

Week 3 (Gen 12.1-12:9) – The Call

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

The call is **personal**. God command Abraham to “go” (“get thee out” in the KJV). Abraham and his family were heading to Canaan but stopped in Harran (11:31). Note the providence of God – Abraham is already heading to the promised land before he receives the call.

- God’s first and last words to Abraham begin with an imperative (a command)
 - “go” and “take” (Gen 22) – both times followed by 3 objects “country, kindred, father’s house” and “your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac”
 - Both times the objects of the verb arranged in a sequence of less intimate to more intimate – this highlights the intimate, personal scope of the call.

So the call is personal but it is also **volitional** – Abraham had to respond, he had to do something. He had to go but he also had to believe, he had to exercise faith.

Go “to the land I will show you.” There are no explicit directions – Abraham is simply pointed in the right direction. Note the parallel with Gods last words to Abraham (Gen 22:2) “one of the mountains of which I will tell you” – again there are no specifics. To obey a command like that requires faith (Heb 11:8 spells this out “**By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.**”)

These two aspects of the call to Abraham as also true for the call to be a Christian.

The blessings of the call

2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

There are 7 clauses (remember the importance of 7 as divine number of completeness, e.g., Creation, Sabbath, etc):

I will make you: 1) a great nation, 2) bless you, 3) make name great, 4) you will be a blessing, 5) bless those who bless you, 6) curse those who dishonor you and 7) in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Covenant language here:

- Preamble – Identification of the Great King. v1 “the LORD said”, v2-3 “I will...”
- Obligations – “go” v1
- List of blessings for obedience v2-3

While this is not a formal covenant the narrative is building up to the covenant inauguration ceremony in Gen 15.

1) God promises that he will become a great nation (i.e. offspring). Alarm bells should be going off given the context of Sarah's inability to have children.

2-3) Bless you and make your name great – contrast with the people building the Tower of Babel “to make a name for ourselves.” A great name comes by grace; it is a gift not an achievement.

4) “you will be a blessing” is actually an imperative “be a blessing.” This clause serves as the central/hinge point. Grammatically it is subordinate to first imperative “go” – Abraham cannot be a blessing if he stays in Haran but if he leaves a blessing he will be.

5-6) We see the theme of blessing and cursing play out in subsequent chapters, e.g., with Pharaoh in Gen 13.

7) There is an outward focus to the call (“all the families of the earth will be blessed.”) This is also true for the call to be a Christian. Remember that the 3 objects in verse 1 highlight intimate nature of the call. We see the opposite in Acts 1:8 where Jesus says “**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**” Here the 3 objects are focused outward rather than inward. So while to call to a Christian is personal the scope of the call to be a witness for Christ is broad and expansive.

Seeing Christ in the call

Typology – Abraham is a type of Christ, a foreshadowing. Just as Abraham was called so was Christ. He alone was sent by his Father (see the gospel of John), called to leave his father's house, to put aside his riches and become a servant. And all this he did willingly (Heb 12:2).

The 7 clauses in v2-3 also apply to Christ:

For example, having a great name is royal language. God offers the same promise to King David (2 Sam 7:9 – note that this section is the establishment of the Davidic covenant). Also Abraham is promised that kings will come from him (Gen 17:6) and he is referred to as a “mighty prince” (translated “king” in LXX) in Gen 23:6.

Christological application – We noted last time how Luke traces Jesus's line back to Adam to show he is the seed that was promised in Gen 3:15. Matthew traces Jesus's line back through David to Abraham because Abraham was the first king and both he and David point to Jesus who is the true king.

Again this is another example of typology. Abraham is a type of Christ not just through the call but also through the office of kingship.

Paul also understood that these clauses find their fulfillment in Christ:

Phil 2:8 -9: **And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him (i.e., blessed him – clause 2) and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (clause 3).**

Gal 3:7-16: **Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. (clause 1 – Abraham becomes a great nation because he is the spiritual father of all those who believe) 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” (clause 7) 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham (theme of blessing in clauses 2, 4 and 5), the man of faith.**

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse (this is tantamount to unbelief in the promises (and in Jesus to whom the promises point) and therefore dishonoring to Abraham – clause 6); for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (clause 7) 15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. 16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. (the promises find their fullest revelation in the person and work of Christ)

In verses 1-3 we see the call then in verses 4-9 we see Abraham's obedience to the call.

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

So Abraham went taking his family and possessions and came to the land of Canaan.

Note the repetition of Lot in verses 4 and 5. This repetition serves to drop a hint about their forthcoming dispute in cpts 13-14. Also if Sarah is barren then the fact that “Lot, his brother's son, went with them” likely indicates that he was the presumed heir, which has important implications later on. This is essentially nullified however in verse 7 when God says that the promised land will be given to Abraham's offspring.

Verse 6 – “the oak of Morah” – this tree crops up in several places in Scripture and it is significant that the verse comments “and the Canaanites were in the land.” This tree is

referred to as “the oak of the diviners” (Judg 9:37) and was likely a site of pagan idol worship. Likely the reference to the tree in verse 6 is a polemic (a strong verbal or written attack on someone or something) and is speaking out against pagan idol worship – remember the context.

Verse 7 - The fact that Abraham builds an altar here would seem to support this idea. We also see a similar thing when Jacob later buried the foreign gods belonging to members of his household (Gen 35:4). Note that Abraham’s building of an altar is tied in with the promise of God – that God would give his descendants the land. Worship is the appropriate response to grace. Also building altars and worship are often prompted by theophanies in the OT (God “appeared to Abram”). This is the 1st appearance of the Lord to a patriarch, before God’s revelation has been auditory (“God said to Abraham”). This serves to increase dramatic force of the narrative and to reinforce the promise.

8 From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Abraham sets his tent between Bethel and Ai, i.e. he did not dwell in Canaanite cities. Contrast this with Lot as we will see in a couple of weeks. Again this is setting the scene for their future dispute.

The pattern of movement (Shechem – Bethel – Ai – Negev) parallels that of Jacob and the Israelites in their later conquest of Canaan. Essentially this is an act of prophecy, a subtle foreshadowing that the conquest of Canaan had already begun. In setting up altars Abraham is laying claim to the land as belonging to his God.

He builds an altar but also “calls upon the name of the Lord” – technical term for worship – again, worship is tied in with the promise that the land he is travelling through will belong to his descendants. Shows that Abraham believed in the promise of land.

He has travelled from the northern to the southern border of the land – He has walked through it, lived in it, worshiped in it – symbolically he has taken possession of it. He ends up at the southern border in the Negev, which prepares us for the next episode, which takes place in Egypt.