in the same way, that's what's happening here. So God says, Nothing is impossible for them. They're going to build a heaven.

So God confuses our language. Lest they, in their humanity and in their unity, accomplish all that they set their mind to. And then decide, oh, we don't need God after all.

We can do everything on ourselves. So again, the limit imposed on humanity is there as a perpetual reminder that something is not right in the world. So all the divisions in the world, the cultural differences, the things that prevent us from all uniting together to accomplish everything, those are perpetual reminders for us.

Something is not right. We need God. We need to be reconciled to him. That's the only way we can be reconciled to one another. And God's punishment, of course, fits their sinful rebellion, as it always does.

[14:54] So their goal was that they would not be scattered by building a city. And God's punishment, of course, is to scatter them, to disperse them. In verse 3, they said, Let us make bricks.

And in verse 7, God says, Let us confuse their language. And the Hebrew words behind let us make and let us confuse are almost identical. They look and sound almost identical.

So God's, again, giving a punishment that fits their crime. And the Babylonians had named their city Babel, saying this is the gate of the gods. But instead, Moses compares it to the Hebrew word balau, which means to babble, to be confused, to mix.

You think that's the gate of the gods? No, it's confusion. It's folly. That's the end of your enterprise. At this point, we have to ask ourselves the question, why does God care that humanity has decided to live together in a concentrated area?

What's wrong with that? Right? Right? He created us for community. What's wrong with cities? What's wrong with urbanization? What's wrong with these people staying in Babel? The clue is given throughout verses 8 to 9 because the word earth is repeated three times.

[16:11] And it highlights something because if you remember Genesis 2, 8, chapter 2, verse 8, God says to humanity, commands them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.

That's their call. That's their God-given mandate to fill the earth, to go forth and fill the whole earth with the image of God. And by doing so, bring glory to him. And the Babylonians are saying, no, we're not going.

We're digging their heels and saying, we're staying right here and make glory for ourselves. Not spread the image of God. Spread our glory, our image, right here in this city.

But, of course, it's God's plan that ultimately prevails. And it's really fascinating. In Luke 10, 1 to 12, when Jesus sends out his missionaries, it says he sends them out two by two.

And it says that he sends out 72 disciples. Have you ever wondered, why 72? That seems like such an odd number, right? It seems to be a pretty random number. But there's a reason for that.

[17:17] Because the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Genesis 10, actually, instead of 70 nations, it lists 72 nations. The table of nations that had, it lists 72 nations.

And, in fact, there is a textual variant for the Luke passage as well. And some of them say that Jesus sent out 70 disciples instead of 72. So, I mean, which one was original?

I mean, that question is not as important as the fact that the biblical writers are intentionally making the connection between Genesis 10 and Luke 10. Is that God created all these nations.

There are 70 nations in the whole world. And that's why Jesus sends 70 disciples out to go to spread his gospel. Because the goal of Jesus' mission is not to save one nation, one people group,

one race, but to save every race and every people group and every nation.

That's why Jesus does that. And that's our God-given calling. To be part of that cosmic enterprise.

[18 : 21] And let me ask you, what city are you building? A city of happy marriage and a family.

A city of high-paying job and comfort. A city of invention and innovation that will improve the human condition. A city of scientific discovery that will improve the prognosis of certain diseases.

A city of social justice that will help the marginalized. All of these things are well and good. But what are you doing these things for?

Or better, whom are you doing these things for? Because if the purpose for which you do these things is the same as the man of Babel, let us make a name for ourselves.

So that you might be praised as creative and innovative, just and compassionate. So that you might be sought out by others for advice. So that you might make a mark on history.

[19 : 32] Then God's not impressed with what you're doing. He'll have to come down to take a look at what you've done. No matter how lofty your accomplishments, God will have to condescend to even witness it.

And his evaluation of your work will not be favorable. Augustine, the esteemed 5th century Christian theologian, wrote his magnum opus, City of God, after the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410.

And that sack of Rome left the Roman Empire reeling because they were in disbelief and shocked.

