

SHARING GOOD FORTUNE Sunday School December 4, 2011

Unifying Topic: A BLESSING FOR ALL NATIONS

Lesson Text

I. The Call Of Abram (Genesis 12:1-3)

II. Abram's Obedience (Genesis 12:4-6)

III. Abram's Opportunity (Genesis 12:7-9)

The Main Thought: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Sometimes people are asked to do incredibly difficult things with only promises of reward to motivate them. How much are some people willing to endure and risk in exchange for promises? Abram and Sarai in their old age risked everything to move their family and all their possessions to a new land because of their faith in God's promises.

Lesson Aim: To teach students the story of God's promise to Abram and Sarai and of their faithful response.

Life aim: To help students identify the promises that God has in store for every Christian, and to encourage them to remain faithful until the promises are fulfilled.

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- 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
- 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
- 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.
- 12:4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.
- 12:5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.
- 12:6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.
- 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.
- 12:8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.
- 12:9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

HISTORY:

GENESIS CHAPTER 11 is all about the plans of man. Genesis chapter 12 is all about God's plans. ¹In the last few verses of Genesis 11 we see the necessary preparation of Abram's faith. Verses 27-32 focus on Terah, the father of Abram. Terah actually had three sons—Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran died in Ur of the Chaldees while his father, Terah was alive. Haran's son was Lot. Abram married Sarai (Abram's half-sister, later called Sarah). Verse 30 adds this note: "*Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.*" The whole family moved from Ur of the Chaldees and stopped in the city of Haran where they stayed until Terah died. That was evidently a period of many years. Only after his father's death did Abram proceed on the journey to Canaan.

LESSON:

Genesis 12:1-3 The Call Of Abram

Abram departs from Haran (vv1-3)

12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, — Abram was in Haran when this call came. This was not the place to stay. The word "*Haran*" means "*parched*," and it was indeed a parched and barren place to live. If you stop and consider what it means, the last few verses of Genesis 11 and the beginning of Chapter 12 are all about death and loss and a series of separations in Abram's life. He was ...

- Separated from his Homeland when he left Ur of the Chaldees.
- Separated from his Family when his brother and his father died.
- Separated from his Destination when he stayed for many years in Haran.

¹ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2002-10-06-Hope-for-Tomorrow-How-God-Keeps-His-Promises/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

- Separated from his Dream when his wife was unable to have children.

Any one of these four separations would be a heavy burden for any man to bear. Taken together, they represent the shaping of his faith and his character through adversity. Looking back, we can see that these things were necessary in order to prepare Abram to become Abraham ("father of multitudes), the supreme biblical example of a man of faith, and the father of the Jewish nation.

1. Leave your country: comfortable surroundings.
2. Leave your relatives: influence.
3. Leave your Father's House: security.

After all that he had endured, Abram's greatest days were yet to come. Weeping endures for a night but joy comes in the morning. Let that thought encourage you as you consider God's work in your life. The pain you are going through is not for nothing. He takes away the things we thought we couldn't live without in order to give us something better and more satisfying. We yield the temporal to gain the eternal. We give up the things we could not keep in order to receive those things we can never lose. Originally from Ur but now in Haran was the place of his father. **12:1e ...unto a land that I will shew thee:** We must conclude that Abram did not know where he was going. As he did the first things first he separated himself from all that was important to him, now God would show him or direct him to a land that was the promise. Thus his stay in Haran was not a result of disobedience. Note how the promise given to Abram parallels the promise to the believer. Abram was to inherit the Promised Land if he turned away from the world and followed God. We are to inherit the Promised Land of heaven if we turn away from the world and follow God. The Promised Land is a symbol, a type, a picture of heaven. However, their Promised Land of Canaan would be their inheritance!

12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: The command of instructions was given in verse 1; now the promises or incentives are now presented to Abram. His leaving his country, his kindred, and his father's house was made clear to him. Obedience is the key word we look for in Abram to carry out such commands.

