

The Call of Abram: Genesis 12:1-9  
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This week we take a significant step in our study of Genesis. You can think of Genesis in two parts. Chapters 1-11, and then chapters 12-50. Those obviously aren't two equal halves, but that's how the storyline is broken up. Chapters 1-11 contain primeval history. The accounts of what happened in the earliest years of mankind. Creation, the first man and woman, the first generations of mankind. There was Adam and Eve and the Fall into sin. Then their sons Cain and Abel. And after Cain killed Abel, there was Seth. And eventually there was Noah and the Flood. And later the Tower of Babel. All of that is part of primeval history, which makes up Genesis 1-11. It's a history that provides the background for all mankind. This is our common heritage. All the families of the earth can find their roots in Genesis 1-11. In chapter 12, and for the rest of the book, the narrative focuses on one particular family. The family of Abraham. Genesis 12-50 we can call patriarchal history. It's the story of the patriarchs, the fathers. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and the story of Jacob's son Joseph. The account of their lives is what makes up the rest of the book of Genesis. So we have the primeval history of the universe in chapters 1-11, and the patriarchal history of God's chosen people in chapters 12-50.

It's interesting to think about the progression of this book, because it shows that God is both the ruler of the entire universe and the God who elects Abraham and Abraham's offspring to be his special people. John Stott writes, "we should never allow ourselves to forget that the Bible begins with the universe, not with the planet earth; then with the earth, not with Palestine; then with Adam the father of the human race, not with Abraham the father of the chosen race. Since, then, God is the Creator of the universe, the earth, and all mankind, we must never demote him to the status of a tribal deity or petty godling like Chemosh the god of the Moabites, or Milcom (or Molech) the god of the Ammonites, or Baal the male deity, or Ashteroth the female deity, of the Canaanites."

So even though the biblical narrative does fairly quickly zero in on the chosen people of Israel, the Bible begins by emphasizing God's universal reign. He is not just the God of the Israelites. He is not a tribal deity. He is the God of the universe. He created everything out of nothing, and He reigns over all the nations. The God of Israel is the One true God over all the nations. And now we're going to see how the God of the universe chose one particular nation, one particular person and his descendents, in order to bring blessing to all the nations. God is sovereign over all things and all peoples, and He decided to bless the world by blessing Abraham and Abraham's descendants.

Let's look at this in Genesis 12:1-9. This passage is so significant because it records the call of Abram. God later changed his name to Abraham, but when God first called him his name was still Abram. And I want us to notice three very important things about Abram's call. Three things that were true of Abram, and are also true of believers today. First, God has called us and given us the gift of faith. Second, God has called us to forsake all else. And third, God has blessed us in order to be a blessing.

**God has called us and given us the gift of faith.**

In Abram's call, and when we look at how God worked in our own lives to save us, it should be clear that it was all by God's initiative. God came and got us. God called

us to Himself. We weren't seeking for Him. We didn't come to Him. He came to us. When God called Abram, it wasn't because Abram was a good man. It wasn't because he had faith. He didn't have any credentials to commend him to God. God didn't receive a stack of resumes and decide that Abram was the most qualified to be the father of God's chosen people. Don't be mistaken. Nobody was qualified. Nobody deserved God's blessing. Abram was a sinner who deserved God's wrath and punishment. But God chose him in spite of his sin. God chose to bless him even though he was a sinner. Listen to what Joshua 24 says about Abraham. "And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many'" (Joshua 24:2-3).

Do you see what that says about Abram? Abram was not seeking the true God. Abram was not worshiping and serving God. He had no faith in God. He was an idolater. He was a pagan. And God called Abram out of paganism. He called him out of his idolatrous lifestyle. God did not choose Abram because he was a good person. God did not choose Abram because he had faith. He chose him even though he was an evil, faithless person. And just like God called Abram, God has called every person who is a Christian. He has called us out of our own sin, out of our unbelief, out of our idolatry and rebellion. He has brought us out of that and given us the gift of faith in Jesus Christ.

The fact that God chose us is completely a work of His grace and mercy. We are not good people. We do not deserve God's blessing. But God calls us while we are still sinners, while we are serving other gods. Romans 5:8 says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Isn't that amazing and glorious? Isn't that Good News! We were all serving other gods, whether it be work, or money, or power, or sex, or fame, or family, or comfort, or religion. Some of us were very active in churches and followed the rules and thought that we could make ourselves good enough to earn God's favor. But all of that is idolatry. It's serving false gods. But in spite of our sin and rebellion, Christ died for us. He died the death that we deserve. He took the punishment.

