Unshakeable Promises: Trusting God's Covenant Plan

Genesis 12:10–13:18

What do you do when the thing God promised you is suddenly threatened — and you have the ability to take control?

Most of us have been in that room.

Maybe it was a job that felt unstable, so you quietly updated your résumé without telling your boss. You didn't quit. You didn't make a scene. You just — quietly — started keeping your options open.

Maybe it was a friendship that started to cost more than you expected, so you pulled back. You stayed connected — but just enough. Just enough to say you were still there without actually being all in.

Maybe it was this church. You've made commitments. You're currently serving. But there's still a back door in the back of your mind — just in case God doesn't come through the way you thought He would.

We call it wisdom. We call it prudence.

What we're actually doing is leaving — because conditions got hard. Not in rebellion. Not dramatically. Quiet moves. Calculated moves. Moves that look responsible from the outside — and feel like survival from the inside.

And here's what makes it so hard to name: the pressure is real. The job instability is real. The financial strain is real. The season where you've been showing up and heaven feels quiet — that's real.

That drift — that quiet, calculated move away from where God placed you — has a name in our text this morning.

Open your Bible to Genesis 12, verse 10. This is not a story about a man who failed God. It's a story about a God who refused to let a man's fear destroy what He already promised.

Here are four irrefutable truths about a God who keeps His promise.

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1. When Fear Drives Us Out of Faith, God Remains Faithful

(Genesis 12:10–13)

As you recall, Abram has just been called.

God spoke. He answered. He packed up everything — his family, his flocks, his future — and walked away from the only life he had ever known. No map. No timeline. Just a voice and a promise.

And the promise led him to Canaan.

He built altars in Shechem. He built one in Bethel. At every major stop, he called on the name of the LORD. This is a man walking with God. Pursuing the promise.

And then verse 10 says seven words that change everything: *"There was a famine in the land."*

Don't dismiss this, because it changes Abram's trajectory.

The famine is severe. This isn't a dry season. This is the kind of famine that empties your supplies and threatens your survival. The kind that makes a man of faith start doing math instead of praying.

And the math leads Abram south. Down from Canaan. Down to Egypt.

Now, let's be fair to Abram here. Going to Egypt wasn't irrational. Egypt had the Nile River. When Canaan dried up, Egypt was still producing food — it was the logical destination for anyone threatened by the famine.

Some of you know exactly what that looks like. When things get tight in Southeast Raleigh, those who are food insecure can go to With Love From Jesus for free groceries.

Abram is trying to protect himself and provide for his family. We understand that. But Abram was not merely responsible for his family — he had been commissioned by God. He had an overarching duty to the LORD.

So he goes down to Egypt, away from the Promised Land. And as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, "Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are..."

Sounds romantic, right? It's not. Abram is still running the numbers. He assessed her as a threat. Her beauty has made her a danger to him.

And his fear is completely founded — powerful men like Pharaoh were known for taking what they wanted. If they wanted another man's wife, they could take her and kill the husband, no questions asked.

The threat is real. So Abram builds a plan.

He says to her, "Please say you're my sister, so it will go well for me because of you and my life will be spared on your account."

Technically, he's half-right. Sarai is his sister — same father, different mother. So there's a kernel of truth in his deception. But he leaves out the most important fact: Sarai is his wife.

Who is the plan designed to save? Abram. Not Sarai. Not God's promise. Abram.

Sarai is merely a pawn in his master plan. What kind of man uses his wife as a human shield?

But before we walk too far down that road, let's focus on what God wants us to know. The Bible is not holding Abram up as an example of how to act, nor how not to act. The events are presented without comment — not to condemn, not to approve, but to show you how God overcame the obstacle that was ready to dismantle His covenant piece by piece.

And that exposes something true about all of us. When pressure comes, we drift. Not all at once. One quiet calculation at a time. From "God will provide" to "I've got to handle this."

Every one of us is wired for it. And that's exactly why we cannot escape self-preservation on our own.

But hear me when I say this: you are the recipient of a covenant that God has already staked His own reputation on. The altars you've built, the prayers you've prayed, the times you've shown up — none of that disappears when the famine hits.

Every one of us is in one of three places right now. You're in a famine. You just came out of one. Or one is coming.

So what does trusting God through it actually look like?

It doesn't mean you pretend the famine isn't real. It means you don't quietly exit the land God placed you in — the marriage, the church, the calling, the assignment — just because conditions got hard. It means you stay. And you keep calling on the name of the LORD at the altar you already built.

"God promised He would never leave us or abandon us." (Hebrews 13:5)

His promise doesn't expire because the season got hard.

That's the first truth we see in this text. Now here's the second.

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2. When Our Sin Puts Others at Risk, God Still Protects the Promise

(Genesis 12:14–20)

As it turns out, Abram's concern was warranted.

Pharaoh's officers spot Sarai and report her to the king. She is taken to Pharaoh's household — presumably to be part of his harem.

Now watch what Abram gets out of all this. Verse 16 — he is richly compensated. Flocks. Herds. Donkeys. Servants. Camels. Pharaoh thinks he's entering a legitimate arrangement. He pays a bride price to Abram.

