

The Life of Abraham

The Call of Abram

Genesis 11:27-12:9

Rev. Freddy Fritz

July 9, 2017

The Call of Abram

Scripture

Today I am starting a new series of sermons on “The Life of Abraham.” We shall examine several selected incidents in his life.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis describe the beginning of all things. We learn there about the cosmic clash between the serpent and the seed of the woman. After the Fall of man into sin, people eventually became so wicked that God destroyed the entire world by a flood, saving only Noah and his family. However, after some time, people once again rebelled against God by seeking to make a name for themselves and building the tower of Babel. God confused the language of all the earth. And from there he dispersed people over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:9).

Ten generations from Noah we come to Abram, later called Abraham, whose life story we shall begin examining today.

Let’s read about the call of Abram in Genesis 11:27-12:9:

²⁷ Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. ²⁸ Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹ And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

³¹ Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. ³² The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

12 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. ² 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. ³ 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.”

⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. (Genesis 11:27-12:9)

Introduction

The movie *Pearl Harbor* tells of the events leading up to and immediately following the Japanese attack on the U.S. on December 7, 1941. The film follows the fictional lives of two fighter pilots, Raph and Danny, who have been inseparable friends since childhood and are stationed at the same base in Hawaii.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Raph and Danny are called into Colonel Jimmy Doolittle’s office. They have succeeded in downing seven Japanese planes.

Doolittle stands behind his desk and addresses the pilots somberly.

“You’ve both been awarded the silver star. You’re just about the only pilots with combat experience. I need you for a mission

The Life of Abraham

I've been ordered to put together.”

Raph and Danny look nervously pleased. Doolittle looks them over carefully.

“Do you know what ‘top secret’ is?” he asks.

Raph responds with a wry smile. “Yes, sir! It’s the kind of mission when you get medals, but they send them to your relatives.”

Ignoring the remark, Doolittle continues, “Top secret means you train for something never done before in aviation history—and you go without knowing where you’re going. You do it on that basis or not at all.”

Honored to be asked, yet unsure of what they are committing to, both men agree to go.¹

Over 4,000 years ago, God issued a similar call to Abram. He called Abram to go without knowing where he was going. Likely, Abram was unsure of what he was committing to, but he still obeyed God.

Lesson

The call of Abram in Genesis 11:27-12:9 shows us that God gives his people the earth to reclaim for the kingdom of God.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Abram Travels Halfway to the Promised Land (11:27-32)
2. Abram Receives God’s Promise (12:1-3)
3. Abram Responds to God’s Promise (12:4-5)
4. God Identifies the Land of His Promise (12:6-9)

I. Abram Travels Halfway to the Promised Land (11:27-32)

First, Abram travels halfway to the Promised Land.

¹ See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2003/february/14172.html>.

Moses said in Genesis 11:27 that **“Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot.”** Then we learn that **“Haran died in the presence of his father Terah”** (11:28a). Some scholars believe that **Abram** took care of **Lot**, because he traveled with Abram to and from Egypt (13:1). In any event, Haran died **“in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans”** (11:28b), that is, Babylonia, which is present-day Iraq. Babylonia is associated with Babel, where people rebelled against God by wanting to make a name for themselves (11:4). They did not want to spread God’s kingdom all around the earth as God had mandated (1:28; 9:1). So, God confused their language, and from there he dispersed people over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:9). Even **Abram** and his family worshiped pagan gods. Joshua later told the tribes of Israel as they gathered at Shechem, “Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods” (Joshua 24:2).

So, people all around the world did not worship the true and living God. Was God giving up on his plan to establish his kingdom on earth? The Bible’s answer is a clear *No*.

We learn that both **“Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah”** (11:29). Moses also noted that **“Sarai was barren; she had no child”** (11:30). That is very important to the background of God’s promise to Abram that we shall see shortly.

We also learn that **“Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran”** (11:31-32). From these words we might conclude that **Terah** moved his family from **Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan**, where he

The Life of Abraham

lived for a while and then died at the age of 205, after which time God called Abram.

But, in fact, God called Abram when he was still living in **Ur of the Chaldeans**. When God later affirmed his promise to Abram, he said in Genesis 15:7, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” So, what happened? When did God call Abram? The clearest answer is given by Stephen to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:2-4:

Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.” Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living.

I believe that Kent Hughes is right in his assessment of what happened. He writes:

The point here is that it was in darkest Ur that Abram saw the glory of God and heard the call to depart and go to a land that God would show him. And he convinced Terah to leave with him. But when they got to Haran..., Terah would not budge. So dutiful Abram bid his time until Terah’s death, after which he was off again to the promised land.²

That seems to be a good explanation as to why Abram traveled only halfway to the Promised Land.

Let’s examine now God’s call and promise to Abram.

II. Abram Receives God’s Promise (12:1-3)

Second, Abram receives God’s promise.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 179.

While he was still living in Ur of the Chaldeans, **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”** (12:1). God, who had created the entire universe out of nothing, who had designed to establish his kingdom on earth, but who had seen people continually rebel against him, now called Abram to reestablish his kingdom on earth. But, to do so, Abram would need to make a complete break with his past. God was calling him to leave his country, his extended family, and even his own immediate family to go to the land that he would show him. One commentator said, “To leave home and to break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient men almost the impossible.”³ And another commentator said, “The call was to abandon all natural connections, to surrender all social customs and traditions, to leave land, clan and family. These were the very areas of strong attachment which in the ancient world would have been thought to provide ultimate personal security.”⁴

Although God was calling Abram to do something that was extremely difficult in his culture, he did encourage Abram by giving him seven promises in verses 2-3. God’s promises were:

1. **“And I will make of you a great nation, and**
2. **I will bless you, and**
3. **make your name great,**
4. **so that you will be a blessing.**
5. **I will bless those who bless you, and**
6. **him who dishonors you I will curse, and**
7. **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

Seven promises. Seven is the number of perfection, of completeness. So, God’s promises to Abram were perfect and complete.

