

The Call 1-7-07

Genesis 12:1-9 NIV)

¹ The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

We are beginning the year with this momentous turning point in the history of man. To understand how important this passage is consider several points. 1. Three of the world's major religions start with these verses. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

2. The whole of Genesis to this point has been introducing the characters involved in this covenant. We have seen the ancestors of Abram. They keep falling and needing redemption. First there was Adam and Eve. God gave them a promise and a covering. (Genesis 3:15) Then the world got so violent and evil that a flood was the only answer, and God spared Noah and his family. (Genesis 6:8) Then his descendents built a tower in defiance of God and were mercifully scattered. (Genesis 11:9) So what are we to conclude about the human side of the covenant? Sinful, rebellious, and prideful would only begin to describe our state. The norm of higher education today is telling students that Christianity is an expression in mindless faith. They teach that it is fine to be religious as long as you acknowledge that it has nothing to do with reason and intellect. Yet secular humanism teaches that man is steadily evolving to a higher level. Talk about a disconnect with reason and intelligence! The Bible is the one philosophy that answers the question of why man is so depraved. If they believe in empirical validation, we win! Man is fallen.

And how have we seen the holy God of these passages, merciful, gracious, patient, and just would be a few of the descriptions for Him. It is a good thing God doesn't ask much of the human side. We have no indication in the text that Abram was seeking God in any way. God reached out to him in gracious love, not in response to Abram, but to elicit a response from him, just like He reached out to you and me.

3. The rest of Scripture and history is a fulfillment of these verses! That is how important the text is that we are looking at today. (Ephesians 3:4-6) I hope that when we are done, it will be clear to you how pivotal the first three verses are. Up to this point, God had been dealing with mankind as a whole. Mankind had fallen so consistently that God called out one man to create a nation that would represent Him to the sinful world.

4. Abram will be the chief character of Genesis, with more written about him than any other individual of Genesis. He will be called the father of Israel, and father of the faithful. The New Testament will dedicate Romans 4, Galatians 3, and the major portion of Hebrews (11:8-19) hall of faith to him.

Commented [notes1]: 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
Gen 3:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.
Gen 6:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 9 That is why it was called Babel --because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.
Gen 11:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,
5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.
6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.
Eph 3:4-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.
Heb 11:8 (NIV)

To appreciate the call on Abram, we have to understand what life was like in Ur. The people of the earth were scattered after Babel, but Terah and his family had stayed in the vicinity. The locals continued building towers. They apparently didn't get God's message. They were idolaters. (Joshua 24:2) Even after the miracle of Babel, they went their own way.

Commented [notes6]: 2 Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.' Josh 24:2 (NIV)

Ur was excavated in the 1920s and 30s. A death pit was discovered in which a queen decked in gold and jewels was buried along with her servants who were put to death so that they could serve her in the afterlife. There were temples to various gods in Ur along with a tower to worship Nanna, the moon god. The worship of this goddess included human sacrifice. That was Ur, decadent, multistoried, and pagan. In the midst of all that, God, the Creator, came down again not in judgment but in grace, this time to whisper in Abram's ear, "Leave!"

This is the fifth great bottom I see in our roller coaster run through Genesis, but the call of God to Abram starts our ascent again. God has chosen a man to proclaim His name in the earth. He called Him out of the world with a command and promises. It is a very lopsided covenant. We'll see this covenant set forth 10 times in Genesis!

¹ *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.* The Lord didn't ask Abram to leave, He commanded him to. He was to separate himself from a number of comfortable things. (2Corinthians 6:17) The first was his country. Have you been to the third world? Imagine God commanding you to move to Mexico, or Cuba, or say Pakistan. Are you starting to feel a bit of what Abram felt? Only God didn't give Abram a destination. He just said He would show him later.

Commented [notes7]: 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 2 Cor 6:17 (NIV)

Leaving your people is another struggle. These are the people who speak your language, who have your customs, and who know you and your family. You might have some comfort if God told you to go to Canada where they speak English. It is a very difficult thing to live in a land of another language. I can tell you from experience it is quite a lonely thing, because you can't fully express your heart. You have no deep conversations until you become fluent, which can take years.

Leaving your father's household is another struggle. Notice how the focus narrows, country, people, household. They were all infected with the materialism and paganism of Ur. God was asking Abram to separate himself from everything that was comfortable and head out into the unknown. (Hebrews 11:6) There were no phones to call home and see how the family you left behind was doing. You would probably never see them again. The term "household" probably also meant the wealth of the home. The father owned the estate. To leave would be to walk away from the security of the family wealth. Are you starting to get a feel for the faith that God was asking Abram to have?