So Pharaoh has his new wife, Abram's life is spared, and he's made a wealthy man. Everyone appears to have exactly what they want. Everyone is satisfied — everyone except one person. Verse 17 says:

"But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Abram's wife, Sarai."

The word "but" is important. It's a pivot. A reversal.

Everything has been going according to Abram's plan up to this point. That is, until God acts by striking Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues.

Pharaoh summons Abram and hits him with three questions that function as three consecutive indictments: *"What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She's my sister,' so that I took her as my wife?"*

In this instance, the immoral pagan king is more moral than Abram.

Abram — the man chosen by God, the man who built altars, the man who called on the name of the LORD — traded his integrity for security. And the unbeliever is the one holding him accountable. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black.

And Abram is silent. No defense. No apology. No explanation on record. Just silence.

Pharaoh presents Sarai: "Here is your wife." He returns her with her honor still intact. Abram and his whole entourage get escorted out of Egypt.

God used the immoral man to confront the moral man.

I need you to sit with that.

Abram didn't come clean on his own. He didn't have a moment of conviction. He didn't walk into Pharaoh's court and confess. God had to send plagues to surface what Abram was hiding.

God is the one who exposed Abram's sin. Abram didn't rescue himself. God rescued him from himself.

And that is exactly what God does for us.

You did not find your way out of Egypt by the strength of your own moral resolve. If you are out, it is because God brought you out. If you are still in it, God loves you too much to leave you unaware of it. He will use whatever is necessary to make you aware of it — not to hurt you, but to lead you back to Himself in repentance.

The promise does not rest on your ability to confess perfectly, recover quickly, or clean yourself up. It rests on the faithfulness of a God who refuses to let your failure have the final word.

Egypt may be where you wandered, but by grace, it doesn't have to be where your story ends.

That's the second truth. Now here's the third.

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3. When We Choose Generosity Over Grasping, God Expands the Gift

(Genesis 13:1–9)

Verse 1 marks a literal change in direction: *"Abram went up from Egypt."*

The Hebrew verb is the directional opposite of "went down" in chapter 12. The descent closes with an ascent. He comes back to the Negev, retraces his steps north to Bethel — back to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been before. Back to the site where he had built the altar.

He's back to where he started. He goes back to the altar.

He's not starting over. He's recovered his heart of worship. He's wiser, more mature, and certainly more committed than before.

This is how we mature in God — often through our own waywardness. Not in spite of it, but through it.

Every twist. Every detour. Every moment where you look back and think, *I should have never gone that way* — God was already there. Already weaving it into something you couldn't have seen from where you were standing.

That's the mercy of a God who refuses to let His will go uncompleted.

Now from verse 2 we learn that Abram is very rich. And Lot has leveled up too. Verse 5 tells us he has flocks, herds, and tents. His wealth didn't come from his own ingenuity. It came through his uncle's household. Lot is prospering because Abram prospered.

But there's a problem. The land cannot support them both. Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen have started fighting. Abram sees what's happening, so he says to Lot in verse 8:

"Please, let's not have quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives. Isn't the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

This is a man speaking as someone who already knows whose land it is. He's offering first choice of what already belongs to him — because he is convinced the promise doesn't depend on his grip.

He knows that God protects the promise with or without him.

Research out of the Gottman Institute — one of the leading authorities on conflict and relationships — found that the primary predictor of resolution isn't the severity of the issue. It's what the most powerful person in the relationship does. When the person with more power chooses to absorb the uncertainty and step back, resolution rates go up dramatically — even when the presenting issue is never directly addressed.

Abram is the more powerful party here. Lot is prospering because of him. And Abram is the one who absorbs the cost.

That's a night-and-day difference from the man who handed his wife over to another man just to save his own skin, is it not?

Notice what makes Abram's generosity possible: it's that God gave him more than he deserved. And he's starting to know it.

That's the movement. Chapter 12 — Abram secures himself. Chapter 13 — Abram trusts God to secure the promise. Same man. Different posture.

Abram is no longer driven by self-preservation and acquisition. Now he's free to give. To let go and let God work His will.

And that brings this text directly to us.

God has given all of us more than we deserve — you know what I'm saying is true — and because that's true, you do not have to enter every conflict determined to protect yourself.

You can give ground in conflict. Not because the other person is right, but because God is your security.

You can absorb a cost. Somebody pays in every conflict, and the person who knows God is their keeper does not have to make sure the other person pays every time.

You can let the other person choose first.

I don't know where this finds you today. Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's a conflict in this church. Maybe you're in a situation where you have the upper hand.

This text has one question for you: What would it look like to give first? Not because you know everything will work out the way you want, but because you are convinced that God is the One keeping you.

That's the third truth. Now here's the fourth.

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4. When We Let Go, God Lifts Our Eyes to Greater

(Genesis 13:10–18)

"Lot looked out and saw."

