

The Call of Abraham

Text: Gen. 11:10-12:9

Introduction:

1. The first eleven chapters of Genesis cover approximately 2,000 years of Biblical history. It takes the rest of the Old Testament to cover another 2,000 years of Biblical history so the pace slows down dramatically. It takes the next thirteen chapters of Genesis, covering the life of Abraham, to cover the next one hundred years. Abraham was born about 300-400 years after the flood and about 2,000 years before Christ. So, Abraham comes on the scene of Biblical history about half way between Adam and Christ. (John Butler)
2. We now come to another pivotal point in Biblical History with the call of Abraham who would be the progenitor of the Jewish Nation. Whereas the first section of Genesis (Chap. 1-11) had more of a world-wide focus, the Bible now focuses in on Israel as God's chosen people through whom Messiah, the promised Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), would come. Griffith Thomas explains, "The call of Abraham represents the third start God makes with humanity. Adam had failed, Noah's descendants had failed, and now another attempt was made. The former attempts were made with the human race as a whole but now God would take one man and one family to make one primary nation that would be His vehicle of blessing to the world."
3. Abraham is one of the most significant characters in the Bible. He is referred to repeatedly throughout the entire Bible (I counted 337 mentions of his name using the search feature of the e-Sword Bible program). Nearly fourteen of the 50 chapters of Genesis is dedicated to Abraham. Abraham goes down in Biblical history as the only one to be specifically called the "friend of God" (James 2:23) and the father of the faithful (Rom. 4:16). Abraham and his wife Sarah are found in the Hebrews Hall of Faith (Heb. 11:8-13) and so we can learn many lessons for the walk of faith from their lives. We can be encouraged as we witness both the highs and lows, the successes and the failures of their walk of faith but overriding it all, the faithfulness and mercy of God to fulfill His Divine purposes through them.
4. In this section we are introduced to Abraham and God's call that brought him out of heathen idolatry and into the promised land of Canaan to become the founder of the Jewish nation. We will consider this call of God to Abraham in four parts.

I. THE CONTEXT OF ABRAHAM'S CALL (GEN. 11:27-32)

A. Abraham's Family

1. His Father – Terah.
 - a. Terah was an idolater. This is clear from Joshua 24:2 "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, *even* Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: **and they served other gods.**"
 - b. Archaeological discoveries reveal that the inhabitants of Ur worshipped the moon god Sin.

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2. His brothers – Nahor and Haran.
 - a. Nahor's family would play an important role in Abraham's life inasmuch as his son Isaac would take his granddaughter Rebecca to be his wife and later on, Jacob would marry his great granddaughters Leah and Rachel. That Nahor's family was idolatrous is clear on account of Rachel's taking her father Laban's gods.
 - b. Haran died early on in Ur and left Lot behind. It appears that as Lot's uncle, Abraham took him under his wing. Lot would become a genuine believer in the One True God along with his Uncle Abraham but sadly would go on to live a defeated and carnal life.
3. His Wife
 - a. Sarai was Abraham's half sister (Gen. 20:12). This was an acceptable and appropriate marriage at this early stage. Later, under Mosaic law the marrying of close relatives would be forbidden.
 - b. Sarai was barren (Vs. 30). Significant that this is noted early in the account as it would become a major part of Abraham and Sarah's story as a couple.

B. Abraham's Country

There are two words that help summarize Ur of the Chaldees. It was a city of:

1. Prosperity. Located in the Mesopotamia region, next to the Euphrates River, Ur was a successful and wealthy city. They were also known for their technological advancements in construction and the arts.
2. Idolatry. The Bible (e.g., Josh. 24:2) as well as archeological discovery confirms that Ur of the Chaldees was a center for heathen idolatry.
3. Unger's Bible Dictionary gives a helpful snapshot of Ur of the Chaldees: "Ur is located in southern Babylonia, not very far from the ancient city of Uruk to the NE and about 150 miles from the head of the Persian Gulf... Sir Leonard Woolley conducted excavations from 1922 to 1934. The famous royal cemeteries, dating c. 2500 B.C., yielded jewellery and art treasures of unbelievable beauty, particularly gorgeous head attire, personal jewels, and a golden tumbler and cup of Queen Puabi. Several musical instruments and other beautifully crafted objects demonstrate that this city had achieved a high level of civilization 500 years before Abraham." He goes on to state, "Archaeology has revealed that in Abraham's day Ur was a great and prosperous city, with perhaps 360,000 people living in the city and its suburbs." (See Pg. 1320-1321).
4. Concerning Ur of the Chaldees, Henry Morris notes, "The archaeologist's spade has shown Ur to have been a great city, with a high civilization (including a great library) even before Abram's time; but it was also a very idolatrous and wicked city."
5. The above forms an important backdrop and context to better understanding God's call of Abraham.