The fact that this sprawling empire could fall. That Rome could fall. And in that light, when Christians were confused because they were starting to identify kingdom of God with the Roman Empire.

And in that time, Augustine wrote that the city of God is not the same as the city of man. The Roman Empire is not the kingdom of God. And in this writing, he says this about the virtues of pagan Rome.

He describes the virtues of pagan Rome as splendid vices. Wonderful phrase. Splendid vices.

They're not true virtue. They're splendid because they're virtuous deeds.

[20 : 45] But they are vices because they are carried out for non-virtuous reasons. In a man-centered, man-glorifying rather than God-centered, God-glorifying way.

And that's not pleasing to him. Think about it this way. Imagine an ambassador for the United States of America. Let's say he operates with all the pomp and glory and power that an ambassador is supposed to function with.

He confers with other heads of state and he makes decisions of national and international import.

And so what if this guy, this ambassador, he goes to Russia and he encourages Putin to take over Syria so that he could open up business opportunities for himself in Russia.

What if this ambassador goes to North Korea and then he gets millions of dollars in exchange for giving away U.S. trade secrets, military secrets, teaches them how to put nuclear warheads on a long-range ballistic missile?

I mean, he's functioning as an ambassador, all right? Right? He's got tremendous power and influence. But is he doing his job? He's a completely useless ambassador.

[22 : 07] Likewise, we could accomplish all the great things in this world, but if we are not representing the God who created us, if we're not doing it for the glory of the one who made us, we're being useless creatures.

We're not fulfilling the purpose for which God created us. Are you building the city of God or the city of man? And this is not a relevant message for non-Christians only.

Every Christian needs to hear this message also. Check. In chapter 11, verses 10 to 26, we get a fuller genealogy of Shem, which transitions us to the story of Abram.

But before we get to Abram, we find this in verses 31 and 32. It says, Terah is from the chosen line, and the line of Shem.

It seems that his family has, by this point, likely strayed from worshiping the Lord God. And you can see this from several clues, but the name Terah is most likely related to the Hebrew word for moon.

[23 : 40] And the names of his daughter-in-law, Sarai and Milka, both come from lunar worship, moon worship. So, for example, there was a moon god named Sin.

Saratu was his wife, and Malkitu was his daughter. So it sounds very much like Sarai in Malkitu.

And this is all the more plausible because Ur of Chaldeans and Haran were both areas where moon worship was prominent.

So it seems that they were involved in this, and they are being kind of called out of that. Maybe God called Terah out of that. And that's why later God calls Abram specifically. So Terah, it says that he started to journey toward Canaan, to go into the land of Canaan.

But when they came to Haran, it says they settled there. The implication of the narrative is they should have kept going to Canaan, the promised land, but instead they settled in Haran.

And settling anywhere outside of Canaan, the promised land, is a bad thing in the book of Genesis. It's always the people who are outside of God's chosen line, the promised, His grace, that settle outside of Canaan.

[24 : 50] Let me give you some examples. Cain settles in the land of Nod, Genesis 4.16. It's the inhabitants of Babel that settled in Shinar, chapter 11.2.

In Genesis 13.12, it says that while Abram settled in the land of Canaan, the promised land, Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his far tent as far as Sodom.

And we know what happens to Sodom, judgment and death and destruction. Ishmael, not Isaac, Ishmael settles in the wilderness of Paran.

Genesis 36.78 says that Jacob and Esau, that the land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock because it was so big. So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir.

Esau is Edom. This is contrasted intentionally with Jacob. It says Genesis 37.1 of Jacob, he lived in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan.

[25 : 49] Unless you're in the land of Canaan, you're not supposed to settle. Until you're there, you keep sojourning, you keep going, you keep journeying, you're not supposed to settle.

The only time when the chosen people of God are said to have settled outside of Canaan is later in Egypt. And you know what happens there? Enslavement. So that God must once again rescue them out of Egypt to take them back to Canaan.

So settling in a land other than Canaan is a sure way to exclude yourself from God's promise and favor. And it says Terah settled in Horan. Who knows why he settled?