1. Then and only then could God "*make him a great nation.*" The nation to which he had thus far belonged was sinking into belief of several deities and idolatry. God promises Abram to make him a "*great nation*" and that would have to include descendants; offspring that would populate a nation! If there were to be a nation, there had to be a new race of people: the Jews, the nation of Israel; and this nation would be obedient to God! The implication of the word "nation" here is that God's promise will be made great; far beyond the lifetime of Abraham.
2. Only God could "*bless him*" bringing him past earthly joys that were spent through the influence of kindred or even the place of his birth. God would look after and care for Abram with both the joy of a promised child and descendants (*seeds of Abraham*), whether biological or spiritual offspring, connecting the past with the future.
3. Only God could "*make his name great.*" He would out measure the name given in his father's house. God found Abraham while he was still an idolater living in a pagan culture. ²A "great name" involves a heritage. In the ancient Middle Eastern culture it was always defined by family and descendants who carry on the name and legacy (which includes reputation).
4. Being a blessing means that Abram is an agent of blessing and not just its recipient. It connects the blessing of Abram with the blessings of others; i.e. if I'm blessed, those in my household are also blessed, and those I touch are blessed. The purpose of Abram's blessing is to bless others; he supplies a need for others.

A nation and a name are only made by God! And they are going to be made great! In other words, the future lies with God, not with Abram or Sarai.

12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: Abram is called into a future that he does not know. God desires blessings for Abram. Those that bless him and his descendants, treat him with respect, and care for him will be blessed. God says, I will identify myself with you. However, those who curse Abram and his descendants are those who treat him lightly, despise him, or treat him with contempt. God's curse for such lack of

² <http://www.criovoice.org/lectionary/YearA/Aproper5ot.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

respect and disdain was to involve the harshest of divine judgments. **12:3b ...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.** When Abram responds faithfully to God's call, he can bring blessings for many believers. Therefore, this is but true identification of sonship.

Genesis 12:4-6 Abram's Obedience

Abram journeys through Canaan (vv4-6)

12:4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. To my understanding it was supposed to only be Abram and Sarai to leave the country. As Abraham went, he may have doubted, but he went. He may have argued, but he went. He may have wondered, but he went. However, he brought his nephew Lot with him. This was partial obedience. I guess he thought it would be alright with God. Lot will not be a blessing to Abram. He will be nothing but trouble. This move would be a life changing turnaround that would completely change his life. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. That shows us that age is no hindrance to faith in taking bold steps for the Lord. Many people change jobs like that; they just get up and move to another city or country. I believe it would only be by faith.

12:5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. Those that took that faith walk with Abram had to believe if not on God's Word but on Abram's obedience of faith. Nothing whatsoever is said about Sarai or Lot opposing Abram, and nothing is said about Abram forcing or coercing them to go. The testimony of Abram's faith spoke to their hearts to also be obedient. Will our faith speak strongly to others hearts? One's faith would have to be strong in order to step out on nothing. And what I mean by strong is strongly committed to God; displaying obedience without whining. So now we see they have arrived in the land of Canaan.

12:6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. ³This is more than just a record of what happened to Abram when he first entered the land. This is a very accurate picture of the conditions of a Spirit-filled life. The first thing we are told is that Abram passed through the land (Canaan) to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. These names are most revealing. "*Shechem*" means "shoulder," and the shoulder is to the Hebrew a symbol of strength. The name "*Moreh*" means "instruction" and when we combine these two words, we get our first glimpse of what it is like in the land. Once Abram arrived in the land, the Canaanites were also in the land. Aha, enemies will have to be confronted as your faith increases. This second picture we have here is that life in the land is to be a life of constant conflict. This is what God is showing us. You can't be distracted because God says, I will show, I will make...I will bless, I will make...and you shall be... You have to remain steadfast and unmovable in the promises because they yet await! These Canaanites were the pagan tribes which afflicted Israel all through their history. We have to go through the conflict to receive the promise!

