

GOD'S CALL TO ABRAM (ABRAHAM)

Genesis 11:27-12:5a

Key Verse: 12:1-3

“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. 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.’”

Today we begin a special series on God's calling to several people in the Bible. We start with Abram, also known as Abraham, since God changes his name later (Gen 17). Though these callings from God are all mysterious, unique, and specific to the individuals, we want to learn principles from each of their callings that we can apply to our own lives as believers. Through God's call to Abram, we will focus on two aspects: God's command and God's promises. May God bless our study of the call of Abram.

I. God's Command to Abram

The end of Genesis 11 introduces us to a few details of Abram's family life. His father Terah had 3 sons: Abram, Nahor and Haran. A sad event happened: Abram's brother Haran died. This must've been sad for both Abram and for his father Terah. No loving parent wants to experience their child dying before them. To lose a family member is painful and heart-breaking, as some of us have experienced. Haran also left a son, Lot. We see later that Abram took his nephew Lot with him. Basically, Abram adopted his nephew Lot as his son. This brings up another difficult truth in Abram's life: he had no children, since his wife Sarai was barren.

Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran (12:4). This age was not as old as it sounds, since the Bible tells us that Abraham lived to be 175. He was able to have children past the age of 100. In today's terms, we could say that Abram was in mid-life. His life situation was not extraordinary or impressive. Ironically, his name, Abram means “noble father,” even though he had no children when God called him.

Now let's look at Genesis 12:1. “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.”

We have no idea how God spoke to Abram. Was it an audible voice? Was it just in his mind? In any case, however it happened, mysteriously, God spoke to Abram. Could it be that God speaks to all of us, but many aren't listening or we don't care? I do believe that God speaks to us all.

What were God's first words to Abram? The words were not a pep talk like: “You are going to do great things, Abram. Don't despair. Don't worry.” No, those were not his first words. At least not yet. God's first words to Abram were a challenging command: “Leave your homeland, your

people and your relatives, and go to a place that I'm going to lead you to." Think about the challenges of this command.

Naturally, we want to settle down. We don't want to move far away, especially to a place with a new culture and language. The Bible says that God called Abram while he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. Scholars debate where Ur of the Chaldeans was located. Some place it near the Persian Gulf. Others put it further north. [MAP] In either case, if we look at a map of the Middle East, Ur or the Chaldeans was between 800-1200 miles from the place he was going to end up. And remember that Abram had no brochure, no photos, no GPS and no moving van to go where God was leading him. That would be like moving from Chicago to New York or Atlanta or Denver, by walking, with donkeys or camels. Plus, the people there would speak a different language.

I believe most of us wouldn't mind moving to a new place if it meant an upgrade in life to a more luxurious, comfortable and convenient place, with nice people, gorgeous homes, and good weather. But Abram was given no details of where God was taking him. Think about missionaries who leave their homelands and go to an unknown place to start a new life for the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Actually, many here in our church left Korea to come here to preach the gospel. Of course, I respect even more those who go to difficult or impoverished places, and move downward in living standards to serve God. One family in our church went as missionaries to Ukraine. Senior missionaries among us went to Uganda and Rwanda to proclaim Christ and shepherd people there.

So why would God command Abram to leave his culture, settlement, clan and even family members to go to an unknown place? I can think of 2 good reasons.

First, God wanted Abram to leave sin and ungodliness. Joshua 24:2 gives us a good clue about this. It says, "Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods." God called Abram to leave other gods to worship and serve the living, one true God, who created heaven and earth.

Jesus called a woman caught in adultery to do similarly, saying to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." Jesus calls us out of darkness and sin into his light and righteousness. God calls us to live a holy life in Jesus Christ.

Second, God wanted Abram to trust and obey God. To get up and go to an unknown land and people and start a new life required great trust and faith in God. Our natural tendency is to depend on something else like money or education or hard work or our own effort. Or we can depend on people like our parents or siblings or teachers or friends. God wanted Abram to trust and depend on him. That's what faith in God is. Abram had to believe that God would be with him and guide him.

Jesus also calls us into his kingdom through a love and trust relationship with him. This means trusting and depending on God, like Abram did, rather than depending on something or someone else. It means to listen to God and follow his guidance through his holy word in the

Bible and through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes following God also includes receiving wisdom and counsel from godly, mature followers of Christ.

Third, God had a new life purpose for Abram. If we are clinging to the life we have now, we could very well be missing out on the life that God wants to give us. Apostle Paul said that Christians put off the old self and put on the new. Jesus said new wine is poured into new wineskins. God wants to give us all a new life in him. Many people fall into pessimism and self-pity when life seems to be the same-old stuff and boring. But God is always doing and making something new. Do we want the new? Or are you clinging to the old?

II. God's Promises to Abram

Now let's look at seven very great and precious promises that God gave to Abram in verses 2-3:

“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.”

First of all, God promised to make Abram a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, and to make him a blessing. Sounds like a good deal, right? I mean who doesn't want to be blessed? Aren't we all seeking a “blessed” life? Of course, it depends on the blessings you are hoping for.

Let's consider these blessings in more detail. God said, “I will make of you a great nation.” Imagine that! A great nation. And Abram didn't even have one child at the moment; only a nephew and some servants. To become a great nation implies a tremendous impact on many people for the better. It means to have great historical influence on others. Physically, this great nation became the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, through his son Isaac. Did you know that Abram also fathered the Arab nations through his son Ishmael?

