

The Faithfulness of God

June 14, 2026

Nelson Cathedral

OT Genesis 12: 1-9

NT Romans 4:13-25

Gospel Matthew 9:9-13 and 18-26

Introduction

In 1960 my parents did something remarkable. They decided to move to NZ from the UK, leaving behind their family and friends and the life and places they had known, to move to the other side of the world. At that time this involved a 6-week voyage on a boat, with two small children in tow (my oldest Brother and Sister). No cell phones or video chat – they were in a sense leaving everything behind.

I know for some of you here, you have also taken such a leap of faith, whether it be from the UK, Europe, India, Sri Lanka. You have left your homes,

families and friends for a new life in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Today we are returning to the Old Testament, to Genesis 12 and the story of Abram and Sarai, as God calls Abram into a special relationship with God. But this will involve a choice – to stay or go!

For us now and in the weeks to come, what is important to realise in these stories, just as it was from Genesis chapter 1 to chapter 11, is that the focus is on God's character and answers the question, "what is God like".

As is revealed through Abraham and then later Moses and Israel as a nation, God is gracious and faithful and can and will bring about the promises he has made. And our response to the faithfulness of God is to trust and obey, leaning into the promises God has given to his people -which now include us.

Abraham.

So, let us start with a simple but maybe surprising question, “Who was Abram – or Abraham as he will be known”?

A simple and provocative answer is that Abram was a “nobody”. If we look back at Genesis 11, he was descended from those scattered after the Tower of Babel, where once again humanity sought to be in control and be like the gods. He came from the region of Ur – most likely in southern Iraq - near the city of Babel which was later called Babylon.

We know nothing of Abram’s character or of his faith prior to God’s words to him. But as the book of Genesis precedes through the family history of key people, we are told of one issue that could stop God’s plan dead in its tracks - Sarai, Abram’s wife could not have children.

And now seemingly out of nowhere God speaks, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land I will show you”, says the Lord.

Promises.

With these words, God was presenting Abram with a choice, to “Stay” or “Go”. For those of you who have left the familiar to resettle in a strange land, you will know what those thoughts and feelings are like, the worry and apprehension – have you made the right decision. Well only time will tell.

God asked Abram to leave

- his land in favour of the land that God offered. And remember that Ur was a major ancient city – a London or New York of it’s day. It would have been hard to leave all that Ur offered.

God asked Abram to leave

- his immediate family, for the family that God offered. This would have included leaving the

family gods behind and the protection and blessing people hoped they offered. And also remember Sarai was childless.

God asked Abram to leave

- His extended family, his tribe if you like and his position and status in it, which would have included the security and protection that extended family provided.

But God did not ask Abraham to give up anything that God was not going to replace, so God offers a three-fold blessing.

- God will give Abram a new land
- a new family, in fact a great nation
- and God will bless all nations, all peoples through him.

Covenant and Abraham's Response

What we see in this three-fold blessing is the beginning of God's covenant plan with Abram and then later with Israel as the people of God through Moses.

It is in this concept of covenant that God reveals to us what God is like, answering the problem of the break in relationship between God and humanity that occurred in Eden and then again Babel.

1. First, we see that God is the God of grace, because it was God who chose both the path ahead and the person of Abram – everything was God's initiative.
2. Second, that God was and is faithful to the promises made. We see this fulfilled in the covenant ceremony of Chapter 15, where the divided carcasses of animals represent the contract made and the consequences of breaking the covenant.

But rather than the weaker partner walking between carcasses, it is God alone who commits to bringing about the promised blessing. It is God who guarantees success.

God will demonstrate over and over again the ability to overcome obstacles and resolve the issues that jeopardise God's plan. In the case of Abraham that involved Sarah being childless, a famine in the land, and never actually setting in the land God was providing.

And Abram's response to God's promise in verse 4, "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (12:4). Later, in Chapter 15 verse 6, this is restated, "And he believed the Lord; and the Lord credited to him as righteousness".

This is the very point Paul is making in Romans chapter 4. God's promise – God's grace – was given well before the Law was given to Moses. It was

Abram who trusted God, who placed his faith in God and God's promises, and went.

And just like us, what we see in the following chapters is the tendency of Abram and later that of Israel as a nation, to try and solve their problems on their own and in their way, rather than turning back and relying on the faithfulness of God.

But as Paul states, Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised. Therefore, his faith, his trust in God alone, was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rm 4:21).

All Nations - Us

As we consider these events that happened some 4000 years ago, we are drawn to the words, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed".

We also hold to the fact that the God who was gracious and faithful to Abram, is the same God we gather to worship today.

The covenant that God made with Abram, has now been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and the new covenant he has made. A covenant to not just reveal God to us fully and in person, but to also open up the possibility of becoming God's chosen people not by nationality, but by faith in Jesus.

If we look at our reading from Matthew's Gospel, we see this in action. People coming to Jesus and trusting that Jesus can do what was promised. Jesus bringing life and wholeness, the very promises of God, and not just for some people or respectable people – a chosen few – but a blessing available for all people. In Jesus we see God who is gracious and faithful and who can even raise the dead. In the new covenant, it is God in Jesus who saves.

Because our God is gracious and faithful – seen fully in the coming of Jesus, then we are left with two points to consider.

1. The first, like Abram is to trust God. God has promised to be with us by sending his Son and abiding in us through his Spirit, so we can expect God to keep that promise and turn up. We just need to be attentive and recognise God at work.

If I think back over the year we have had, there has been the death of my father, the loss of income, and even unexpected surgery 2 weeks ago.

But the story of Abram made me realise that I sometimes forget to recognise God at work even in life if tough:

- with the healing of wider family relationships;
- the kindness of people and unexpected income just when needed;

- even ED to surgery in 2hours because the surgical list happened to finish early that day.

So how can I, how can we, develop the spiritual practice of thankfulness, sometimes called “Examen”, and take a few minutes at the end of each day to name 2 or 3 things that we can be grateful to God for, as we become more and more aware of God at work in our lives.

2. The second aspect of Abraham’s story is that God blessed him in order that through him, others – even all people - could be blessed. In a similar way, we are blessed because we know the living God, so how can we in turn be a blessing to others, even in the simplest of ways – a kind word, or a kind action. We too are called to be agents of God’s grace in our world.

Conclusion

The story of Abram and Sarai, and later the story of Moses, even the story of the whole Bible, is the story of the grace and faithfulness of God.

God has provided the way for us to be his people by God coming to us in the person of Jesus to save us. God promised to remain with us through the Holy Spirit.

We can trust in the grace and faithfulness of God, and in turn, we are called to be agents of grace in this world, as we go in the name of Christ.

Amen.