So our salvation is completely a work of God. We don't come to God initially. God comes to us first, and changes us from the inside out, so that we then come to Him. God called Abram out of paganism, out of idolatry. And God has called us out of our sinful lifestyles and has put us on a completely different path in life. God has called us and given us the gift of faith.

**Secondly, God has called us to forsake all else.**

When God calls us to faith, when He calls us out of sin and gives us the gift of faith in Him, it is a call to forsake everything else. See what God says in verse 1, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." This is a tremendous request, and verse 4 says that Abram went. And it was only by God's grace that he went. God had given him the gift of faith. Even though the cost was tremendously high, and the rewards were yet unseen, Abram set out by faith. Hebrews 11:8 says, "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." God hadn't told him where he was going.

Just put yourself in Abram's shoes for a minute (and maybe some of you can identify with this situation pretty closely). God says, "Abram, here's your assignment: Leave your home, leave your family of origin, and go! Oh, and by the way, I'm not going to tell you yet where you're going. But go." This is a call that demands everything. God is telling Abram to forsake everything and follow. Does that sound familiar?

Christ says to us, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25). What God required of Abram is what Christ requires of us. Jesus says leave your old ways, your old life, your old habits, and I will show you where to go. Forsake everything and follow Me.

The call of the Gospel is total and complete. Jesus doesn't say, give me a couple hours each Sunday. Jesus says, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me. Give Me everything! Everything you have. Everything you are. Every gift and talent, every hope and aspiration, every relationship. It's all mine. Jesus is not a Savior who works around your schedule. You can't compartmentalize Him into certain parts of your life, and leave Him out of other parts of your life. He wants everything, and He wants to affect every part of your life.

And, you know, that is good news. Because the areas of our lives that we try to keep to ourselves, those will be the things that bring us the most misery and regret. Submitting to Jesus' plan will bring joy and fulfillment and meaning. So we can't, and it would be foolish for us, to tell Jesus that He can control these specific things in our lives, but not these things. Jesus, I'll submit to You in the area of finances, but You can't tell me what to watch on TV. Or, Jesus, I'll go to church and read my Bible, but I won't confess my sin to anyone. Or, Jesus, I'll minister in these ways and at these times, but I'm not going to do anything that's outside my comfort zone.

In so many ways, we hold ourselves back from totally following Christ. And all we're doing is robbing ourselves of greater joy. The most exciting life to live is the life completely surrendered to Christ. Christ demands everything! EVERYTHING!! Trust Him, and follow, because His plans are infinitely greater than our plans. We're hesitant to go, because we think what we have is better than what God could give us. But how stupid is that?! We're huddled over the trash can of our accomplishments and possessions and plans, and Jesus says, "Leave the trash can there, and follow Me. I'll take you to the banquet table. I'll give you abundant life." Trust Christ with everything. It will glorify Him, and it will bring us great joy.

As I think about how God called Abram, I also think about what God is doing in our church right now. Tom and Cam and I feel very strongly that the Lord is calling our church to go somewhere, but we don't yet know exactly where that is. I think God has made it very clear to the elders that we are to be a city church, meeting as close to downtown as possible. He has made the vision clear and has told us to go. But He hasn't yet pointed out the particular building that we're supposed to move to. So we're trying to walk by faith, step by step. As a congregation we'll need to give up some things that are familiar to us. We'll need to take some risks and be willing to go places we haven't gone before, and minister in ways that stretch us. This is the Christian life. It can be scary

because we don't know what's around the next bend. We don't know what God has for us. He has simply said, "Go."

It's also extremely exciting, because God is the One who is leading us. And He is working all things together for our good. So even though His plans for us will include hardship and struggle, it is what's best for us. And over the long haul we'll be able to look back and see how He has refined us and sanctified us and given us greater peace and joy in Him. Let's go! For the sake of God's glory, and for the increase of our own joy, let's go wherever it is God is leading us. Let's prepare ourselves, emotionally and spiritually, to pack up and make a significant transition in the life of our church. God is doing something. I believe He's doing something great. And when He opens the door and says, "Here's where I want you," I want us to rejoice and go.

