

Sermon - Great Expectations – Abram

Pastor Ed Blonski | December 14, 2022

Expectations of Promises

As we continue this advent series called “Great Expectations” we find ourselves less than two weeks before Christmas!

Expectations are running high this close to the big day!

Expectations we put on ourselves – like finalizing plans for the family celebration, menu, and gifts.

And expectations heaped on us by others – to act a certain way, be in a certain place at a certain time, and to present certain gifts to certain people.



Expectations are related to promises. Promises we make to ourselves and promises we make to others.

When you make a promise to someone, it creates an expectation in that person that you will keep your promise.

And no one really makes a promise to themselves without the expectation that they will, at the very least, try to keep that promise.

When God Makes a Promise



When you think about promises made by God, you most likely have the expectation that God will keep any promise He makes.

And that would be natural! After all, God is, well, God! And a loving and powerful God should be expected to keep His promises.

In fact, from what I know of God, He almost has to keep any promise He makes. It's not in God's nature to break promises – which is akin to lying.

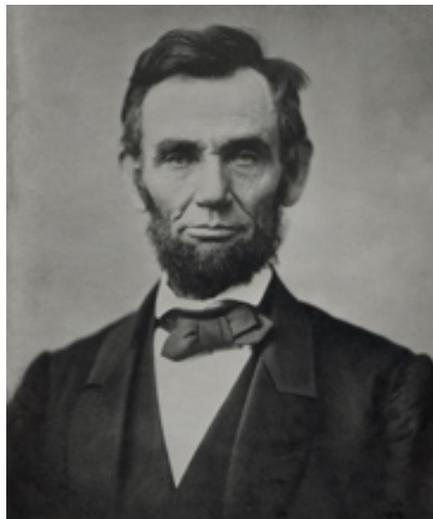
Yet, you and I both know people who believe that God has, indeed, broken promises in the past, especially in their own lives.

However, I think the truth is that God doesn't break His promises, but instead keeps them in ways that are unexpected. And, therefore, unlooked for.

The Bible is full of stories of this very thing – God makes promises, people expect God to keep His promises, God fulfills His promises – but often in ways that are quite different from people's expectations!

Abram Shapes Our Example of Expectation of God's Promises

Most people know him as Abraham. No, not this Abraham.



This Abraham.



The story of Abram (later known as Abraham) begins with promises made to him by God.

His story begins when he was known as Abram. And that is where we will begin, with the story of Abram that can shape our expectations of God's promises.

We're going to explore promises – three, in fact – that God makes to Abram.

We're also going to explore how the Bible tells us that God kept these promises to Abram.

And finally, we're going to see how this can shape our own expectations of God's promises.

How This Relates to Christmas



Let me pause for a moment to touch briefly on how this relates to Christmas.

We're ten days away from Christmas Eve. It's so close you can almost taste it!

And yet, tonight's Great Expectation happens 2000 years before the first Christmas!

How in the world can the two things be related?

Keep in mind that you and I are also 2000 years from the first Christmas! We're as far from Christmas as Abram was!

And yet I'll show you that we are just as close to Christmas as Abram was – based on the expectations of how God will fulfill His promises.

The Three Promises of God to Abram

Abram was minding his own business, establishing a life for himself with his wife Sarai in what is today known as Babylon.

His father asked him to travel with him to live in another part of the world – a place that would be known as Haran, about 600 miles north and west of where they were currently living.

They would follow a route that ran along the Euphrates River.



While in Haran, God came to Abram and made three promises to him.

Make him a “Great Nation” (many descendants)

The first promise was, “I will make of you a great nation.”

This means that God was going to expand his family with many descendants.

