

Genesis 12:1-9, The Beginning of Hope in the Promises of God: A Life of Abraham,

Preached by Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on January 6th, 2007

"The authors of Genesis do not show Abraham evolving a theology, a set of beliefs. Rather they imagined him responding to events and experiencing the divine in an imperative that broke down old certainties and expectations."

Karen Armstrong

"We should pray for Western powers to become true Christians, because currently not only are they are not Christians, but also they are acting against Christ... We wish the new Christian year to be better than last year and the years before that, and it will be endowed with teachings of Jesus Christ which is peace, justice, and love."

Muslim Iranian Majlis Speaker Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel

"To believe in something, and not to live it, is dishonest."

Gandhi

Intro

We have been taking a look at the transforming power of the gospel in our own lives for these past few months, and I am now excited to switch gears and take a look at the life of Abraham (**Genesis 12-25**), because it gives a glimpse at how and why God calls us in a similar journey. Abraham is sort of an archetype, or an analogy for how God works faith, hope and mission (Purpose) into our own journeys. God brings us growth through His sovereign hand in our experiences and circumstances, hardly ever through cognitive reasoning alone.

Karen Armstrong, though seeing some positive things in Genesis, sees a very hard relationship between God and man, and that God is often "Out of touch," and "Out of control." Armstrong sees God's demands as completely unfair and ambiguous, and that His promises are negligible compared to the heartache they seem to cause. Is God capricious and unfair? Maybe Ms. Armstrong can only view Genesis from a purely finite perspective, and fails to see the beauty in God and His promise, and His created, intended plan for humanity. I hope to see God's sovereign grace and beauty working in the life of Abraham. Journey with me!

This book (The book of beginnings) started in a garden. A glimpse then of the result of this story comes at the end of this compilation we call the bible (See **Revelation 21**). We hear this promise uttered throughout God's word. It's about a time when joy and peace would reign, and God's kingdom would begin to transform the kingdom of evil. This is a story of two kingdoms, and a story of a king who would come and benevolently rule the kingdom of God based on a reality and principles that are far different than the one the kingdoms of earth are governed. The "Kingdom of God" has often been established here on earth with arrogance and bloodshed; as believers in Christ, we must point to a kingdom that is different. We are called, like Abraham, for that mission.

Genesis tells the story of creation and fall, but it clearly leaves a blueprint for its intent (see **Genesis 3:15**). Genesis 4-11 played out the reality of sin, and man's desire for control and apotheosis. It is ironic, because in Babylon (Abram's City) men wanted to make a name great for themselves (**Genesis 11:4**), but they intended to do so through their own means, and not in faith; God called Abram ("*Exalted Father*") to make his name great (**Genesis 12:2**) on His terms. This story is the lynchpin connecting point between the history of humanity and the history of God's elect (Israel); the history of the curse, and the history of the blessing. What's interesting to see in this story, as well as the story of the whole bible, is God's sovereign intent for His people and the world. He is not a tribal deity, and His "Chosen" do not exist for themselves, but for His glory and His mission, and it is also important to note that we will all be surprised who God's "Elect" are!

From the Head...

Chapter eleven connected Abram to humanity (**Genesis 11:27**). He obviously came from a family lineage, which most likely had high hopes for their offspring. He grew up in Iraq (Ancient Babylon/Chaldea) to a "Moon Worshipping" ancestry. This part of the story begins in "Barrenness" (**Genesis 11:30**). This story begins where humanity is; barren and destitute and in great need of a savior and a miracle. Barrenness is hard in the 21st century; it was devastating in ancient Palestine! The women's significance was often wrapped up in her ability to give the family a future. The family's welfare counted on children, and the security of the people relied on men to protect them. Barrenness was a curse in the mind of a 15th century Iraqi! Families back then were extended and purposeful. Everyone had a role. Families today are individualistic and rights conscience most often concerned with their own welfare, and not the welfare of others. In our passage Abram is called out of paganism to follow God in the land that He would "Show" him (See **Hebrews 11:8-13**). Verses 2-3 are incredible. Four promises; "*I will make you a great nation;*" "*I will make your name great;*" "*I will bless those that bless you;*" and I will bless "*All peoples of the earth.*" But look close at verse 2; "*I will bless you...and you will be a blessing.*" God is going to do for Abram that which He broke up the party for in chapter 11. **God would make his name great so that he could be a blessing.** This is what God is trying to do in all of our lives. This is His DNA, His imprint in the lives of those that are led by the Spirit of God. But as we see in Abram's day, it comes with a price; it comes through obedient faith in God and His promises. According to **Ephesians 2:8** that faith is a gift from God, but the fact remains, we are to respond to God's call in our lives. Abram is called away from every potential idol in his life to go into the unknown. God

calls us away from our idols in order to create a sense of dependency on Him. Admitting the need for salvation is an admission of dependency; the very thing the fallen human heart does not want to admit. Verse 4 shows Abram leaving and doing what God called him to do in spite of the ostensible impossibility of the task.

How would a 75 year old man and his barren wife become the father of nations? Abram left, and the text says that he took...*"the people he had acquired in Haran."* This is significant because the people of God are not all Israelites (See also **Exodus 12:38**). Whether it be in the Exodus, Jesus' lineage or the subsequent explosion of the church in Acts, it is clear that God's people come from all tribes, races, and ethnicities (**Revelation 5:9, 10**).

A Few Observations:

1. God speaks into and act in hopeless situations.
2. God calls people into seemingly impossible missions.
3. This text is a picture of the resurrection; what was not alive becomes alive.
4. In God's first call (Speech act) He calls the worlds into existence. In His second calling, He calls a people to stand outside the barren land to enter into a land of life.
5. The life of faith is a life in journey, adventure with God.

...to the Heart

How easy is it to get caught up our own agendas and lives, and not listen to the calling of God in our own lives. It is easy to pass of these bible stories as just that, stories that have little or no bearing on our own lives, but in reality God still calls, and still works with broken people, and does the miraculous through them. Is your Christian life an adventure, exciting and joyful, or is it boring, irrelevant and disconnected from your lives? This is a question that is important for us to figure out in the midst of this journey, especially when we enter the desert.

Also, when it comes to obedience do you feel obedience is a form of legalism? It's pretty easy to think that, because a lot of religion is a legalistic bent to being made righteous through our own efforts. Abram was obedient. The result of faith is obedience, but is an obedience that is done because of knowing God, and loving God, and not because we feel that we are earning His approval.

Books for further study: *Genesis*, Walter Brueggemann, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis*, Gordon J. Wenham, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, John H. Walton, *Creation and Blessing*, Allen P. Ross

Next Weeks Verses: Genesis 12:10-20

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