Furthermore, the word “bless/blessing/blessed” is used five

³ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 151.

⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, 151.

The Life of Abraham

times in these verses. This is very interesting. God issued five “blessings” in Genesis 1-11 (in 1:22; 1:28; 2:3; 5:2; 9:1). There were also five “curses” pronounced by God against fallen creation and people in Genesis 1-11 (in 3:14; 3:17b; 4:11; 8:21; 9:25). So, God’s fivefold blessing to Abram in Genesis 12:2-3 affirms God’s original intention that his blessing will ultimately nullify his curse. This truth finds its ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that God’s promise to Abram expand from promises for him personally (“**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**”), to his contemporaries (“**I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse**”), to the climax (“**and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**”). This final promise is also fulfilled in Abram’s greater son, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:11), who will send out his followers to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

These are wonderful promises that God gave to Abram. But, how could they possibly come true? We have already learned that “Sarai was barren; she had no child” (11:30) and Abram was “seventy-five years old” (12:4). How could God fulfill his promise of a great nation to an old man with a barren wife?

God’s call to leave land, clan, and family was hard. Harder yet, was God’s promise that an old man and a barren wife would have children that would produce a great nation, and through whom all the families of the earth should be blessed.

How did Abram respond to God’s promise?

III. Abram Responds to God’s Promise (12:4-5)

Third, Abram responds to God’s promise.

Moses said in Genesis 12:4a, “**So Abram went, as the Lord**

had told him.” God said, “Go!” and Abram “went.” Simple obedience. First-time obedience. There was no haggling with God. No negotiations. No debates. Just plain obedience.

We know Abram as a great Old Testament man of God. The secret (really, it is not such a “secret,” is it?) lies in his simple obedience to the word of God. We would all grow in our walk with God if we also simply obeyed the word of God to us.

Moses then went on to tell us who went with Abram in verse 5, **“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. When they came to the land of Canaan....”** This was a journey of 400 miles. It would have been a difficult and dangerous journey. But Moses did not give any details of it because his interest lay elsewhere. As one commentator said, “In but one sentence he covers four hundred miles and then takes all of four verses to cover the next seventy-five: Abram’s actions in the land.”⁵

IV. God Identifies the Land of His Promise (12:6-9)

And fourth, God identifies the land of his promise.

When Abram got to Canaan, Moses said that **“Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh”** (12:6a). **The oak of Moreh** was a shrine where the Canaanites worshiped their pagan gods. That is why Moses added, **“At that time the Canaanites were in the land”** (12:6b). The **Canaanites** were the descendants of Canaan, whom Noah had cursed (9:25). The land God was giving to Abram was occupied by an accursed people, the seed of the serpent.

At this point, Abram may not yet have been aware that this was the land that God was giving him. So, **the Lord appeared to**

⁵ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, 152.

Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land” (12:7a). There, amid the pagan Canaanites, God identified the Promised Land.

Abram’s response to God is marvelous: **“So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him”** (12:7b). In the center of the land, in clear view of the Canaanite shrine of pagan worship, Abram erected his first altar to the Lord.

And then Moses said that **from there Abram moved** further south **to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. And, once again, Abram journeyed on, still going** further south **toward the Negeb** (12:8-9). This was the southern border of Canaan. In Genesis 13:18, we read that “Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.”

Why did Moses emphasize that Abram built altars to the Lord at various places in Canaan, right next to the pagan shrines? It is because God had called Abram to reclaim this land for his kingdom. Abram was expressing his trust in God by building altars to indicate that he was willing to be instrumental in the fulfillment of all of God’s promises to him. Calvin put it beautifully when he said that Abram “endeavored, as much as in him lay, to dedicate to God every part of the land to which he had access and perfumed it with the odor of his faith.”⁶ In this land, not the Canaanite gods but God will be King. This was God’s country!

If we know the rest of the life of Abraham, the book of Genesis, and the rest of the Bible, we know that God wonderfully fulfilled every single promise to Abram. However, at this point in his life, Abram simply obeyed God, not knowing how God would fulfill his promises to him. God said, “Go!” and he “went.” And

⁶ John Calvin, *Genesis*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 116.

when God identified the Promised Land to him, he set up altars to the Lord, indicating his trust in God.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the call of Abram in Genesis 11:27-12:9, we should reclaim all nations for the kingdom of God.

The climax of God's promises to Abram was "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12:3). God's plan of redemption goes far beyond the Promised Land. God is still interested in blessing "all the families of the earth." God's plan is that the gospel go to all nations. Canaan was but a first step in God's plan.

In claiming Canaan for the kingdom of God, Abram was pre-figuring his seed, the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1). Jesus came to reclaim the whole world for the kingdom of God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16a). His only Son, Jesus, died to atone for "the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). After his resurrection, Jesus commanded his followers to reclaim all the nations for the kingdom of God. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). That call is still valid for us today. As God called Abram to reclaim Canaan for his kingdom, so Christ calls his disciples to reclaim all nations for the kingdom of God.

So, let me ask you: what are you doing to reclaim all nations for the kingdom of God? Are you obeying God's word? Are you praying for unsaved friends? Are you inviting people to hear the word of God so that they might be saved? Are you telling people about the good news of the gospel? Are you active in a ministry in the church?

May God help each one of us to be obedient to Jesus Christ and his command to make disciples of all nations. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org