Maybe he just found a good community there. Or maybe he was just wary of living the pilgrim's life. But we know this is not good because immediately, the next thing we learn about Terah is that he died in Horan.

Where you settle is where you die. The days of Terah were 205 years and Terah died in Horan.

[26 : 57] Genesis tells us 31 places, 31 people dying. He says they died. But only three times they tell you where they died.

It's because it's important. He says he died in Horan. Now if you are a Christian, let me ask you, where have you settled? Perhaps when you first gave your life to Jesus, you were zealous and you wanted to do everything for him.

But since then, you have settled. Perhaps God has called you to marriage, but you have settled for living together. Perhaps God has called you to singleness and chastity, but you have settled for serial dating and voyeurism.

Perhaps God has called you to radical generosity toward the church and toward those in need. but you have settled for giving just 10% or the spare change that happens to be in your wallet at that moment.

Maybe God has called you to excellence in your workplace, but you have settled for mediocrity, for doing what is passable. Perhaps God has called you to be an intercessory prayer warrior, to daily bring before God the needs of his saints, but instead you have settled for praying five minutes a day or just for moments before your meals.

[28 : 30] God has called you to be an intercessory prayer, God has called every single one of us to be his missionaries, to be his agents in seeking and saving the lost, but maybe we have settled for just hanging out with our comfortable group of Christian friends.

God has called all of us to live every single moment of our lives for him and for his glory.

But maybe we have settled for giving him few minutes a day and a half day a week. C.S. Lewis writes about this in his book, *Screwtape Letters*.

The book is a series of imagined dialogues between Wormwood and Screwtape. Screwtape is the uncle who is advising Wormwood on how to lure and seduce man to hell. And he advises him in this particular insightful dialogue to use small sins and pleasures instead of big sins and pleasures.

And he writes this, You will say that these are very small sins and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only

thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the enemy.

[29 : 54] It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick.

Indeed, the safest road to hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

Where you settle is where you die. Where have you settled? As far as our personal spiritual state is concerned, adultery is no worse than lust if lust is enough to edge us away from God.

Murder is no worse than anger if anger is enough to edge us away from God. Voyeurism is no worse than Netflix if Netflix is enough to edge us away from God.

Militant atheism is no worse than cynicism if cynicism is enough to edge us away from God. Don't ever settle down.

[31 : 08] Regularly take inventory of your spiritual life. Daily repent of your sins, small and large, and seek to give every ounce of your energy to live for Him. I love Jonathan Edwards' resolutions.

I don't know if you guys have read that. When he was very young, he wrote a series of resolutions for how he has resolved to live for God. And some of those say this, Resolved, I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory and my own good and profit and pleasure.

That go together. Resolved never to do any matter of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God. Resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

Resolved to live with all my might while I do live. Don't settle. God has not called us to be settlers in the city of man.

Instead, God has called us to be sojourners journeying toward the city of God. And we find a fine example of that in Abram starting in chapter 12. With Abram, we find a turning point in history from primeval history to patriarchal history.

[32 : 27] And so far, we've seen a recurring pattern in the book of Genesis. God creates. He shows his grace and he blesses creation. And then creation mucks it up. They sin and mess up.

So God punishes and judges and then again continues his grace. That's the pattern we've seen over and over again. That's what we see here again. God blessed the line of Shem to be prosperous and to grow and to multiply.

And then after that, we find the sin of Babel. And then God once again shows grace. And this time it's through Abram. Verse 1 begins, Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

Notice how God's call to Abram becomes progressively more demanding and narrow. First he says, Go from your country. Okay, I mean, I could leave my country. That's not that hard.

And then he says, Leave your kindred, the people who are like you, your cultural group, your ethnic group, the people you are akin to.

[33 : 32] And then it escalates further, Leave your father's house, your very own family. Leave them. Your closest relations. Isn't this exactly what Jesus has in mind when he says, Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me?

Our highest allegiance is to the Lord. And anything that's in the way, we have to forsake to follow him.

And inversely parallel to the progressively narrowing call of God on Abram is God's promise to bless him. God's promise to bless him is increasingly wider.

