

**Called to Blessing . . . And to Bless**  
**#7 in a Series on The Story: From Creation to Christ**  
**Genesis 12:1-9**  
**Faith Community Church – February 17, 2008**

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## **Introduction**

### 1. Let My People Go

I want to place us in the history of Israel at a time just before the people are reading to enter the land of Canaan. For 430 years Israel was in Egypt, most of the time as slaves. Through a man named Moses God told Pharaoh to let his people go, but Pharaoh refused. It wasn't until ten severe plagues had come to Egypt that Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave. But he changed his mind and sent his army in pursuit. The God of Israel had preserved his people, opening the Red Sea so that Israel crossed on dry ground. When the last people crossed, God closed up the waters, swallowing the Egyptian army.

Soon after leaving Egypt the people had been given an opportunity to conquer the land of Canaan, but a lack of trust in God resulted in their refusal to enter the land. God subjected them to a 40-year time of wandering in the wilderness while the generation of disobedient men died.

But a new generation has arisen, and they are poised at the border, ready to claim the land for their new home. Moses had spent the past several days going over their history, and had reviewed the Law, warning them of the consequences of rebellion.

Use your imagination for a moment. You are sitting by the fire, your wife is putting the children to sleep. The men are talking. A conversation begins about how this all began . . .

### 2. How It Began

#### *Abram's Background*

Abram was the son of a man named Terah. The family lived in a city known as Ur of the Chaldees, a city that was devoted to moon worship. Like the rest of the occupants, Terah worshipped the moon and probably passed that on to his family.

#### *God Speaks*

But one day, something startling took place in Abram's life. And we read about that in Genesis 12:1-3.

#### *Abram Travels*

At some point the family began to move, but upon coming to the city of Haran, Terah stopped. How long they were there we don't know. But when Terah died, Abram resumed the journey and finally came to the land of Canaan.

Sitting around that fire, the soldiers of Israel may have thought about the promise that God had made to Abram. As they finally crossed the border of Canaan, they would actually be taking part in the beginning of God's fulfilling the promise that had been made centuries before. The promise of the land for their home was a great promise, but they had little idea how great the story would be.

## **Reflecting on the Call of Abram**

### 1. Blessing

Exactly what is *blessing*? Blessing is a word that Christians use a lot. As one author says, "Blessing has to do with being in favor with God and under his protection and care."<sup>1</sup> God was going to do good things in Abram's life. And in blessing Abram, he would bring about blessing upon all people. Hundreds of years later, through what he began in Abram, God would accomplish this purpose of blessing. Paul writes about this purpose in Ephesians 1:7-10.

### 2. Genesis 12 is a pivotal point in the Old Testament story.

Because of what begins here, this passage becomes a pivotal point in the Old Testament story. It has great historical and theological value. And in this passage Abram becomes an example to his future children – those who come to believe the promise God made – people like you and me who have trusted in Christ, the fulfillment of promise.

### 3. Lessons learned from Abram

In what way is Abram an example? Let me highlight two things we see in this passage.

#### A. About hearing God and following

"Now the Lord said . . ." (12:1).

Though the text does not give specifics, Abram had apparently heard the audible voice of God. What we see here begins a regular pattern of speaking to Abram – and at times appearing to him – that continues through his life and into the lives of his son and grandson.

Was there hesitation on Abram's part? The text does not say, but silence would argue that Abram obeyed immediately. I say that because we have numerous instances where Scripture records the doubts and hesitations of people, and none is seen here.

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<sup>1</sup> Walton, Genesis, 392.

Hearing and following God becomes the hallmark of God's people. Note what Jesus says in Matthew 17:1-5. Earlier he had said these words (Matthew 7:24-27).

So the question then for us is this: are we hearing and following?

Hearing and following today presumes reading and thinking. I don't have time to go into the issue of people who feel that God speaks to them and nudges them along today. If it happens, it has to be subordinate to what God has clearly revealed in his Word. There are two ways in which we become good hearers and followers:

1. By responding to the clear commands of Scripture.
2. By developing the ability to know how to apply the principles of Scripture to life circumstances.

There are no shortcuts to immersing our life in the study of what God has said. So be challenged by that.

### *B. By worshipping God on the journey*

Note verses 4-8. Twice it is said that Abram builds an altar. In short sections of narrative like this, when something is mentioned it takes on a good deal of importance. And we see by reading the rest of Abram's story that altar-building was something he did on at least several other occasions.

What was an altar? For Abram, it was simple the vehicle to worship. And what is worship? Worship is – simply stated – acknowledging God's rule in our life. It acknowledges God's direction, provision, and worth.

It is easy for us to lose sight of why we are here – to miss the purpose behind the purpose. What do I mean by that? I mean that we can do our thing and forget that what we are doing is not the main thing. It is the vehicle for serving God.

Abram was a husband and father. He had an occupation and he had a lot of people he was responsible for. A shortsighted person would look at those things and say, "That's the reason I'm here." But it's not. Those roles and responsibilities are simply contexts in which we serve God.

The altars that Abram set up would remind him of what God had done and why God had brought him to Canaan. We won't build altars of stone in our yards and in our offices, but can you learn to acknowledge that your greater purpose in life is to serve God faithfully where he has put you? That is one of the things that worship is all about.

### **Connecting Genesis 12 to Our Lives**

1. First, when our lives follow those qualities, God blesses us like he did Abram. We have much in Scripture that tells us about the need to center our lives around God and his purposes:

Psalm 1

Proverbs 8:32-33

John 13:15-17

James 1:22-25

2. Second, God's intent was that the nations would be blessed through Abram. His desire was that Abram would be the conduit of God's care and favor. From a human standpoint, Abram's walk with God – listening, obeying, worshipping – gave his life a meaning beyond the routine. Deep down that's something that all of us want – or should. We want our life to matter, to count for something.

Abram gave his life to God and God blessed his life and others around him. I'm confident that if we do what Abram did that God will bless us and others as well.