Now pay close attention to what Lot beheld: *"The land was well watered everywhere — like the LORD's garden — like the land of Egypt — as far as Zoar."*

Beautiful. Lush. Everything a man with livestock could want.

And then the parenthetical bombshell: this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

You ever watch a suspense thriller where you can see what the person being stalked can't? The danger is right there, and you want to yell at the screen — don't go in there, turn around, get out of there. That's exactly what verse 10 is doing. The author drops the warning right there in the parentheses, like a spoiler on purpose. He wants his audience to feel what Lot can't, so that we see what Lot is blind to.

He's oblivious to the fact that he's walking straight into destruction.

Verse 11 — Lot journeyed eastward. And that direction is more than a geographic reference. So far, every movement away from God in Genesis has been toward the east. Out of Eden — east. Cain after Abel — east. The nations at Babel — eastward. And now Lot heads in the same direction. Away from God.

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman spent decades studying how people make decisions under uncertainty. What he found was this: we are wired to overvalue what we can see and undervalue what we can't. We anchor to what's in front of us. We grab before we look up.

He calls it loss aversion. This is not a character flaw. This is how human cognition works.

Which means Lot's choice is entirely predictable. And so is yours. And so is mine.

We see what's right in front of us. We reach for it. We call it wisdom. We call it taking advantage of a good opportunity. Ultimately, we miss what God was pointing to — because we grabbed before we looked up.

Verse 12 draws the line: *"Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived among the cities of the plain and set up his tent near Sodom."*

Inside Canaan versus outside Canaan. Land versus city. Promise versus proximity to judgment.

Then the character verdict: *"The people of Sodom were wicked, sinning greatly against the LORD."*

Lot chose a place whose judgment had already been decided. He just didn't know it yet.

So Lot separates from Abram. And then verse 14 — the LORD speaks: *"Lift up your eyes from where you are. Look north and south, east and west."*

Lot looked in one direction and grabbed. Abram is commanded to look in every direction and receive.

"Get up and walk around the land, through its length and width, for I will give it to you."

I need to pause here before we close, because if you miss this, you might draw the wrong implication. You might hear this text and think: if I let go of what I'm currently holding, then God will give me something bigger, better, more than what I had before.

That's not what this text is implying.

God's covenant with Abram is specific — to a specific place, a specific people, a specific nation. The fulfillment of what God promised Abram flows through Christ to us, but it does not flow the same way. This is not the same promise. We are not Hebrews — Abram is not our biological forefather.

What this portion of the text means for us is that God's will for us is bigger than things. Bigger than resources. Bigger than earthly advantage. He wants us to walk in the full inheritance of the gospel: adopted into His family, part of a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, actively growing into Christ — the author and finisher of our faith.

Abram let go of a piece of land. God gave him a legacy that runs through every nation on earth and ends at the throne of Jesus Christ.

After God speaks, notice what Abram does. Verse 18: *"Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron. And there he built an altar to the LORD."*

He worshipped.

God called him — he built an altar. God delivered him from Egypt — he built an altar. God expands the promise — he builds an altar. This is the character trait of a person growing in God.

Abram is showing us that worship is tantamount to everything else. We need to build the altar before the promise is complete.

Worship God in the land you cannot yet fully occupy. In the marriage that is still being restored. In the degree you're still earning. In the health report that hasn't changed yet. In the financial season that hasn't turned yet. In your season of spiritual dryness — worship God.

The promise doesn't have to be complete for the Promiser to be worthy of your worship.

Worship was never about your circumstances. Worship is your response to a God who is worthy — not worthy when He comes through, not worthy when the report changes, not worthy when the season turns. Worthy right now, as He is, in spite of where you are.

Worship God through your season of not yet.

Full Circle

There was a man who knew God. Who built altars. Who followed a voice into the unknown. And the first time his faith was challenged, he folded. He went to Egypt. He made a deal. He put his wife at risk to protect himself.

Yet God kept the promise anyway.

Not because he deserved it. Not because he recovered quickly. Not because he had enough faith.

But because the promise never rested on him. It rested on the Promiser.

Jesus is the one Abram was pointing toward without knowing it.

He didn't fold under pressure. Didn't engineer a cover story. Didn't choose Egypt over the land. He walked straight into the famine. Into the wilderness. Onto the cross. With open hands. Trusting His Father completely.

And when He let go of everything, the Father gave it all back as resurrection.

The covenant God kept through Abram's failure — through every detour, every compromise, every Egypt — He finally sealed it in the blood of Jesus, Abram's greater Son. He did that for every nation on earth.

That's what you have been given. In full.

If you're reading this and you don't yet know Jesus — this is for you.

Abram was not a religious man when God found him. He was a moon-worshipper, wanting nothing to do with the true God. Yet God chose him anyway — not because of who Abram was, but because of who God is.

That same God is present right now, wherever you are.

You don't have to have it all together. You don't have to clean up your Egypt first. The door is open. You just have to walk through it.

The question is: are you ready to embrace God's promise for yourself?

This message was preached at Bridge Fellowship Church as part of our Genesis series, "Promise Maker." We'd love to have you join us in person or watch the full message on video.