Commented [notes8]: 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Heb 11:6 (NIV)

Now for God's part of the covenant. It uses the word "bless" five times and has a total of seven blessings. It contains "I will" five times, the number of grace. If Abram would just jump on the camel and go in faith, completeness of blessings would be his, the

grace of God would fill his life... if only! That's not exactly what he did, but God still kept his side of this promise.

² *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.* If he would forsake his nation, God would make him into a great nation. (Matthew 19:29) His wife was barren at the time. That took a leap of faith to believe. He would also be blessed. Our culture doesn't value the blessing of God. We have such faith in materialism that we don't realize that without God's blessing things are meaningless. The blessing of God brings peace, purpose, and fulfillment in life. If Abram would leave, He would have God's blessing. (Matthew 5:6)

His name would be made great. How ironic! The builders of Babel were trying to make a name for themselves. They wanted to exalt self instead of God through their efforts. God is telling Abram that if he will cast himself on the Lord, the Lord will make his name great and make him a blessing to others. When you receive a heart after God, you desire to be a blessing to others.

³ *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*" God would so associate Himself with Abram that those who bless Abram would be blessed. As for the curse portion, the Hebrew does not have two identical terms as we have in English. Instead it is something along the line of "whoever disdains you I will curse." They don't even have to curse them (Numbers 24:9); they need merely not esteem them to end up cursed by God. (Psalm 17:8)

The last part of the promise is the part that speaks to us. Through (or "in") Abram, everyone on the earth would be blessed. How is that possible? Only through the descendent of Abram, Jesus. (Galatians 3:8) That is why the Matthew genealogy of Jesus begins with Abraham. (Matthew 1:2) From this clue we see that Abram is now the line of the seed that God promised would crush the head of the serpent.

Now consider that the rest of the Old Testament is the blessing of God on the descendents of Abram. You might say, "Wait a minute. They went as captives into Egypt, didn't take the whole land they were promised, rebelled against God again and again, went into captivity again and ended up under the thumb of Rome when Messiah came, not to mention the holocaust. How were they blessed?"

The problem is our understanding of blessed. Blessed doesn't mean roses without thorns. Blessed means God keeps dealing with you until you get it right. That is the very best thing for us. Consider what kind of parent would let their child continue to do destructive things, or give up on them because they were rebellious. God never gave up on Israel. He still hasn't. They were keepers of the word of God. They inherited the land. Through them came the Messiah and were the first to hear the Gospel. They will one day turn and be saved, even as today there are many Jewish Christians and increasingly so. (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:25-27) I know some disagree with that, but that is what I see in the prophecies and the writings of Paul in the New Testament.

Commented [notes9]: 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. Matt 19:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matt 5:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: Like a lion they crouch and lie down, like a lioness--who dares to rouse them? "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!" Num 24:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 8 Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings Psalms 17:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." Gal 3:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 2 Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren, Matt 1:2 (YLT)

Commented [notes15]: 10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. Zech 12:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." Romans 11:25-27 (NIV)

What did Abram have to do for this promise to come to pass? Leave! That's all, just separate himself. He did, (eventually) and God did all the rest. Are there any loopholes for Israel not to be blessed? I don't see one. Today, the world is turning its back on Israel and siding with terrorists just as the prophets predicted, (Zechariah 12:3) but God's word will not fail. They will accept the Messiah.

Commented [notes17]: 3 On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. Zech 12:3 (NIV)

For a moment, I want you to consider how the early church saw our passage fulfilled in their day. Look at the wording of the Apostle Paul in light of this passage. ¹⁶ *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.* Romans 1:16 (NIV) He repeats the expression "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" several times in the next chapter as well. I was baffled by what seemed to be a prejudicial expression. (Ephesians 6:9) When reading *Eternity in Their Hearts*, I realized that Rabbi Saul was merely repeating the Mosaic pattern in our text for today. First He blesses Abram and his seed, and then He blesses the world through him. (Acts 3:25)

Commented [notes18]: 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. Eph 6:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' Acts 3:25 (NIV)

Much of Paul's early audience was Jewish. This would ring a bell with them. "Oh yeah! The promise to Abram!" And so when Paul went into a city, his M.O. was to go to the Jew first, according to the Scripture, not because he didn't like Gentiles. On the contrary, he would rather have gone to them first, but he saw the pattern of the Genesis 12:1-3 promise. We have to understand that for the first few decades the church was entirely Jewish. God blessed the Jews with the revelation of Messiah. Many received Him and took the blessing to the Gentiles just as Genesis 12:1-3 predicted. (Acts 9:15) Now the whole world has been blessed, just as God said. Even the most remote corners of the globe are hearing of the salvation Jesus freely offers all who will believe. (Matthew 24:14)

