

“From Many to One to Many” (#1 of 10) Genesis 11:27-12:20
By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, First sermon, on March 4, 2018

Introduction: Several years ago I worked on my family tree, my genealogy (家谱) .

On my father’s side. My Dutch ancestors (祖先) set sail from the Netherlands (荷兰) to America in the year 1847. The grandfather of my grandfather was a man in his 30s.

He took his wife and three children to the new world. To start a new life.

In Genesis 11 and 12, we read about another man taking his wife and three children to a new land, to start a new life. Here we read about his genealogy.

It’s a genealogy one that goes all the way back to the man Noah.

1. It was God’s PLAN that Noah’s descendants should multiply greatly.

That’s our first point this afternoon: **THE PLAN** of God.

It was God’s plan that Noah’s descendants would spread out (分散开来) and fill the earth.

And that was God’s original plan to Adam and Eve, wasn’t it?

To multiply, and to fill the earth.

But the descendants of Noah refused to fill the earth. They stayed together in one area.

So God brought confusion to their languages. And that forced the people to separate from each other. Eventually they became many nations.

In Genesis 11, God focuses on one son of Noah, the son Shem.

And from Shem’s many descendants, God focuses on just one of them: the man Terah. In chapter 11, verse 26, we read that Terah had three sons.

And of those three sons, God focuses on one son, the man Abram. His name is later changed to “Abraham.” I am going to call him by that more familiar name, “Abraham.”

These early chapters of Genesis focus our attention from many people, the many descendants of Adam, the many descendants of Noah, down to just ONE MAN.

Illustration (举例说明) : It is sort of like a funnel (漏斗) , that you might use to put oil in your car. Or to pour liquid from a large container into a smaller container. The top of the funnel is very wide. But the bottom is narrow. So it is with God and his plan for the human race. It starts out very wide, very broad.

But like a funnel God’s plan narrows down to ONE MAN.

Oh, but that is not the end of God’s plan, to focus on just one man. No, in Genesis 12, we read that God’s plan is for “THE NATIONS.”

God tells Abraham that ALL THE FAMILIES on the earth eventually will be blessed in him.

All the people in the world eventually will be blessed in and through Abraham.

So think of two funnels—the first one, wide at the top, narrow at the bottom.

And the second funnel underneath, turned upside down. The narrow part at the top, and the wide part at the bottom. So is God’s plan: from the many, down to the one man; then from one man, down to the many.

Eventually all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through Abraham.

This was, and still is, the plan of God. His plan for many peoples.

All the peoples of the earth. For Europe, for Africa, for Asia, for the Americas... for the distant islands. Everyone in some way, will be blessed through Abraham.

And of course we know that this blessing through Abraham, is fulfilled in JESUS.

Jesus is the main descendant of Abraham. Jesus is Abraham’s descendant.

It is in Jesus—his finished work on earth—that the peoples of the earth truly are blessed.

Why Abraham—why did God work his gracious plan through Abraham?

Some will say, wrongly, that Abraham must have been a better man than the others. Well, no. Right away in chapter 12, we are told of Abraham’s great sin, his failure to trust in God.

He lied about his wife, to mighty Pharaoh (法老) of Egypt.

And in this series of sermons (讲道 , 讲章) we will read about many other sins of Abraham.

Let us be clear: Abraham was chosen by God in the same way we have been chosen— completely by God's grace; in God's sovereign (主权的) plan. There was nothing in Abraham, to move God to chose him. It was 100% by God's grace. For us, also. In the NT we read that we are saved, in Jesus, completely by God's grace. And not by our own deservng.

We read in Genesis 12:1 that God suddenly had appeared to Abraham.

Without Abraham's looking for God, or seeking God.

One day God simply decided to choose Abraham and tell him his plan.

“Abraham, I will make of you a great nation...and I will bless you.”

Later, in chapters 15 and 17, we learn that this is COVENANT (约 , 盟约) LANGUAGE.

A covenant is simply God making a relationship of grace, of love, with people he chooses. And that covenant is sealed by blood. So that, later, Jesus speaks of his own blood, the blood he shed on the cross, as “the blood of the covenant.”

Ultimately, this covenant with Abraham, is a covenant in Jesus, and is effected by Jesus' blood, shed on the cross. // That is God's plan. His plan even from eternity (永恒) ./

2. Now let us turn to the SIN OF ABRAHAM. I already mentioned it.

Because there was no food, no crops, in the area in which Abraham was living, Abraham traveled to the land of Egypt. He traveled west.

Abraham's wife was named Sarai. Her name is also later changed by God, to “Sarah.”

I am going to call her by her later name, “Sarah.”

Evidently, Sarah was a very beautiful woman. When Abraham came with his entourage into the land of Egypt, everyone started talking about this very beautiful woman. Abraham had become afraid that maybe the king of Egypt would kill him, and take his beautiful wife for himself. So he had said to Sarah:

“Don't tell people that you are my wife. Instead, tell them that you are my sister.” You see, Abraham was fearful.

