

## Genesis Chapter 12: v. 1-20. – God’s call to Abraham

Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” <sup>4</sup> So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup> Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. <sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land. <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup> And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent *with* Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South. <sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine *was* severe in the land. <sup>11</sup> And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “Indeed I know that you *are* a woman of beautiful countenance. <sup>12</sup> Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This *is* his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Please say you *are* my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.” <sup>14</sup> So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she *was* very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house. <sup>16</sup> He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. <sup>17</sup> But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. <sup>18</sup> And Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What *is* this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she *was* your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, ‘She *is* my sister’? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take *her* and go your way.” <sup>20</sup> So Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

### Introduction

A few weeks ago we concluded our teaching at the end of chapter 9. Today we are going to study Chapter 12, therefore I need to fill in a few gaps in the text from Chapter 10-11.

In Chapter 10 and 11 we have a record of the nations that descended from Noah. The genealogy of these early nations is interrupted by God’s judgement. The intention of the writer at the time was to give us some background before God called Abram to form a special nation. Although God started again after the flood, with Noah and his family, the people soon were corrupted and followed their own ways, rather than following God’s way.

There is one name that I would like to select from Noah’s descendants in chapter 10. The name is Nimrod. (10: v. 8-9) Nimrod is described as a “mighty one on the earth”.

He made a name for himself as a mighty hunter. (v.9) He was probably the architect and builder of the tower of Babel. In v. 10 he had 4 kingdoms in the land of Shinar and after God confused the languages in chapter 11 v. 1-9, Nimrod went to Assyria and built Nineveh and 4 other cities.

Nimrod’s name signifies “Rebellion”. He wanted power and the ability to rule over everybody. He tried to set up a new religion. He wanted people to worship him and not the great creator God.

Satan had not given up trying to influence people’s lives and he had a grip on the life of Nimrod. However God put a stop to his possibility of world rule and decided to confuse the language of the world, which was

probably Hebrew, so that nobody would understand each other and then they would be scattered all over the world and cease building the city of Babel.

Also God's original instructions in Genesis Chapter 9: v. 1 would be fulfilled. God told Noah and his family to fill the earth. They had not obeyed these instructions.

God's plan was successful and the nations of the world were scattered.

The next thing we need to note and that is the introduction of Abram in chapter 11: v. 26. We are told that Terah lived 70 years and begot Abram. In Chapter 11:v. 10-26 we have Abram's descendants' right back to Shem who was one of Noah's sons. This is important when tracing the family line from Adam to Joseph and then Jesus. (See Luke Chapter 3: v. 23-38) Family heritage is very important to Jewish people. Moses knew this which is why he included it in the lead up to the call of Abram.

We are told in v. 27-32 of chapter 11 that Abram had a wife called Sarai, who was barren, and his brother Nahor had a wife called Milcah. We are also told that Terah had another son called Haran who had a son called Lot. Sadly Haran died while they were living in the Ur of the Chaldeans. The rest of the family went off to the land of Canaan, but only got as far as Haran and dwelt there. Sadly Terah died in Haran.

Now we come to Chapter 12: v. 1-9.

In v. 1-3 we have before us 4 promises that God made to Abram.

1. People – God promises Abram that He will make him into a great nation. Abram needed to have a lot of "Faith" in God about this promise because his wife Sarai was barren. Where was this nation going to come from? It would take a mighty miracle of God's "GRACE" for Sarai to have any children.
2. Place - God promised Abram that he would have a "HOME". At the time Abram was not told where that home would be. God said that He would show him that land. We know from v.5-6 that the land was going to be Canaan.
3. Protection - The way that God explained to Abraham about his protection was to tell him that those people who supported Abram would be blessed by God and those people who opposed Abram would be cursed by God Himself. You could get no better protection than that. Sometimes this protection can be seen in Genesis in the form of God's presence. ( Gen. 28: v.15 )
4. Programme - Finally we see that God has a programme and a future plan in the call of Abram. In v. 3 we are told that it will be through Abram that all the families of the earth will be blessed. Abram was going to be a channel through which God would bring blessing to the whole world.

As we meditate upon the call of Abram by the mighty creator God there are several things that are worth noting.

1. God's call to Abram can't be explained.

It can't be explained historically. We have noted in chapters 1-11 of Genesis that there had been 3 big negative things that had happened since God created this world. There was Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, then there was God's wrath upon mankind with the universal flood and now the judgement of confusing the language as a result of the tower of Babel. We have a world historically that is pleased to do without God's authority and fellowship. We have a world that is cursed, destroyed and scattered. If you were God, you might think that it was time to bring the final judgement upon this created world and upon mankind.

But NO, it is not a time for JUDGEMENT, it is a time for GRACE. Grace is the world receiving what it does not deserve. God was about to bless the world through Abram and it is utterly unexplainable except for the “GRACE” of God.