II. THE COMMAND IN ABRAHAM'S CALL (VS. 1)

The call of God in Abraham's life was what started it all. Without the call of God, Abraham would have lived and died and idolater in Ur of the Chaldees and his name buried in the sands of time. While God's call of Abraham had some unique aspects to it, we can see how the central principles apply to us. Notice four important principles with this call. It represents:

A. The Salvation Call (Vs. 1a; Acts 7:2-3)

For Abraham, there were at least two aspects to this:

1. Revelation of God (Acts 7:2-3).
 - a. The Revelation of God's Person – “And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; **The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham**, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.” (Acts 7:2-3) Abraham had been raised by an idolater and was likely an idolater himself until the One True God revealed Himself to him. The exact details of God's appearance to Abraham are not given but we believe this represents a Christophany – a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ who is the revealing Person of the Godhead. Why would you continue worshiping idols when you have met the living God!
 - b. Revelation of God's Word – “Now the LORD had **said** unto Abram...” (Vs. 1a)
2. Repentance toward God. Abraham turned from heathen idolatry to belief in the One True God, the Creator of all. Salvation involves a turning to God from sin and one's own way.
 - a. In Isaiah 51:1-2, God reminded Abraham's descendants (Israel) of the hole they had been dug out of, “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: **look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged**. Look unto **Abraham your father**, and unto Sarah *that* bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.”
 - b. This is illustrated in the conversion of the Thessalonian believers. 1 Thess. 1:9 “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye **turned to God from idols** to serve the living and true God;”
 - c. This is demonstrated in Paul's preaching. Acts 20:21 “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance toward God, and faith toward** our Lord Jesus Christ.”

B. The Separation Call (Vs. 1b)

Abraham was called to a separated walk. F.B. Meyer writes, “The key to Abraham's life is the word “Separation”. He was from first to last a SEPARATED MAN. Separated from his fatherland and kinsfolk; separated from Lot; separated, as a pilgrim and stranger, from the people of the land; separated from his own methods of securing a fulfilment of the promises of God; separated from the rest of mankind by special sorrows, which brought him into closer fellowship with God than has ever been reached by man; separated to high and lofty

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fellowship in thoughts and plans, which God could not hide from him. BUT IT WAS THE SEPARATION OF FAITH.” For Abraham this involved separation from:

1. Country – this symbolizes the believer’s separation from the world. We are called by God out of the world unto a life of consecration to God.
2. Kindred – a reference to family in general.
3. Close family – his “father’s house” represents the much closer family ties.
4. Note: For Abraham there was a geographical component to this. He was to relocate to the promised land. In a very real sense, the long distance between Ur and Canaan was representative of the spiritual distance that now existed between Abraham and those of his family who remained in heathen idolatry. Responding to God’s call means leaving the world with its pleasures and priorities behind. It also means leaving behind, at least in a spiritual sense, those of our family, extended and close, who choose to stay in their sins and reject salvation.

C. The Sacrifice Call (Vs. 1b)

1. The above all represented sacrifice for Abraham. God’s calls are not always easy to follow! To leave that which is nearest and dearest involves sacrifice! Consecrated living means being a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1-2).
2. “A great act of renunciation at the divine call lies at the foundation of Israel’s history, as it does at the foundation of every life that blesses the world or is worth living...God does not hide the sacrifices that have to be made if we will be true to His command. He will enlist no recruits on false pretences. All ties of country, kindred, and father’s house have to be loosened, and, if need be, to be cut, for His command is to be supreme, and clinging hands that would hold back the pilgrim have to be disengaged.” (Maclaren)
3. Sadly, when confronted with the sacrifices required for a true walk of faith, many choose to stay where they are and not venture any further. Oh, that we might learn to see that the blessings of the walk of faith far outweigh any sacrifices we may be called upon to make!
4. David Livingstone: “People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of the great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward of healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with such a word, such a view, and such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege...I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not talk when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father’s throne on high to give Himself for us.”

