

SESSION #2

We saw the Biblical context of Abraham's call in our first session. As we continue his story, we come to God's Call itself:

B. GOD'S CALL

1. first of all it was A Call to Abraham

Gen 12:2-3

² I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- the call was specifically to Abraham, while he was still living with his father & extended family in **Ur** (present-day southern Iraq near the Persian Gulf)
 - Ur was an astonishingly **advanced** city of its time; perhaps 250,000 pop.; well-developed cultural, business & educational life (they understood mathematics at a high level and could calculate square & cube roots without calculators!) – Abraham's home was a **sophisticated**, literate, comfortable & quite luxurious city; leaving here for the uncertainties of a much more primitive land would have been very difficult
 - Abraham's first 60 yrs were lived in Ur – his family were **idol** worshipers (as Josh. 24:2 tells us) – these idols likely included Nanna, the moon goddess (patron deity of Ur); but God spoke to Abraham there & gave him the original call & promise; so the whole family headed off for Canaan, and got as far as **Haran** - Ur & Haran were 2 of the 3 greatest centers of trade in Mesopotamia (one might compare them to present-day NY & LA)
- In Acts 7:2-4 [Stephen said] "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The **God of glory** [a unique title! – only used 1 other time in entire Bible (Psa. 29:3)] appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran."
 - the family settled there at Haran for 15 yrs until their father Terah died
 - ...during these yrs Abram perhaps found himself caught between cultural expectations (look after his ageing father) and God's call – because Abram left Haran and finally headed off to the Promised Land *the year his father died*
- God told Abraham to *leave his home* to **go** to a place 'that *I will show you*.'
 - he didn't know what it looked like; he didn't know where it was; he'd never been there before
 - but the critical question was not *where*, but **who** – who would show him where to go?
 - "**I** will show you"

Ben Patterson wrote, "To follow Christ has always been a journey without **maps**, but [it has always been a journey] **with him**."

- God's guidance in our lives may seem 'map-less' too; but He provides something better: *He goes with us!*
 - remember: God's call, even with Abraham, was primarily to a **relationship**, not to a place
- George MacDonald (in his book *The Gentlewoman's Choice*) wrote that "...having an interest in God is a very different thing from living in a close **relationship** with the Father..."

Concerning one of his characters, MacDonald said: "He was so busy understanding with his intellect that he missed the better understanding of heart and imagination. He was always so pleased with the *thought* of a thing that he missed the thing itself – whose **possession**, not its thought, is essential." ...God calls us, not to theology or head knowledge about Him, but to a living **relationship** with Him!

2. A Call to Leave

- the original call given to Abram in Ur is reiterated for us in the first 3 verses of chap. 12
- it was a **threefold** call to **leave**...
 - "country"
 - "people"
 - "father's household"

...all 3 were **natural sources of security** for someone like ancient Abram

 - "country"/land – this was his nationality
 - "people"/clan – this provided personal identity and security
 - "father's household" – which gave the right to inheritance; economic security; family blessing
 - there *is* a **price to pay** in embracing God's call & following Him

3. A Promise to Claim

- but there's another side to the picture:
 - God gave him a **threefold promise**:
 - "land"
 - "nation" (descendants; and one special descendant in particular)
 - "worldwide **blessing**"

...significantly, these 3 specific promises relate to (parallel) the 3 things he was called to sacrifice!

 - if Abraham would leave his **country**, God would give him his own **country/land**
 - if Abraham would leave his **people/clan**, God would give him an entire **nation** of people
 - if Abraham would leave his **father's household/blessing**, God would **bless** him beyond imagination!

...God's pre-condition to the promise is a call to **leave our natural sources of security** – there is a price to pay!

 - Bill Arnold wrote: "The earthly things to which we cling in our desperate search for security and comfort are actually the very things that get in the way of *true* security."

- John Stott calls these first 4 verses of Gen. 12 “the most unifying text in the Bible. God’s whole purpose is encapsulated in it.”
- this first narrative concerning Abraham teaches us how to discover **true security** in life
 - responding to God’s call will mean turning away from all that we naturally lean on for security and putting our trust/faith in an unseen God and his unseen promises
 - such **renunciation** is **not popular** in our modern cultures which put a premium on self-indulgence (“you owe it to yourself”)
 - but in Luke 9:24 Jesus said, “Whoever **loses his life** for my sake will save it, but whoever insists on keeping his life will lose it”
- Martin Luther once said, “I have held many things in my hands, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.”
- so, the story of Abraham constantly revolves around the significant double theme of **promise & faith**
 - God makes a promise; people are called to respond to that promise with faith
 - ...here God makes a **promise** to Abraham which will result in a new community

4. Embracing the Call with Faith

- Abraham responds to this promise with **faith** – he embraces the call of God –
- “So **Abraham left/went...**” (vs. 4 is an absolutely crucial verse in the history of faith)
 - ...his ‘going’ was an evidence of his faith in the promise of God
 - ...he believed the promise, he obeyed, he went, he asked no questions
 - Hebrews 11:8 tells us – “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, **obeyed** and **went**, *even though he did not know where he was going.*”
- Abraham has a **genuine faith** – his “going” in response to God’s command & promise, proves it so
- this “**promise/faith**” theme is not something restricted to Abraham; it is a theme which reverberates down thru all of history...and lands right here, today, wherever you are as you catch this session online!
 - Gal 3:8: “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by **faith**, and announced the ***gospel in advance*** to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’” (in other words, the **promise** is the GOSPEL = Galatians also speaks about this combination theme of “promise” & “faith”)

Gen 12:6-9

Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land.

⁷Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent *with* Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. ⁹So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

- this is the first time we see God speaking to Abraham since that original call in Ur many years earlier
 - now that Abraham is in the heart of the Promised Land, God specifies his promise to him concerning the land: it will belong to Abraham's offspring
 - Abram marks this appearance from God with the building of his first **altar** to the LORD
 - indicating a complete transition from idolatry to worshipping the one true God
 - then he moved on to Bethel, built another altar there, and "**called on the name** of the LORD"
 - ...this Hebrew phrase means to turn to the one named as the single referent of life – not trusting in any other
 - we find the first occurrence of this phrase back in Gen. 4:26 – in the time of Seth's son Enosh, "men began to call on the name of the LORD."
- ...so Abraham is in a faithful line for whom **worship** is natural & essential; that line extends down to you & me for whom *worship ought to be equally important*

Eugene Peterson wrote, "The work of **worship** gathers everything in our common lives that has been dispersed by sin and brings it to **attention before God**; at the same time it gathers everything in God's revelation that has been forgotten in our distracted hurrying and puts it **before us** so that we can **offer it up** in praise and obedience. All of this does not take place merely in a single hour of worship. But, faithfully repeated, week after week, year after year, there is an **accumulation to wholeness**."