God’s call to Abram can’t be explained personally.

There was nothing special in the life of Abram to attract him to God. Let us turn to Joshua Chapter 24: v. 2.

<sup>2</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River<sup>a</sup> in old times; and they served other gods.

Abram was brought up serving other gods. He did not have a heritage in serving the one true God. And yet God called Abram, the sinner, Abram the one that worshipped idols. We can only explain it because of the “GRACE” of God.

2. God’s call to Abram was successful – v. 4-5 & 7-9.

We are told that Abram was 75 years old when he obeyed God’s call to leave the land where he was living. The key to this success can be found in v. 4. “So Abram departed as the lord had spoken to him.”

Abram was not brought up to respect, honor and worship the one creator God.

However as soon as God called him he was happy to obey. We are told twice in the text that Abram built an altar to the Lord. (v. 7, and v. 8) He built an altar for the purposes of making sacrifices to the one true God who had called him and made wonderful promises to him. Abram came to God on the basis of atonement. This was the offering of an animal as a sacrifice for sin. It was a substitute sacrifice.

Abram also called on the name of the Lord.

We discovered some weeks ago that this was the earliest form of “Worship service”.

It was public prayer and worship to God.

The important thing about God’s call to Abram was that His word directed Abram and that Abram was preoccupied with worshipping God.

The same should be for each one of us. When God speaks “GRACE” into our lives and saves us, calls us out of darkness into His wonderful light, we should be concerned about obeying His word and worshipping Him with our lives.

3. God’s call to Abram seemed impossible – v. 6-7.

There were two big things that made God’s promise to Abram seem impossible. The first was that his wife Sarai was barren. She couldn’t have any children. The second was that the land that God promised to Abram was already occupied with a nation of people called the Canaanites. These were not nice people and they did some horrible things that God hated. They would not set aside and move out of the way for Abram and his family and all his future descendants to occupy the land.

The situations surrounding God’s promise to Abram seemed impossible.

As we read the Bible we learn that sometimes God begins His great works with seemingly impossible situations.

A Religious man called Saul of Tarsus persecuted Christians. However one day God made a promise about this man that seemed impossible.

Let us read Acts 9: v. 13-16.

<sup>13</sup> Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

It seemed impossible at the time but God made it happen through His power and His Grace. It was not about Saul, it was about God working His purposes out through Saul.

Why is it that God delights in making the impossible possible?

Paul gives us a clue in 2 Corinthians 1: v. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. <sup>9</sup> Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,

So the answer is that by challenging us to have faith in God when the way seems impossible, we will put our full trust in God and not in ourselves and our own ability.

Then when the impossible is achieved, God is glorified.

I can testify of many situations in my ministry where the situation I was in seemed impossible, but God made it possible, and He did it in amazing ways.

### Real Life Story

About 23 years ago God called my wife and I to minister in a Church in London.

The Church leaders were convinced of God's call and so were we. The Church was a big building but only had a small fellowship of about 25 people. We moved to London and things were going quite well. However the money from the Church savings ran out and the leaders advised me to look for another position.

However I said that God had called me to this fellowship only 18 months ago. The problem was only money and that God would provide.

I had the faith that God would provide. Sadly the leadership team did not have the same faith. The leadership team all left the Church and cut off my salary so I had no salary at all. The leadership team were quite wealthy and they felt that if they left I could not survive without their support.

I cried to God, reminding Him of my call to this Church and asking if He would give me and my wife a sign that if we stayed in faith and worked in the Church with no salary that He would provide for us.

About 1 week later I returned home on a Wednesday night after a Bible study and my wife Wendy said to me, "we have received an envelope through the door tonight, but you will not believe what is inside it?"

I opened the envelope to discover £1,000, which was more than 1 month's salary.

This would be about 250,000 yen. Remember that was 23 years ago and worth a lot of money.

There was no note or letter or any explanation but Wendy and I knew that it was a sign from God to assure us of His provision. God provided for us for a further 8 years in this Church and we saw many people converted and won for Jesus.

If God calls you to serve Him, then He will definitely provide for you.

When the going gets tough, God will get going and provide for you.

In John Chapter 15: v. 5, Jesus said “Without Me you can do nothing ...”

If we can achieve things in our own strength, then they have no value to God.

We must be willing, and surrendered instruments in His hands. Then we can say like Luke does in Chapter 1: v. 37 “For with God, nothing will be impossible”

We now move on to the second half of Chapter 12. (v. 9-20)

1. Abram failed to trust God in Egypt.

We are told in v. 9 that Abram went on his journey towards the south. There was a famine in the land and they went down to Egypt to get some food.

Abram did something before entering Egypt that we should never do. Abram chose to trust in his own thinking, rather than trust in God and His promises.