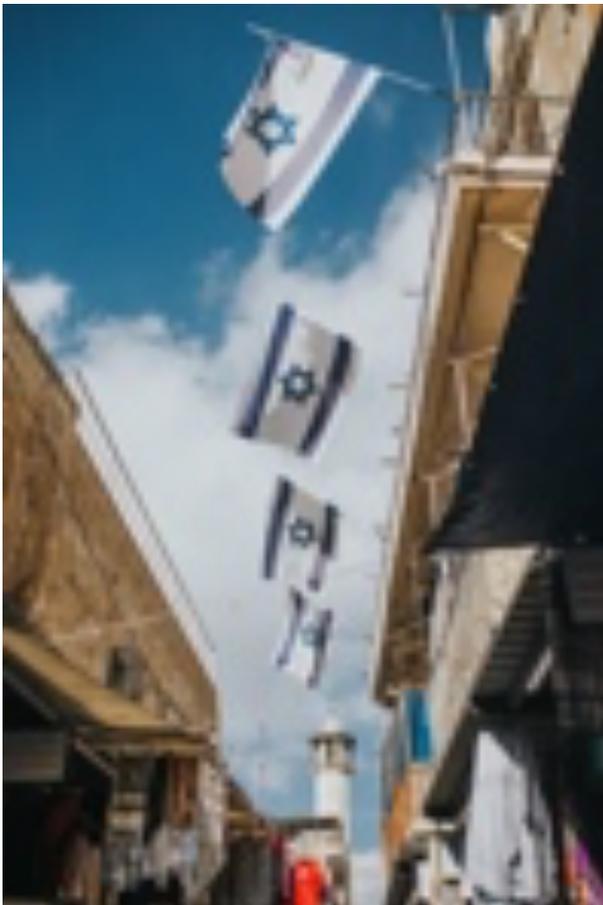
Right off the bat, God makes an incredible promise!

Because Abram was in his 80's and was married to Sarai who was well past the age of child-bearing, being in her 70's. But she also couldn't have children at all, what the Bible calls “barren.”

So this promise of God must have been astounding to Abram!

But before Abram can even get a “but...” out, God continues on with His promises.

He would have God's blessing and protection



“I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse.”

In other words, God will protect Abram and bless him. This goes right along with the promise of many descendants.

God will provide the protection and blessing that will lead to and allow for many descendants.

Still, God doesn't let Abram get a word in edgewise and continues His promises.

Through one of them all nations would be blessed

“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This is the promise that most relates to Christmas because this is the continuation of the promise made to Adam and Eve back in Genesis 3:15 about a Savior.

This is the Messianic promise that would be fulfilled with the birth of Jesus – a distant descendant of Abram born in Bethlehem.

Jesus will grow up to carry the sins of all the world on Himself.

He will truly be God's blessing to the entire world!

Indeed, in Jesus “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This is truly amazing.

God shows up seemingly out of the blue to this old man, with an old wife – who couldn't have children – and promises enough descendants to be considered an entire nation, promises to bless and protect him so that he could be the father of many, and promises that one of those descendants will be the Savior of the world!

Abram Like and Unlike Us

How would we expect Abram to react to this? We might expect Abram to question God.

But the Bible tells us that Abram simply packed up all his stuff, his family and with his wife went where the Lord led him.

Now, the Biblical record tells us everything we need to know but almost certainly doesn't tell us every last detail about this story.

Abram didn't even question God? That would not be what we'd expect!

But we do know that Abram does exactly that, after some time passes.

In some ways Abram is so unlike us. His faith is so strong in God that he just packs up and goes where God leads him.

But Abram is not some super saint. He will be like so many of us and question how God will pull off this incredible three-fold promise.

God answers him by making a covenant with him. This will be known as the “Abrahamic Covenant” that will shape and sustain what would become the nation of Israel for 2000 years until the birth of Jesus.

It will get them through their four centuries of slavery in Egypt.

It will get them through their forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

It will get them through the up-and-down period of the judges.

It will get them through the tumultuous and glorious period of the kings.

It will get them through the dark times of exile and return to await the coming of the Messiah.

That’s quite a covenant, quite a promise, quite the expectations!

And it is only possible because it comes from God! And God the Holy Spirit gives the faith to accept it!

Not just for Abram.

But for you and me as well!

Our “Abram Expectations”

These “Abram Expectations” are for us as well.

While the covenant made to Abram was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the spirit of the expectations is still ours!

A legacy of faith (to the family that will come after us)

God’s promises to us can we viewed as an expectation of a “great nation.” But in this way.

i. Direct Descendants

God promises you a “legacy of faith.” As you believe in Christ, you can pass on that faith to your children,



grandchildren, and through them further down the family river or up the family tree.

It may seem like such little influence, but if you share Jesus with one or two children, and they share Jesus with one or two, and those share Jesus with one or two – hopefully you can see how this is going to explode into many more who love Jesus as Lord and Savior within just a handful of generations of your own family.

ii. Spiritual Descendants

But also take into consideration those who are not direct descendants that you share Jesus with! If you share Jesus with just two people, two friends or two neighbors, and they in turn share Jesus with two people, who in turn share Jesus with two people – the geometric progression is hundreds of people hearing about Jesus just from you who tells two people in a very short time.