And you see that in verses 2 to 3. And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The word blessed is repeated five times here and the consonants of the word blessed sound like Abram.

[34 : 39] So Abram is intricately tied to all of God's blessings here. And at first, God says, Abram alone is blessed. Abram, I will bless you. And then second, God says, his name will become a synonym, an embodiment, a byword for blessing for others as well.

And then third, he says that those who bless Abram will themselves be blessed. And then fourth and finally, all the families of the earth will be blessed through him. It gets larger and larger, expands God's blessing as Abram obeys.

And in order to understand God's promise to Abram well, we have to compare it back to what God did to Babel, the people of Babel.

Because if you notice, the very first word that people of Babel say is what? Come. And the very first word that God says to Abram is go.

At Babel, it says that men wanted to make a name for themselves. And in here, it is God who promises Abram, I will make your name great. At Babel, the people did not want to be dispersed over the face of the earth.

[35 : 46] But here, God promised Abram that he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. It's again a reversal of all the things that the people of Babel were trying to do.

Abram is called to do the opposite. He's the model of obedience. And we see this clearly in his response in verses 4 to 9 of chapter 12. God's first word to Abram was go.

And Abram's first, the first verb attributed to Abram is that he went. He obeys right away. So Abram went as the Lord had told him. And Lot went with him.

Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. So it seems like since Lot's father died, his father's name was Haran. Lot's father died prematurely. He died before his father did.

It seems that he takes on his nephew to take care of him. That's why Lot comes with Abram. And it says that he takes his family and he journeys to the land of Canaan.

[36 : 42] And unlike Terah, he gets there. And he goes from Shechem, the northern part, the northern boundary of the promised land. And he goes to Bethel and then to the Negev, which is the southernmost boundary of the land of Canaan.

So this shows that Abram is obeying God and actually traversing the entire land of Canaan. And verse, but however, it's the promise to Abram that God made doesn't seem immediately to be fulfilled.

We don't know exactly how it's going to be fulfilled because if you look at verse 6, it tells us at that time the Canaanites were in the land. This is the land that God promised Abram to show, that he would show him, but God, it's already occupied.

So there doesn't seem to be a prospect for land there for Abram. And not only that, what did God say in verse 7? He said, to your offspring I will give this land. Now that's such an outlandish prediction because not only does he not have the land, he told us earlier in chapter 11, verse 30, that his wife Sarai was barren.

She had no child. So what God promises Abram is basically a pipe dream. Offspring? You want to give this land to my descendants? But Abram lives by faith and not by sight.

[38 : 06] And so at the end of verse 7 it says, so he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. He builds an altar in the land of Canaan and worships the Lord God there.

He's spiritually staking out the land for himself. Yes, I don't own this right now physically, but by building the altar there he essentially owns it. He's taking possession of it.

This is the land God promised me and I will build an altar here. That's why it says in Hebrews 11, 8 to 10, by faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance and he went out not knowing where he was going.

By faith he went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land living in tents with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise for he was looking forward to this city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

He was looking ahead. He was sojourning toward the city of God not settling in the city of man. And the land of Canaan of course it's a type of the promised land of heaven of perfect communion in relationship with God and so it's pointing to that ultimate reality and Abraham was in faith even looking forward to that and that becomes a paradigm for all the future followers to walk by faith and not by sight.

[39 : 37] God calls us to be sojourners journeying toward the city of God not settlers in the city of man. Are you living as a settler in the city of man?

Or are you still journeying toward the city of God? The Bible repeatedly tells us our citizenship is not here on earth it's in heaven.

1 Peter 2 11 says Beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

It's because we are sojourners we're here on earth as it is now it's only our temporary home so if we begin to feel at home here then we're beginning to become aliens in the promised land.

And we have no excuse because Abraham or Abram at this point he's still Abram he lived in the age of promise but not in the age of fulfillment.

[40 : 45] he was promised all these things but he did not yet see all these promises come to fruition. So why is the story of this Jewish man from the third millennium B.C.

important to us? Why do we read about Abram? We live in the third millennium A.D. And most of us are not even Jewish.