And isn't fear something easy to fall into? It is for me. When I was a pastor of a church, I sometimes feared for the members of my church. I sometimes feared about the future of my church. If you are honest, you probably have some fears in your life.

Children can be afraid of a subject in school, or of a bully.

Teens can be fearful about being rejected or mocked by other teens.

Adults sometimes are afraid for their children. Or afraid about not having enough money. Or afraid about some sickness. To be human is to be afraid.

But many of our fears are not godly fears. Many of our fears show a lack of trust in God.

So it was with Abraham. God had made a promise that eventually he would become a large nation of people. That meant he would have to live...at least long enough to have a child, to have descendants.

So even though he had God's promise of life, yet, Abraham feared being killed.

Worse than that, Abraham was putting at risk the plan of God. The plan of God to transform the descendants of Abraham into a large nation, a great nation. Humanly speaking, Abraham was risking the plan and purpose of God. Ultimately, Abraham was risking God's plan to send Jesus to this earth.

You see, if Sarah would be taken as the wife of Pharaoh, where would Abraham's children come from? Or maybe Abraham was already scheming (谋划) about another plan, to have children by another woman? Regardless, the redemptive (救赎的) plan of God to eventually send Jesus....and through Jesus to bless the nations of the earth...

that whole plan was put at risk. Because of Abraham's fear.

Oh, let us, children and adults, put our trust in God. Let us depend on His Word, His promises.

And let us not be afraid in ungodly ways./

Pharaoh somehow figures out that Abraham had lied to him, saying that Sarah was his sister, not his wife. Pharaoh and his entire household was "afflicted" in some way—maybe some sickness, some diseases, had come upon them. We are not told exactly what happened, only that Pharaoh learned the truth. That Sarah was Abraham's wife.

Pharaoh rebukes Abraham. Pharaoh confronts Abraham.

Think of it...an ungodly man, a pagan (异教徒) man, a believer in false religion, has to confront and correct the godly man! Pharaoh corrects Abraham.

"Now, get out of here. Leave this land," says Pharaoh to Abraham.

3. But here we see, again, **the GRACE OF GOD**. The kindness of God, to Abraham.

Grace, kindness, in first calling Abraham, in revealing himself to Abraham. Now, grace in sparing Abraham's life. Kindness also in not punishing Abraham for his great sin. His sin of deceit...and his greater sin of not trusting in God's power.

By grace, Abraham is saved; he is spared.

But remember. This grace is not merely for Abraham's sake.

The grace God showed to the man Abraham is not merely for his own life. Or for his marriage. Or for his wife, Sarah. God's grace is shown for His own glory. For the outworking of His own sovereign plan. The plan first revealed to Adam and Eve after they sinned in the Garden. That God would continue to work in them and through them. To bring forth a seed, a son, which is ultimately Jesus.

And here, that God would continue to work in and through Abraham, the sinner.

To eventually bring forth a seed, a son. Not the son Isaac. Oh, him too.

But, ultimately, the Seed of Abraham is Jesus.

Turn to the NT book of Galatians. Turn to Galatians chapter 3.

This is a letter by the apostle (使徒) Paul to the believers, the followers of Jesus, in the area of Galatia. First century A.D. And in the immediate context, Paul is referring to a later situation in the life of Abraham. Recorded in Genesis 15. Look at [vs. 7-9. Read.

The gospel was preached to Abraham! The good news about Jesus was preached, in some form, to the man Abraham. He didn't understand it fully. The gospel was revealed only in part. But Abraham heard something of that good news about Jesus.

That someday one of his descendants, Abraham's descendants, would be the Saviour. "In you, Abraham, in you, or through you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed." That is, through Jesus, the biological descendant of Abraham, many, many, many on planet earth will be blessed.

And here we are today. From many nations. My ancestors came from the Netherlands.

Your ancestors came from other countries in Europe, in Asia, in Africa. In God's plan, to send Jesus, to shed his blood on the cross. That blood is the blood which atones (代赎) for our sin. Which removes our sin, from God's sight. And that blood which also brings us the righteousness (义) of God, the perfection of Jesus, credited to us.

If only we simply trust in Jesus. If only we have faith in Jesus.

[Read again vs. 9.

Abraham was a sinner, yes, a great sinner. But by God's grace, he was also a "man of faith." That's what Paul calls him...Abraham, "the man of faith."

You see, despite his many faults and failures, Abraham trusted in God.

By faith, Abraham looked forward to the Saviour, Jesus.

And through that faith, by God's grace, Abraham was saved.

By that same faith, we also are saved today.

Let me ask: are you a person "of faith"? I'm not asking if you are perfect.

I know you are not perfect. I know your marriage, your life, your family, is not perfect.

Neither is mine. But have you put simple faith in Jesus?
If you have put faith in Jesus, then, vs. 9 of Galatians 3, says this:
That right now you are sharing in THE BLESSING of Abraham. ...
Today you share in the blessing of Jesus, the descendant of Abraham. / LET US PRAY.

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