

Living in the Land of Promise

Genesis 12:1-9

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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."

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.

When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 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. 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. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

God's Call

Go . . . from your country . . . and your kindred . . . and your father's house . . . to the place that I will show you

- Spheres of belonging: where living life with others came naturally
 - Comfort
 - Safety
 - Predictability
 - Friendship
 - Language
 - Identity
- Primary influences: the source of his understanding of the world
 - Customs, culture, currency, calendar
 - What is important, what is not important
 - What has high value, what has low value
 - What is worthy of attention, what is not worthy of attention

The call is terrifying!

- (Distance from Ur to Haran: 600 miles, distance from Haran to Shechem: 426 miles)
- Leave the spheres of belonging (i.e. what naturally comes easily)
- Adopt a new primary influence
 - A new loyalty must be chief: loyalty to the LORD
 - Reorganize his loyalties
 - All existing loyalties must be subject to that new chief loyalty
 - Existing loyalties are not to be abandoned, but refined by the new chief loyalty
 - Father, Wife, Servants, Merchants, Animals
 - Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world . . . be transformed by the renewal of your mind . . . discern the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect.
 - 1 Peter 1:13 – As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had . . .
- Difficulties arise when loyalty to the LORD conflicts with the expectations of others!
 - Matthew 10:34-39 – Not peace but a sword . . . one's enemies are in his own household.
 - John 15:19 – If you were of the world the world would love you
 - 1 John 4:4 – He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world

Where is God leading Abram?

- To the place I will show you – The answer is not clear at the time of the call.
- God gives enough direction to get Abram moving.
- Why not more information? Why not more of the plans revealed?
 - Maybe this is how faith in God works
 - Maybe Abram's ability to hear and/or understand is limited
- Consider the disciples of Jesus – 3 years of slow revealing, often not understood
- Philippians 1:6 – He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.
- Philippians 4:7 – Peace that passes understanding will guard your hearts in Christ Jesus

- 2 Peter 1:5-8 – Add to your faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love.

God's Plan

I will make of you . . . a great nation . . . I will bless you . . . and make your name great . . . so that you will be a blessing . . . I will bless those who bless you . . . him who dishonors you I will curse . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed

- Imagine these words from Abram's perspective
 - He must have meditated on what these words meant
 - He must have been excited by the scope of God's plan, expecting that it would not all be completed during his lifetime
 - He must have found strength and wisdom in these words
 - This is a unique aspect of Christian meditation – it is not meant to disconnect from the reality around us, but to inform us about how to participate in life according to the parameters God has revealed
- God introduces a new phase of his project:
 - A kingdom of Priests
 - Exodus 19:6 – You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
 - 1 Peter 2:9 – You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.
 - The hallowing of God's name
 - 1 Kings 8:41-43 - Solomon's prayer for the temple concerning God's reputation among foreigners, "in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you."
 - Isaiah 11:6-9 – The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea
 - Habakkuk 2:14 – The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea
 - Matthew 6:5 – Hallowed be thy name
 - Revealing of the Christ, the Son of God
 - John 3:16 – God gave his son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life
 - Romans 5:6 – While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21 – God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God
 - Colossians 1:19 – In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace through the blood of his cross.
 - The Culmination
 - Revelation 21 – The dwelling place of God is with man
 - Luke 14:15-24 – (v23) . . . compel people to come in . . . that my house may be filled

Abram's Response

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. . . . Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

Remember where we are in OT history. There had not yet been:

- Elijah and his miracles
- David and Goliath
- Gideon or Samson
- Joshua, Jericho, and the conquest of Canaan
- Wilderness wandering
- Ten Commandments
- Exodus from Egypt
- Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Abram had to "believe without seeing".

Abraham collects all the people and belongings with him (no doubt an exhausting, strenuous, demanding effort) and starts the long journey to Canaan, not knowing where in Canaan they will land. Consider the number of "are we there yet?" questions – what's Abram going to say – "well, I don't know if we are there!" This would have put tremendous strain on Abram to keep up his own spirits as well as maintain the followership of his cohort. None of this was easy! Faithfulness to God is not easy.

But what did Abram experience when he got there?

- The LORD appeared to him – he received a greater revelation of the LORD himself
- The LORD added a new promise – To your offspring I will give this land

Abram in the New Testament

- James 2:23 – Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.
- Romans 4:17 – Abraham believed God can call into existence things that are not
- Galatians 3:6-9 – Those who believe are the descendants of Abraham
- 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 . . . in tents. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.
- Hebrews 11:39-40 - . . . (they) did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Final Thoughts – Living in the Land of Promise

The words in this passage were faithfully copied by Jewish scribes for centuries – during every type of turmoil: famine, drought, plundering, destruction of Jerusalem (see Deut 28), exile into Babylon, Roman occupation, pogroms in Europe, the Holocaust. God has seen to it that these words have come to us.

God's call to us is like God's call to Abraham. Believe God and it will be counted to you as righteousness.

- Romans 10:9
 - If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (**he has the authority to save and to instruct and provide**)
 - And believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead (**he is alive at the right hand of God the Father and serving those who follow him, having proven his words and promises true**)
 - You will be saved (**God views you not as an enemy, but as a son or daughter; and you have the Holy Spirit, God's word, and the church to help you grow**)

What can we expect by believing in God? Something similar to Abraham

- A new journey of productive faith
- Hardships that stretch us and force faith to be active
- Refinement of our role in all our relationships
- Energy and peace from God's vision
- A maturing relationship with God

The final word

- Genesis offers very difficult passages to deal with morally. But consider this: The destructive choices God makes occur after a long time of patient mercy and are done as a last-ditch effort to preserve the rest of the world.
- We are constantly receiving inputs from the culture around us, as well as inputs from our complicated internal self. You must decide what will be the source of your moral direction – how do you manage all those inputs?
- Option 1: We conform to the vision and morality of the world and culture around us
 - There should be no doubt that the culture around us with its on-the-fly morality is content to harm you and leave you disabled.
 - It is begging you to risk your future in pursuit of high-risk relationships and behaviors
 - That culture is begging you to be discontent with your life and actively construct an identity that has no basis in material reality
 - The culture is content to call upon science to discredit God and the church but suppresses science when convenient. Science personalities remains silent on the self-destructive identity issues popular now. The culture makers make science a servant of a different agenda.
 - Be prepared for the next phase be more destructive than this one.
- Option 2: Follow the Lord the best we know how, take on his project, authorize him to reshape us, and become salt and light in some way.