Commented [notes20]: 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. Acts 9:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matt 24:14 (NIV)

Jesus' ministry was in the same pattern. If you follow His life chronologically, He went to the Jews first (including Samaritans), and in the final year of his ministry, he worked in areas that were mostly Gentile (Sidon, Caesarea Philippi, Decapolis, and Bethany beyond the Jordan). By the time John wrote his Gospel, they understood the pattern was being fulfilled. Listen carefully to his comment on Caiaphas' accidental prophecy. ⁵¹ *He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation,* ⁵² *and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.* John 11:51-52 (NIV) Fill in the blank. For God so loved the _____ ..." The Samaritans said, "Now we know that you are the Savior of the _____." Jesus said, "Go into all the _____." Jesus was talking to Jews when He said that. He believed Genesis 12:3!

Commented [notes22]: 16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. Romans 4:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. John 17:14-16 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 1 John 5:19 (NIV)

Abram is the father of all the faithful. (Romans 4:16) In closing, let us take to heart the call of Abram as pattern for us all. God calls us all to come out of the world. Jesus said we were to be in the world but not of the world. (John 17:14-16) The world system is under the control of Satan. (1John 5:19) We now belong to the Kingdom of God, so God calls us to separate ourselves. (John 15:19) He asks us to put Him above our people and family. He even warns us that our enemies may be those of our own household as they tempt us to put something other than God first in our life. (Matthew 10:36,37)

Commented [notes25]: 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. John 15:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' 37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; Matt 10:36-37 (NIV)

He calls us to go and doesn't really tell us where we are going. Good thing most of the time. Remember Jesus' words to Nicodemus as he tried to explain to him what it meant to be born of the Spirit? ⁸ *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*" John 3:8 (NIV) A surrendered life isn't one that clings to the security of familiarity, finances, or family. He or she clings to God alone.

God is asking us the same thing that He was asking Abram. "Let go and let Me lead. I have a place for you, blessings for your life, and I want to bless people through you." He is asking for us to trust Him to lead us. (Matthew 10:38) When you consider the failures of man in the first eleven chapters of Genesis and in the lives of many we know and read about, doesn't letting Him lead sound like the intelligent thing to do?

Will God make your name great too? The greatest names I know are not ones the world esteems, but heaven does. Why? Because they were people of faith who let God lead them. Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, Lottie Moon, Charles Cowman, D.L. Moody, Billy Graham, Brother Yun, Sundar Singh, those are great names, greater than any names this world admires! God has made their names great. They took the path of Abram, a life of faith in God, a life like the wind. Long after the heroes of the world have been forgotten, those saints' names will resound in the halls of heaven. And I can't wait to meet them.

To him who overcomes...I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it. Revelation 2:17 (NIV) Your name may not be remembered by the world, but there is a great name for every overcoming believer, given to us from the One whose name is above every name. (Philippians 2:9) He will make us to be king-priests serving the King of kings. (Revelation 5:10) Those who belong to Christ are the seed of Abraham and heirs of the promises to him. (Galatians 3:29)

The "I wills" of God wait for any man or woman of faith who will put God above everything else in life, nation, comfort, and family, and do what God has called you to do. As we will see in Abram's life, that does not mean a walk in the park, but it does mean that God is with you to turn even failures into blessings. (Romans 8:28) Most of the people I mentioned above were people who were made great through what they suffered for the sake of the Gospel.

One last thing to consider is that Abram wasn't looking for a city on earth. He was looking for a heavenly one. ¹⁰ *For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* Hebrews 11:10 (NIV) He set his heart on things above and not on things of the earth. (Colossians 3:1) He had seen the cities of men, and they did not offer hope. His hope wasn't in the physical land of Israel as important as that is. His hope was in New Jerusalem, the city of God. What is your heart longing for? Are you a person of faith, whose father is faithful Abraham? Have you let go of all security and thrown yourself to the wind of the Spirit? Are you on journey like that of Abram? It is the most exciting, holy adventure of all. To people who step out on that journey the Scripture says, *God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.* Hebrews 11:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Matt 10:38 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, Phil 2:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. Rev 5:10 (KJV)

Commented [notes30]: 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Col 3:1 (NIV)