Abram knew that his wife was very beautiful and he thought that the Egyptians would take his wife and that he would be killed.

Abram took his eyes off the promises of God, and focused upon his own understanding. He let his thought patterns be influenced by Satan and not by God’s Holy Spirit, through God’s word.

Proverbs Chapter 3: v. 5 tells us clearly not to lean upon our OWN UNDERSTANDING. We are told to acknowledge God in ALL our ways.

It is not unusual for God to test his servants after times of blessing and in this case Abram failed the test. He couldn’t trust God to protect him and his wife in Egypt, he had to make up his own plan.

Remember Jesus after his Baptism heard the voice of God from heaven, “You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased...” (Mark 1: v. 10-11)

Then in Mark chapter 1: v. 12 – 13 we are told that immediately the Holy Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness for 40 days where He was tempted by Satan.

The difference between Jesus and Abram, is that Jesus counteracted the voice of Satan with God’s word. Abram may have thought that he could protect himself and his wife by his own plan, but those thoughts were not of God. He did not take those thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10: v.5)

It is so essential that the thought patterns of our minds are filtered through God’s word, the Bible.

If we don’t filter our thoughts through God’s word, then we may end up with man’s wisdom, which in Abram’s case nearly messed up God’s plan.

2. Abram’s solution seemed to work – v. 13-16.

It appears that Abram was only interested in saving himself. He had it all worked out. He told his wife to lie to the Egyptian authorities and say that she was his sister. They fell for his

cunning plan and took her into the Royal Household. As a result of this Abram was treated well with gifts of sheep, oxen and donkeys and even male and female servants.

One moment Abram was in a land of famine, now he was in Egypt with all the food and comforts he could want.

God's plan seemed to have failed and Abram's plan seemed to be successful.

Sometimes when you step out of God's will, Satan is more than happy to offer you temporary blessing, but it is short lived. Please beware that material blessings are NOT a sign of God's blessing. Yes God will provide what you need, but He is not going to give you a Rolls Royce Car if a Nissan Note will do the job just as well.

So many Christians look for material blessings from God, but God is looking for people who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, then He will provide the things that you need.

### 3. God's plan worked out in the end, through God's power – v. 17-20.

In v. 17 we are told that God stepped into the situation. He plagued Pharaoh and his household with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Just when it seemed that Abram had messed up all opportunities of receiving God's blessing, God stepped in and showed His power in the situation.

The text so far has been all about Abram, now it's all about what God is able to do in order to fulfill His promise to Abram.

We are not told what the plagues were, but we are told that they were great. In fact they were big enough to persuade Pharaoh to send Abram away from Egypt with all their possessions. We also know that Pharaoh discovered that Sarai was Abram's wife. It appears that it was just in time because Pharaoh said that he might have taken her as his wife.

In the end God's purpose are fulfilled in spite of Abram, making his own plans that seem to work for a while.

#### Application

So what applications can we draw upon from this chapter that would be helpful to apply to our lives today?

Firstly there is a clear application in the call of Abram. God so loved the world that He called Abram.

God so loved the world that He fulfilled His promise through Abram.

Yes through Abram, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Through Abram came Jesus. The call that God gave Abram hasn't really changed. What God demanded of Abram in Chapter 12: v. 1 is really quite like what Jesus demands of us in Matthew Chapter 10: v. 37-38.

<sup>37</sup> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>38</sup> And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

What Jesus is saying in these verses is that God must have first place in our lives.

He must have the affection of our heart.

So the question I need to ask is this. What is stopping us from giving God first place in our lives? This is a big question and only you can answer that.

Secondly we need to consider Abram's mistake in not trusting in God's ability to honor His promises, and making his own plans in the situation.

Many Christians understand the theology in the Bible but find it difficult to apply it to their life situation. Many Christians only start bringing God into their real life situation when they are desperate.

How can we avoid keeping God at a distance which usually involves going our own way with God as an insurance policy?

Firstly, bring God into your life situation every day.

Pray for His guidance each day and be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit as you go about your daily life.

Secondly make sure you have a good reading plan of God's word.

Always be reading God's word each day and be open and honest with God as He speaks to you. Be quick to obey even in the little things that He points out to you.

Thirdly, we do make mistakes, don't give up, confess your sins and mistakes to God and He will forgive you and give you other opportunities to obey and grow.

Fourthly, Do your very best to be with God's people whenever you can, especially on a Sunday. It is not always possible because of work but try your hardest.

It is very easy when you live in a foreign country and come to an international Church to slide back in your Christian commitment.

The devil always works on our weak spots and he seems to be more successful when we are isolated and on our own.

Don't allow the devil to get a foothold in your life. Do your best for Jesus.

God says in His word, those who honor me I will honor. (1 Samuel 2: v. 30b)