Why do we care about Abram? Because it is through Abram his line through his descendants that Jesus Christ the Savior of the world comes.

And that's the genealogy that Luke 3 23-28 makes. He connects Abram to Adam and he connects Jesus to Abraham. So the promise to Abram that God made that all the families of the earth will be blessed is fulfilled in Jesus.

And that's why even though there's a very persistent misunderstanding of the Old Testament when people look at the Old Testament we think oh man God used to be a little bit insecure, narrow, particularistic, favored the Jews and rejected everybody else.

[41 : 52] And then finally when New Testament came he was a little bit more enlightened and compassionate and gracious toward the other nations. That's not what's going on. We think that when God chooses Abram and makes these promises to Abram that it was to the exclusion of everybody else.

No, but in reality what's going on is that Abram is the means by which all the nations will be blessed. The reason why God cares so zealously for the Jewish people, the reason why he cares and protects Abram so compassionately and tenderly and intimately is because he knows that that is the line through which the salvation of the world will come.

It's because on that line hinges the salvation of the world. So for that reason, with Jesus in view at the line, at the end of that line, he protects and preserves the Jewish people.

And it's only he that can save us because Abram will fail. You'll see in the ensuing narratives, he's not perfect. And Abram's descendants will fail.

In fact, they're so bad. In Exodus, God says, you know what? Moses, step aside. I'm going to wipe them out. I'm going to start over with you. The people, the great nation that he promised, he threatens to wipe out.

[43 : 11] And thankfully, Moses intercedes. So the Israel is preserved. But no one can fulfill what God wants humanity to fulfill, to live for him and to represent him, to fill the earth and subdue it for his glory.

No one can do that except for Jesus because he's a son of God and son of man. He fulfilled it perfectly for us. And because he's a son of God, he can represent God and vindicate us from divine judgment and wrath.

But because he's a son of man, he can represent us and die for our sins. And that's what he does on the cross when he dies as an atoning sacrifice for our sins and rises again.

And our default state is to be like the people of Babel, to lift, to make a name for ourselves. And it's only when we turn from our own ways to turn toward living for God, for his glory, and to let him make a name for himself.

That's when we enter the promised land. That's when we become recipients of this promise that was given to Abram. And when we do, Jesus helps us and he fulfills it in a wonderful way.

[44 : 23] We see an example of this in Acts, in chapter 2, at Pentecost. You guys remember at Babel, people had one language, but it was confused so that they could no longer understand each other.

When Jesus ascends and sends the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost, everybody speaks different languages, come from all different cultures, but they're given one language, a tongue, and now everybody understands each other.

It's a reversal of the curse that came on humanity that happens in Acts 2. Jesus, his ministry, is the beginning of the reversal of all that is wrong and corrupt about this world and about ourselves, and we get to be a part of that mission.

There's nothing mundane or boring about the Christian life. We get to be a part of God's world-reaching, history-spanning, eternity-shaping mission.

That's our calling. God calls us to be sojourners journeying toward the city of God, not settlers in the city of man.

[45 : 37] As your pastor, as I pray for you, my greatest fear is not that you'll fall into some kind of spectacular wickedness or sin. That's not my fear. My fear is that little by little, with small compromises and little sins, you're edged away from God, that you settle.

Let me conclude by reading just a couple stanzas from this stirring poem written by a British missionary to China. His name is C.T. Studd, Charles Thomas Studd. It goes this way.
Only one life, the still small voice, gently pleads for a better choice, bidding my selfish aims to leave,
and to God's holy will to cleave.

Only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last, and when I am dying, how happy I'll be if the lamp of my life has been burned out for thee.

Let's pray together. O Father, let your word pierce our hearts today, and let your spirit, the fire of God, so inflame us and set us on fire so it burns away the dross, the sin, from our lives, so we can persevere to the end, saying that we have burned every millimeter of our wick to glorify you, serving you, loving you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

[47 : 30] Lord, do that for our church. Fill us, O God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.