D. The Service Call (Vs. 1c)

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1. God's will was for Abraham not only to leave Ur of the Chaldees but to enter the land of Canaan. Remember that we are not just separated from something, we are separated to Someone!
2. This is the "brought out" to "bring in" principle. Deut. 6:23 "And he **brought us out from thence**, that he might **bring us in**, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers."

III. THE COVENANT OF ABRAHAM'S CALL (VS. 2-3)

The key word in these verses is 'blessing'. If Abraham would obey God's call, God would bless Him richly! Note that God gave Abraham promises, not reasons. Promises encourage the principle of faith and trust whereas reasons tend to be more aligned with the rationalisations of the natural man. The walk of faith is the truly blessed life. God promised several blessings to Abraham:

A. The Blessing of Nationhood (Vs. 2a)

1. The nation of Israel would come out of Abraham's line. What a blessing for Abraham to be the human instrument used of God to bring about the world's most significant nation.
2. Israel would go on to become a great nation. Israel would not only become a great nation militarily and economically but above all Israel's significance would be on account of the fact they would be the channel through which Messiah would come.

B. The Blessing of Godly Reputation (Vs. 2b)

1. Nimrod and his followers tried to make a name for themselves and it ended in shame.
2. Here God promises to make Abraham's Name great as a reward for his faithfulness. The name Abraham, to this day, remains one of the most significant Names of history. It is revered in the three great monotheistic religions of the world – Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

C. The Blessing of Usefulness (Vs. 2c)

1. Observe the purpose in God's blessing of Abraham – "I will bless thee...and thou shalt be a blessing." God would bless Abraham so that he in turn could be a blessing to others.
2. With blessing comes the responsibility to be a channel of blessing to others. So many think of God's blessing in selfish, self-centered terms. God does delight to bless us personally but it has the greater end in view of helping others.

D. The Blessing of Divine Favor (Vs. 3a)

1. This promise has to do with how other peoples and nations would relate to Abraham and his descendants (Israel). Fruchtenbaum often says, "This perhaps can be viewed as God's foreign policy to the Gentiles in their relationship to the Jewish people."
2. Blessing is promise upon those who would bless Israel. No doubt the great blessing that has been upon the USA is largely due to the fact she has been a friend to the Jew.
3. Cursing is promised upon those who would curse Israel.
4. Note: This promise has never been rescinded and nations that mistreat the Jewish people can expect the chastening hand of God Almighty to be upon them.

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E. The Blessing to the World (Vs. 3b)

The whole world would be blessed through Abraham's seed.

1. In a **general sense**, Israel has been a blessing to the world in many ways (e.g., technological advancements and inventions).
2. In a **specific sense**, this promise has to do with the spiritual blessings Israel would be used to bring into the world. Israel would be:
 - a. The custodians of the Written Word – the Scriptures. Romans 3:2 says that **“the oracles of God”** were committed to the nation of Israel. What a priceless blessing! Every Book in the Bible, with the possible exception of Luke, was written by a Jewish vessel.
 - b. The channel for the Living Word – the Saviour. Through Israel would come the blessing of the Saviour and the truth of salvation by faith. Galatians 3:6-9 highlights this, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. (7) Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. (8) **And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.** (9) So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”

IV. THE CARRYING OUT OF ABRAHAM'S CALL (VS. 4-9)

Note some lessons from Abraham's response to God's call.

A. The Hindrance to Abraham's Obedience (Vs. 1a; 11:31-32)

1. Abraham's obedience, while admirable, was not immediate. The text clearly indicates that there was a delay in Abraham's obedience.
2. “Now the LORD **had said** unto Abram...”. This command was not spoken to Abraham in Haran as some have mistakenly suggested. Acts 7:2-3 makes it clear that it was given to Abraham when he was in Ur. God had also explicitly said he was to leave “his father's house”.
3. Instead of leaving Terah and going direct to Canaan, Abraham went on a detour from God's will with his father to Haran where they lived until Terah died. Sadly, Terah became a hindrance to Abraham's obedience. This is a sight all too common with parents (including Christian parents) today!
4. This reminds us of a sobering truth that sometimes the closest of human ties can become a hindrance and an obstruction to the fulfillment of God's will in our lives if we aren't prepared to take up the cross of misunderstanding. How many Christians are held back from the perfect will of God by unsaved or carnal family members.
5. True discipleship means putting Christ first, before even the closest of human ties. Christ has first call on your life, not mum, dad, brother or sister! Matthew 10:37-39 “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that

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findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

6. F.B. Meyer writes, “The summons of God will ever involve a wrench from much that nature holds dear. We must be prepared to take up our cross daily if we would follow where He points the way. Each step of real advance in the Divine life will involve an altar on which some dear fragment of the self-life has been offered; or a cairn (pile of stones making a tomb) beneath which some cherished idol has been buried. It is true that the blessedness which awaits us will more than compensate us for sacrifices which we may have to make. And the prospect of the future may well allure us forward; but still, when it comes to the point, there is certain anguish as the last link is broken, the last farewell said, and the last look taken of the receding home of past happy years.”