Genesis 12:7-9 Abram's Opportunity

Abram worships God in that land (vv7-9)

12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. God didn't lead where he would not be. Yes God appeared and spoke to Abram about giving the land to his seed. Well we know it's in the future because Abram didn't have any children to receive the blessing. There is ⁴a life of continual cleansing, for we next read, "*So he built there an altar to the Lord.*" An altar is more than a symbol of worship. An altar is first a place of cleansing, which provides the basis for worship. The reason for a daily altar is the urgent need for cleansing in the believer's life. The altar had at least seven purposes:

1. To *offer sacrifices* to God, asking forgiveness for unbelief and sins.
2. To make a *rededication* to God, renewing his commitment to God.
3. To *seek* God's continued presence and guidance.
4. To *worship* the Lord: to worship the very person who had met his need.

³ <http://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/genesis/the-beginning-of-faith>

⁴ <http://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/genesis/the-beginning-of-faith>

5. To *acknowledge* the Lord, that the Lord alone could fulfill so great a promise, that he was totally dependent upon the Lord.
6. To *praise* the Lord, to praise Him for giving so wonderful a promise.
7. To *testify* to the Lord, to bear witness to the Lord's glorious goodness in meeting his need and in giving so great a promise.

Abram was moved to worship God. He was establishing spiritual markers for the faith journey of Israel. He was laying down spiritual tracks here for people to follow. What hasn't manifested; what you haven't seen yet, you still need to worship God for it shall appear. Remember you're in a faith journey and God will always appear to the faithful!

12:8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

At every opportunity in each place Abram built an altar unto the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.⁵ The fourth point is that this is a life of unending choices. Now Abram pitches his tent between Bethel on the west and Hai (Ai) on the east. Bethel means "*the house of God*," Ai means "*ruin*." This is just where we must live the Christian life, ever looking either to the things of God, or to the ruin of the flesh. We can choose to go to Bethel or to Ai, to Christ or self -- it can never be both. I am either pleasing myself, or pleasing Him. I am either at Bethel, the house of God, or at Ai, the place of ruin. I must continually choose. Abram responded by building an altar to worship God. This outlined Abraham's physical journey, but also marked his faith journey.

12:9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. Then He journeyed on! He never stopped for long. He lived in a tent because he was a pilgrim in the land. He could never settle down; he could only sojourn for awhile. "Negev"—"Negah" was the desert wasteland that was south of Israel. it was sometimes simply called the south.

SUMMARY:

Abraham is in his own country, he is among his own family, and he is in his father's house. That means he is protected, he has support, he has everything in hand that he needs. It would be easy to settle for the status quo that leads nowhere. Abram was to leave the security of the past to embrace the possibility of the future. This was God's command. As Abram went, God would show him the land; make him a great nation; bless him; make his name great; and he would be a blessing for all nations.

God promised remarkable things for his future and Abram did respond faithfully in obedience and went just as the Lord had told him. His father Terah had already migrated to Haran but later died there. He left Haran began his journey south to the place that God had called him. This would mean: Abram's journey from Haran to Canaan was only the completion of what his father had begun. Abram took his wife and his brother's son Lot and a portion of the clan and their possessions and journeyed south to the land of Canaan. As he arrived in Canaan, God reaffirmed His promise and gave more detail: "To your offspring I will give this land." Abraham responded by building an altar thereby acknowledging God as the one leading him in his journey, and God appeared to him. He didn't stay in Canaan but passed through, traveled, and continued toward the Negev, the south. We later find out that Abram left his "*Promised Land*" and journeyed on to Egypt because there was food there.

Callings bring great challenges that will begin with complete obedience to God. As He gives us opportunities to share our blessings or good fortune with others, we will come to know that it's not all about us, but about others.

APPLICATION:

Is there something in your life that you know God wants you to do but you have not done it yet? What steps can you take to obey God? - Because it's not too late to share it.

⁵ <http://www.criovoice.org/lectionary/YearA/Aproper5ot.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>