Even more, Christians are all spiritual descendants of Abram. Christians are the “holy nation” descended from Abraham. 1 Peter 2:9 says to Christians, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Secondly, God said to Abram “I will bless you.” All people want to be blessed by God. So, one of the greatest farewells you say to someone is: “God bless you.” Everyone wants happiness, peace, joy, good fortune and favor from God. For the most part, don't we study the Bible and pray and go to church so that we may be blessed by God? Deuteronomy chapter 28 details many blessings given to those who obey God. It also lists many curses for those who disobey and rebel against God.

Jesus said we will be blessed if we put his words into practice. We will be blessed like a wise man who builds his house on rock, which will withstand storms. At his Last Supper, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. When he had finished washing their feet, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I

am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (Jn 13:12-17).

After his resurrection, Apostle Thomas could not believe Jesus rose from the dead without seeing and touching Jesus for himself. Risen Jesus came and appeared to his disciples again, including Thomas. Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn 20:29). Blessing comes through faith. And obedience comes from faith in and from love for Jesus.

Third, "I will make your name great." We all want to be remembered by others for the good that we've done in our lives. All people, whether they say it or not, want to be honored and admired, not disrespected and shamed. Jesus did not negate the human desire to be great. Rather, Jesus explained how a person can become great, not in the worldly way of lording authority over others, but in the way of loving and serving God and others.

Fourth, "you will be a blessing." This is often a marriage key verse. People want their lives and their marriages to be a blessing to others. They want to bring joy, peace and happiness into other peoples' lives. People want to do something for others. Have you seen those short videos of social experiments where people help someone in need, and it's so inspiring? People want not only to be blessed, but to be a blessing. God wants to bless others, even one person, through us. There's a hymn that ends, "Make me a blessing to someone today." It's a good prayer that God wants to fulfill in our lives.

Fifth, "I will bless those who bless you..." We like when things go well for our friends who are kind and encouraging to us. God promised favor upon Abram's friends and allies. If you want to bring blessing to those you love, seek God's blessing and favor in your life earnestly.

Sixth, "him who dishonors you I will curse." Sometimes we get discouraged or afraid of those who are against us, even against our faith and good intentions. Abram didn't need to worry about his enemies and haters. God promised to deal with them. Basically, God was promising protection upon Abram. We don't need to worry about or fight against those who are against us. Romans 12:14 says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." Jesus echoed the same thing in Matthew 5:10-12, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Christians must not be known for cursing, but rather for blessing, even to enemies.

Seventh, and this is the biggest blessing of them all: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God intended to bless the whole world through Abram. Isn't that everyone's greatest dream and vision, that all peoples on earth would be blessed through us? As noted already, this

promise was partially fulfilled through the nation of Israel. It was ultimately and fully fulfilled through the descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Savior of the world.

Listen to what Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:8-9: "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." Abraham brought blessing to all those who believe in Jesus Christ. And Jesus continues to bless those who believe in him.

How did Abram respond to God's call? Look at verses 4-5. "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan."

God said "Go," and Abram went. He obeyed, in spite of all the challenges and difficulties, fears and uncertainties. Listen to how Abram's obedience and faith are described in Hebrews 11:8-10: "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 the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

The call of Abram has significance in my life. Forty one years ago, when I was 18 and a few months into my college life, my Bible teacher asked me if I could participate in a Genesis Bible School. I said, "no," because I was busy enough with my school studies. My Bible teacher, Missionary Pauline Park, told me that another student, who was older than I, was also participating. So I changed my mind and decided to participate. I wrote on God's Call to Abram. While spending much time in prayer meetings and studying Genesis several nights a week, M.Pauline asked me what calling I had received. I said, "What do you mean? This is God speaking to Abram, not to me." She said, "That's true. But have you thought about how God might be calling you?" I said, "Not really." She said, "Pray about it." She also suggested that I stay in Evanston for the summer after my freshman year to participate in the Summer Bible Conference at Niagara Falls. I said, "no way." She asked why. I said I had to go home to make money working at my family's auto parts business. She said, "Oh ok. Please pray about it." Actually, there was another reason I wanted to go home, which I didn't tell M.Pauline about: I had a girlfriend I wanted to see. But I knew our relationship was not pure and right before God. Through my testimony, I made a conditional vow that if God gave me a good-paying summer job I would stay in Evanston for the summer. I could justify that I needed to work to make money, but I couldn't justify the girlfriend situation. Fast-forward to Easter conference a few months later. I was asked by Dr.Samuel Lee if I could give a message. I said, as usual, "no," since I didn't want to spend that much time working on a message again. So he said, "can you dance?" Actually, I was a pretty good disco dancer. So I said, "yes." I didn't know he meant ballet. I danced my first ever ballet dance. At that conference, I received the living hope of Jesus' resurrection. I also decided to stay unconditionally for the summer, since I experienced

the joy and power of God's word in my life. And you know what else? I got a good summer job that paid even better than my home job. The Call of Abram helped me on my own faith journey.

God made Abram, whose name means, "noble father," a new man, Abraham, whose name means, "father of many." Abram was somewhat of an ordinary man. And God made him a father of nations and a blessing to the whole world. God calls each of us to believe and obey God's word by faith. And he promises to bless us, even to bless the world through us. God is calling each of us. Have you heard God's call? Have you accepted it?