

The Call of Abraham

Gen. 11.26-28. Abraham was raised in Ur of the Chaldees, midway between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. A center of advanced civilization. Two-level homes with central courtyards. Running water. Functional sewage system. Schools taught writing, reading, arithmetic, history and the arts. Royal tombs, palaces, temples, irrigation systems and trade indicate advanced civilization. The moon god was the primary deity.

Within Ur lived Abram and his extended family: father Terah; brother Nahor; his wife Sarai; cousin Lot; and a household of many hundreds of people. Although his family included pagans, idols worshippers, Abram worshipped YHWH.

Call 1: Acts 7.2-3. God appeared 1st to Abram in Ur, not to Terah, Nahor or Lot. The command was to leave his country and his relatives and move to a land that God would show him. Country and relatives. To leave one's country is difficult, but doable. To leave one's family is very hard. Just like his ancestor Noah, Abram responded with immediate obedience (Noah only speaks in 8.22). Just like Noah, Abram took his family with him, even though they were not wholly devoted to YHWH. Just like Noah, Abram would never see his old home again. Just like Abram, Noah would lose all his old acquaintances and friends. Just like Noah, Abram was called into a very public demonstration of obedience and faith in God. There was no hiding his faith. Just like Noah, Abraham's family were willing to ride his spiritual coat-trails.

The first stage of this transition happened when Abram moved with his father Terah and extended clan from Ur to Haran. He left his country – Ur – but his extended family went with him. They settled in Haran, a city state that worshipped the same moon god as was worshipped in Ur of the Chaldees. **Gen. 11.31-32.** Haran was in northern Iraq, in the fertile crescent. Terah was getting old, so Abram stopped on the journey to Caanan and remained there until his father died (Acts 7.4).

Had Abram arrived at the Promised Land? No! But, he was moving in that direction as fast as he could. Some insist on a B/S approach to spirituality, and count all our liabilities....and others take a P/L approach to spirituality, looking at the trajectory of our experience. John Newton, the reformed slave-trader who wrote *Amazing Grace* said, "I am not the man I want to be, but by God's grace I am not the man I used to be." God did not appear to Abram and condemn him for his lack of progress while in Haran, but when circumstances changed, God appeared a 2nd time to give encouragement and affirm the original call.

Call 2: Gen. 12.1-4. Much more detail in this call: a command; a promise; and a blessing. This is a general pattern we find in the Bible. The promises of God are fulfilled and His blessings received only as His commands are obeyed, e.g. Mal. 3.8-12. Tithe. Obedience. God's blessings financially and also spiritually – grow in faith.

The command: Gen. 12.1. The 2nd call is more specific in its command: leave your country and your kindred and your father's house." It is time to make the break. Such a command becomes harder as we get older. Many look to leave home in their youth, and look for adventure around the world, but as we age, we gravitate to the familiar, the tried and tested, to our friends and loved ones. Aged 75, just when Abram is looking to settle down / in, He is commanded to "Go."

Heb. 11.8-9. Although he knew he was going to Caanan, from the center of ancient civilization to a rural backwater, like from NY City to northern MN, the command was more than merely moving to another country. He was fundamentally transforming his lifestyle from being an urban dweller with a fixed address to a nomadic existence in a rural backwater. He would be a pilgrim, moving from place to place. He had put down deep roots in the cities of Ur and in Haran, and now he was to have no earthly roots, but he would be be rooted in YHWH. No longer would he have attachments of property and title and land and deeds, but he would be rooted by faith.

The promise: Gen. 12.2. Make of thee a great nation. He was already old. So was Sarai. How did Abram understand this promise? Would God make him great through his servants, slaves, flocks and herds? Would God give him another wife or multiple concubines to father literal children? Would Abram's family be a family of faith rather than a biological family? Clearly, the promise included a spiritual dimension – Gal. 3 expounds on this. But, was there to be a literal / physical dimension? As with many of God's promises, this promise was open-ended, specific enough to bring joy, and wide-enough to allow for faith to explore and hope to grow.

“Make your name great.” The builders at Babel had sought to make a name for themselves, and today nobody knows any of their names. God however promised to make Abram’s name great for him, as a blessing for Abram’s obedience. True greatness results from obedience to God’s revealed will and cooperation with His divine purposes. We are to do what we know is right, and leave the consequences in this life and for eternity to God.

The blessing: Gen. 12.3. As a friend of God (Jas. 2.23), any insult to Abram would be counted as an insult to God. Any blessing to Abram would be counted a blessing to God. It was the ground (*adamah*) that had been cursed after the Fall – the curse of death. Through Abram, all families that dwell on the earth, the *adamah*, would be blessed. **Isa. 25.7-8.** That curse had come through the unfaithfulness of one man (Rom. 5.12), and now all families of the earth would be blessed through the obedience of the One who was faithful – Jesus, the descendant of Abram (Gal. 3.8). All promises to the prophets and patriarchs after this verse either clarified or amplified God’s promise of salvation to every family in the human race.

Call 3: 12.7. “To your offspring I will give this land.” V. 6 ends with “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” 5 words in Hebrew. Despite the evidence of your eyes and your aged body Abram, you will a) have children, and b) they will possess this land. God does not always reveal Himself in thunderous rebukes or cutting denunciations of sin. Here, we find a word of encouragement. A word of hope. A word of comfort, to a childless, old man.

Abram responds with by building an altar to YHWH. It was a personal and public expression of worship and statement of faith. A silent witness to the pagan Canaanites of YHWH’s presence in their midst. A protest against Canaanite idolatry. And a teaching moment for his family and household (18.19). Abram led his family and extended household in worship. Public worship and expressions of faith are for God, but are witnessed by those around. They teach the ignorant, rebuke the sinful, encourage the doubting, and fortify the faithful. Closing your business during the Sabbath hours, being honest in financial transactions, being men of our word even to our own hurt, forgiving those who hurt or betray us....all is seen by multiple audiences. Our lives are lived on a stage, before men and angels, as was Abram’s life.

Conclusion

No life is hidden. Each of our lives is lived before men and angels (1 Cor. 4.9). How we respond to God’s call in our lives is observed, noted and evaluated by angels, fallen and unfallen, and by those in our families, our churches and our communities. What lessons can we take from God’s call to Abraham?

- 1) God speaks not once but multiple times to each of us. He does not give us the full picture, but like with Abram, He gives us sufficient to walk by faith and in obedience.
- 2) Each of God’s command is accompanied by a promise and a blessing. God’s promises come true, and we experience His blessings, as we respond in obedience to God’s call and commands in our lives.
- 3) To follow in Abram’s example, we are to lead our families in worship and to know God for themselves. Loving our wives sacrificially and faithfully. Not provoking our children to anger. Honoring our mothers and our fathers. And by leading them in daily family worships, around the family altar.

And as we reflect on Abraham’s call from God, what is He calling of each of us here today? And how will we respond?

Have a wonderful Sabbath!

Conrad.