In the meantime, it's not as though we just sit and wait. There are mission trips (Faith Armstrong is in Ecuador right now, Kayti Roche just got back from Romania), there's VBS coming up next week, there are opportunities to share the Gospel with co-workers and neighbors and family and friends and people we meet on the street. We should be praying for God to bless us and make us a blessing. We should pray that God will give us a greater passion for His glory. In all these ways we are already going. We are loosening the worldly roots that tie us down. We are being stretched and pushed out of our comfort zones. Let's walk by faith, and pray for God's blessing on this church so that we can be a blessing to others.

And this leads to the third point. **God has blessed us in order to be a blessing.** Look at verse 2, "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great . . ." Let's stop right there for a moment. God promises to make Abram's name great. How does that fit with what we learned last week about the city of God and the city of man? The city of man, represented in the tower of Babel, is only focused on making a name for itself. But the city of God exists to magnify God's Name. And last week I talked about the sin of trying to make a name for yourself. Those who worked on the tower of Babel were trying to make a name for themselves, and God punished them for it. So we shouldn't ever try to make a name for ourselves, but, as we see in our passage this morning, if it pleases God, He can make a name for someone. God can bless an individual, or a chosen people, or a church, and make their name great in order to magnify His Name. So while we shouldn't try to make a name for ourselves, and serve our own selfish and prideful desires, we can pray that God will bless us and use us and give us greater resources and influence in order that His Name might be glorified. That's what we were praying on Wednesday night on Mt. Washington, when we prayed for the city of Pittsburgh. "God, increase our influence here in this city so that Your Name might be praised. Let the nations be glad in You, and let them sing for joy! And use us to accomplish Your purposes." It's not for our glory. It's all for God's glory. And I pray that it would be God's pleasure to show us more of Himself and let us be involved in the mighty things He plans to do in Pittsburgh and around the world. May we be His instruments, one of His channels of blessing to the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world.

How does this happen? What is the blessing that has come to us and that we hope to deliver to others? I left off in the middle of verse 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." There are two parts to this. Two halves of the promise. "I will bless you . . . so that you

will be a blessing.” Then verse 3 continues, “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.” These are rich promises. The point I want us to see here is that the way we are blessed, and the way others are blessed through us, is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a Gospel verse. This is an early proclamation of the Gospel. The first Gospel message was in Genesis 3:15, where God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” And that prophecy points to Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, who has defeated Satan once, and will defeat him again on the last day. And as the story of redemption unfolds and we come to Genesis 12, we learn that the seed of the woman is also the seed of Abraham. When Tom Schreiner preached a sermon on Genesis 12 at Clifton Baptist Church, his title was, “The seed of the woman is the seed of Abraham.” And when we turn to Galatians 3, which we’re studying in Sunday School, we see that the seed of Abraham is Christ, and we also see that this verse in Genesis 12:3 is a Gospel message.

First of all, 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.” Then Galatians 3:16, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.”

The Good News, the Gospel that was preached beforehand in Genesis 12:3, is that God is going to bless all the families of the earth, all the nations, all the ethnic groups in the world. And the spiritual blessing that is spreading throughout every tribe and language and people and nation is the blessing of salvation by faith alone. That’s the point that Paul is making in Galatians 3, (as well as Romans 4, another place where he uses Abraham as an example of justification by faith). In Galatians Paul is defending the Gospel against those who want to add works to salvation. There were some who taught that a person is saved by faith PLUS works. You have to trust in Jesus, but you also have to be circumcised and follow certain food laws and customs. Paul defends the Gospel against that false teaching and points back to Abraham, who “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:6; Rom 4:9, 22).

It’s by faith alone, not faith plus works. And the other amazing thing is that it is for all the nations. It’s for all people groups, not just the Israelites. God is bestowing this spiritual blessing of salvation by faith alone on all the families of the earth. God is a missionary God. This gospel is spreading throughout the world, and it will continue to spread until every ethnic group in the world has heard. And there will be individuals in every single one of those groups who believe and are saved. God has promised that it will happen, and it will be a glorious day when we worship our Savior in heaven alongside our brothers and sisters from every other tribe and language and people and nation. We are blessed in that we’re saved by faith alone, and the nations are blessed through us as we take this Gospel message to them.

God has called us and given us the gift of faith. So let’s give Him all the praise and glory for our salvation. It is all by His grace. God has called us to forsake all else. So let’s trust Him and follow Him wherever He leads us. And God has blessed us in

order to be a blessing. So let's cherish the Gospel and seek to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world.