B. The Confidence of Abraham’s Obedience (Vs. 4a)

1. Abraham stepped out in obedience to the Word of God – “as the LORD had spoken to him.” Abraham took God at His Word! Wiersbe writes, “How you respond to God’s promises determines what God will do in your life.”
2. Faith does not mean stepping out on the basis of our subjective feelings but trustful obedience to God’s revealed Word and will.

C. The Influence of Abraham’s Obedience (Vs. 4b-5a)

1. Abraham’s faith inspired others to follow him (e.g., Lot).
2. As we obey God wholeheartedly, that can serve to encourage and help others.

D. The Resistance to Abraham’s Obedience (Vs. 6)

1. The presence of the Canaanite in the land is a reminder that Abraham would face opposition to his walk of faith.
2. The walk of faith is not without its obstacles and challenges. In fact, the world, the flesh and the devil are great enemies to the walk of faith as such a walk brings the blessing and power of God into the Christians life.

V. THE CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM’S CALL (VS. 7-9)

From start to finish, faith was the central principle in Abraham’s walk. What kind of life was he called to? There are three features of Abraham’s life in these verses that teach us something of the life of faith – Abraham’s tent, altar and journeying. He was called to:

A. The Prayerful Life of Faith – the Altar (Vs. 7; 8b)

1. God appears to Abraham once he is in the land of Canaan and adds to the promise, he had given in Vs. 2-3. The promise is that the land would be given to Abraham’s seed. We note a principle that when we walk in obedience, God blesses us with a greater understanding of His Person and promises. Jesus said, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will **manifest myself** to him.” (John 14:21) Do you want to know more of God’s presence in your life? Walk in obedience by faith!

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2. In response, Abraham erects an altar. The altar serves as a reminder of God's special working in his life. Do you have any altars of memorial in your life you can look back to that remind you of God's faithfulness in your life?
3. Principally, the altar in Abraham's life speaks of prayer and consecration to, and dependence upon God – "there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and **called** upon the name of the LORD." (Vs. 8)

B. The Pilgrim Life of Faith – the Tent (Vs. 8a)

1. The tent in Abraham's life symbolized his walk as a stranger and a pilgrim; the separated life he was called to. He did not dwell in the impressive cities of the Canaanites but under the shelter of canvas in fellowship with His God.
2. F.B. Meyer notes, "**It is impossible to move our times, so long as we live beneath their spell**; but when once we have risen up, and gone, at the call of God, outside their pale, we are able to react on them with an irresistible power."
3. Heb. 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."
4. Wiersbe writes, "Wherever Abraham went in the land of Canaan, he was marked by his *tent* and his *altar* (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:3-4, 18). The tent marked him as a "stranger and pilgrim" (Heb. 11:9-16; 1 Peter 2:11) and the altar marked him as a citizen of heaven who worshiped the true and living God. He was separated from the world (the tent) and devoted to the Lord (the altar). Whenever Abraham abandoned his tent and his altar, he got into trouble."

C. The Patient Life of Faith – the Journey (Vs. 9)

1. Abraham had to exercise patience as he waited for the fulfilment of God's promises. His waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise of a son (Isaac) is an example of this. Some of the promises would be later fulfilled in his descendants (e.g., the possession of the land).
2. This is perhaps the hardest part of the faith journey for us! We want everything NOW but often it is God's way to make us wait in order that He might grow, strengthen and refine our faith.
3. Although God had promised this land to Abraham and his seed, this was not yet the time for the fulfilment of these promises (See Acts 7:5). "Such experiences are not unique to Abram, but are common to all those who seek to follow God's will. The promise often seems long delayed, and the believer must simply continue following day by day, trusting God and knowing that His timing is always right." (Morris)

Conclusion: Have you responded to God's salvation call? The call to consecrated service? What is preventing you going forward in your walk of faith (something or someone)? Have you embraced the pilgrim mindset? Is there an altar of prayer in your life?