



BEGINNINGS

A Study of the Book of Genesis

Sanctuary Bible Studies – Woodbury Lutheran Church

Session 9, "God Calls Abram" (Genesis 12)

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ABRAM

- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all claim Abram as a patriarch. Millions know his name.
- One person counts in the plan of God.
- His story begins with God's initiative, also known as grace. Abram came from an idol-worshipping culture. Both Ur and Haran were centers for worship of the moon-god. Terah, Abram's father, is later described as an idol worshiper in Joshua 24:2).
- Faith and obedience characterized him at crucial moments in his relationship with God.
- Abram was 75 when God called him, Sarai 65. Though he'd live to 175 (Gen 25:7), he was a senior citizen when called for the most important work of his life.
- Abram was willing to risk, a vital ingredient of genuine faith. He goes without knowing (Hebrews 11:8). If there is no risk, why do we need God in the picture?
- He introduces us to the concept, "the righteousness of faith" (Romans 4:1-3).
- Abram was also flawed in character, leaving Canaan when a famine hit and lying about Sara, his wife. He was willing to give her up, pretending to be her brother.
- He alone in the Bible is called God's "friend" (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23).
- From Abram and His people we received the Savior, Jesus Christ.

2. THE CALL (12:1-3)

- Vs. 1, "The LORD had said...": The tense of the verb indicates that when Abram and his family were still living in Ur, God's call came. Acts 7:2 confirms this. From Ur Abram and members of his family, went first to Haran. Haran may have been a stalling point for Abram's family, but there the call persists and is obeyed. Note that the call is to "the land I will show you." Canaan is not named.
- Vss. 2-3: The call of Abram is structured in seven parts:
 1. "I will make you a great nation"
 2. "I will bless you."
 3. "I will make your name great."
 4. "You will be a blessing."
 5. "I will bless those who bless you."
 6. "Whoever curses you I will curse."
 7. "All peoples on earth will be blessed by you."

- Vss. 4-5: "So Abram left" (vs. 4) indicates the quick trust and obedience of Abram, so much a part of his life with God. Remember this voice he heard was a new voice, a new God. Coming with him are his family and "the people they had acquired in Haran" (vs. 5). These were Abram's servants. In Abram's culture servants were closely tied to their masters. Many took poison to be entombed with their masters.

3. THE ARRIVAL (12:6-9)

- Abram enters Canaan from the north and makes his way south to the Negev south of Beersheba. He stops twice along the way, each time at a site that would be pivotal in Israel's history:
 - At Shechem (vss. 6-7) he builds an altar to the LORD, in the shadow of "the great tree of Moreh," no doubt associated with idol worship. Here the LORD appears to him, perhaps in human form, giving his descendents the land He had promised.
 - Note that earlier (vs. 1) God had only promised to "show" the land to Abram. Now he binds Himself to give it. More than 500 years later, at the time of Joshua, God would renew His covenant with Israel at Shechem (Joshua 24).
 - East of Bethel (vss. 8-9). He built a second altar and "called on the name of the LORD." Later Jacob would have his ladder dream at Bethel (28:10)

4. ABRAM AND SARAI IN EGYPT (12:10-20)

- Abram's decision to go to Egypt during a famine is his plan, not God's. Because of the Nile, Upper Egypt was immune from such droughts.
- The beauty of Sarai (vss. 11, 14) is attested to, even in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where her beauty is described in detail in a commentary on Genesis 12-15 (the "Genesis Apocryphon"). Remember, she's 65!
- Abram's deception, pretending Sarai is his sister, is meant both to save his own hide (vs. 12) and to be "treated well" (vs. 13).
- Abram benefits from giving up his own wife to Pharaoh's harem! Wealth was often measured by livestock. His plan succeeds – vs. 16.
- God steps in with a vengeance! He brings sickness to Pharaoh's household. Amazingly, Pharaoh has more ethics at work than Abram. This pagan ruler confronts God's man with his lie! Egyptian ethics demanded honesty, and Pharaoh clearly links his part in the lie with the sickness in his household. Pharaoh is done with Abram and sends him out of Egypt (as wealthy as ever!). God, in his amazing grace, though, is not done with Abram. He'll take him, lies and all.
- If you think Abram has learned his lesson, hold on. In Genesis 20 we'll see him use the same lie with Abimelech.
- Not lost on Moses, who records this incident, has to be the parallelism between Abram's time in Egypt and Israel's time there. In both cases – Abram and Israel – they left Egypt with significant wealth.

BEGINNINGS

1. Real faith often includes risk – going without knowing.
2. God's people today still reclaim places reserved for idols.
3. Lying easily becomes a habit – even telling the same lie twice.
4. "God is bringing us to perfection, and He'll stop at nothing to get us there." -- George MacDonald