But wait, there's more!

All Because of Jesus



iii. BLDRA

The fulfillment of the promises to Abram – the long-expected Jesus! – gives you all that God promised Abram so long ago.

Through Jesus' birth at Christmas, His perfect life, His death for the forgiveness of sins, His glorious resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven gives you God's promised protection from all that seek to destroy you!

God's Promised Protection

God's promised protection and blessing is yours from sin, death, the power of the devil, the world and your own sinful human nature!

iv. From Sin

From the very beginning – as we saw with Cain and Abel – God wants and promises protection from sin for us if only we will receive it!

Cain chose not to receive it. Abram was better at it. How about you?

By faith you have the protection and blessing of God – a faith that is strengthened whenever you hear or read the Word of God and receive the Means of Grace!

v. Death

You also have the protection from death as a follower of Jesus. Death has no power over you because God conquered death in His Son Jesus Christ.

vi. Power of the Devil

And the one who brought death and destruction into the world – the devil – is now defeated! Jesus defeated Him on the cross.

Satan has no power over you! That's God's promise to you!

I understand that this can be hard to see sometimes.

vii. The World

But that's because Satan still has some control over the world. But it is only control that people give him.

Remember this promise of Jesus, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...." It is pretty bleak in the world today, but God protects us from the world because of the authority that Jesus earned over it through His death and resurrection.

Why are things so bleak? The answer is in the Book of Revelation and you are invited to join us on Sunday mornings at 9:30 to discover the answer!

viii. Our Own Sinful Nature

Still, our lives also tend to be messy and messed up. That isn't an indication that God isn't keeping His promises, but rather an indication that we're still battling our sinful human nature.

St. Paul sheds some light on this battle in Romans 7:15-20

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. [But] it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

We can expect that God will protect us and bless us, but only if we – by faith – follow Abram by taking a backseat to God.

Here's what I mean.

Our Role is “Supporting” – Jesus Role is “Starring”

For many decades, I tried to live my faith on my own. Don't get me wrong, I still believe that faith is a gift given by God through the Means of Grace.

I'm still Lutheran.

But like Abram before me – who, when threatened by kings, took matters into his own hands to save his life – I took Philippians 2:12 as my theme verse, *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...”*

Abram did this when two kings wanted Sarai as their own and he thought they'd kill him off to take her. So he had her lie to them about their relationship.

Abram should have trusted that God would bless and protect him as He promised!

In the same way, I needed to not only take instruction from Philippians 2:12 but also encouragement from Philippians 2:13, *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”*

The two verses go together: work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

A while back, I read a book that changed how I see my role in the working out my Christian faith. In a nutshell it basically reminded me that in my salvation Jesus Christ has the starring role. I have a supporting role – as the one who receives the salvation of Jesus!

This got me to stop looking at my success or failure as a saved follower of Jesus as based solely on me.

Salvation is based solely on Jesus! And that shapes my expectations in a whole new way.

It can do the same for you!

Seeing Christmas as the Ultimate Fulfillment of the Promises Made to Abram



2000 years in the making

For one, it can help you see that Christmas was the fulfillment of the promises made to Abram that were 2000 years in the making.

God was working on something so special, and so powerful, that it wasn't going to come overnight or even in one lifetime.

Oh, it could have. God can do anything. But instead, the anticipation and expectations were so long drawn out that it made it all the more special and powerful when it did actually happen!

Abram had faith that God would do all that He promised. He had to have faith, because he didn't see it in his lifetime. Nor did his children or grandchildren.

But when Jesus was born, it was exactly the right time for the fulfillment of all those expectations!

Taking from Christmas the Ultimate Fulfillment of our 3 "Abram" Expectations

2000 years after the fact

And that can have a powerful effect on us!

For we are just as far away from the birth of Christ as Abram was!

Our Abram Expectations have also been 2000 years in the making.

And our expectations are just as special and just as powerfully fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The One through whom God blesses all the world.

So when you get frustrated that these promises of God seem so far away from being fulfilled, remember Abram.

When you get frustrated that your expectations are not being met by God, remember Abram.

God makes the same promises to you as He did to him.

And because Christmas is about God meeting Abram's expectations and fulfilling His promises to him, so Christmas this year is also all about God meeting – and surpassing – all your expectations and fulfilling His promises to you.

Come, Thou long expected Jesus, come! Amen.