GOD'S CALL TO ABRAM

Genesis 12:1-13:4 (Key verse: 12:2)

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing."

What does God's calling mean? Does it mean that one day God will call on our cell phones and tell us what to do? Let us look at today’s passage and may the lord help us see, why God called Abram and how Abram responded to God's calling. God’s call to Abram was also filled with promises, God promised to make him a source of blessing for all peoples of all nations. Part I of the message is about God’s calling to Abram and Part II Abram response. I pray that we may receive one word of God in our hearts so that we may learn what our response should be towards God's calling. Amen!

**Part I: God’s Calling (12:1-3)**

The end of Genesis 11 introduces us to a few details of Abram’s family life. His father Terah had 3 sons: Abram, Nahor and Haran. A sad event happened: Abram’s brother Haran died. This must’ve been sad for both Abram and for his father Terah. No loving parent wants to experience their child dying before them. To lose a family member is painful and heart-breaking, as some of us have experienced. Haran also left a son, Lot. We see later that Abram took his nephew Lot with him. Basically, Abram adopted his nephew Lot as his son. This brings up another difficult truth in Abram’s life: he had no children, since his wife Sarai was barren.

Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran (12:4). This age was not as old as it sounds, since the Bible tells us that Abraham lived to be 175. He was able to have children past the age of 100. In today’s terms, we could say that Abram was in mid-life. His life situation was not extraordinary or impressive.

Look at verse 1, “The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.” It is not clear how this happened, whether it was an audible voice or it was in a dream. However, what is important is that, it was clear to Abram that this command was from God. In our time, whatever is from God will agree with the bible. Looking carefully at how the lord interacted with Abram in verse 1. What were God’s first words to Abram? The words were not a pep talk like: “You are going to do great things, Abram. Don’t despair. Don’t worry.” No, those were not his first words. At least not yet. God’s first words to Abram were a challenging command: “Leave your homeland, your people and your relatives, and go to a place that I’m going to lead you to.” Let us think about the challenges of this command.

Abram was to leave his, His country, a familiar land. Secondly, leave his relatives, this was extended family ties. Thirdly, he was to leave, his father’s household, this was the immediate comforts and inheritance of his father’s home. As human beings we generally can decide on almost anything, we may know of people who have made big decisions, left a great job for something insignificant, married a person everyone thought would never happen, left their families, took a big operation on their body, decide to drop out of third year at Wits to go to a college or Technikon and so on…however in many of our decisions, there was some calculations. We always look at what we would gain over cutting off or joining something. And if we convinced the gains are greater, we make these decisions. However, in Abram’s case, he is commanded to leave the most, what he treasures, a place of comfort and rest to a place he even cannot even begin to calculate whether it is worth it. Look at verse 1 again, “Go from your country, your people, and your father’s household” to where? “…the land I will show you.” God was still to show Abram, it was not all clear at the time. This meant stepping into uncertainty, trusting God’s direction rather than visible security.

This indeed reveals a lot about God’s calling in life. It can only be entered into by faith, if you begin to calculate it will not make sense at all. And if you rely on your calculations you will never respond like Abram as we shall later see.

God did not call Abram in order to make life miserable for him; rather, God called him to bless his life and make him a blessing. Lets all read verses 2-3, 2“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**” Let us look at these promises in detail. First, **“I will make you into a great nation.”** At the time, this promise was not easy to receive, they had no children and Sarai his wife was Baren, could not have children. To become a great nation implies a significant impact on many people for the better. It means to have great historical influence on others. Physically, this great nation became the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, through his son Isaac. Even more, all those who will come to faith in Jesus are spiritual descendants of Abram. He is called the father of faith (Rom 4:18). Christians are all spiritual descendants of Abram.

Second, **”I will bless you and make your name great”** Everyone wants to be blessed and great. That is why the main theme of some of the big churches is all about blessings. We desire God to bless us. Because a blessing is something that makes us happy and gives us joy, and such things can be material, spiritual and God’s protection. However, what is a blessing? Deuteronomy chapter 28 details many blessings given to those who obey God. It also lists many curses for those who disobey and rebel against God. Jesus said we will be blessed if we put his words into practice. We will be blessed like a wise man who builds his house on rock, which will withstand storms. Jesus once said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn 13:12-17). Blessing comes through obedience. And obedience comes from faith in and from love for Jesus. In Genesis 15:1, After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Fundamentally God’s blessing is His presence in our lives. When we have God we have everything. Abram’s name would also become great because he surrendered to God in submission and obedience.

Thirdly, **all peoples on earth would be blessed through him**. God blesses us in many ways including materially, good health, educationally, as well as physical and spiritual children. However, the greatest blessing that God can give a man is to make him a source of blessing to many people. God promised Abram that he would be a blessing that all peoples on earth would be blessed because of him. Abram was only one man; how could he be a blessing to all peoples of all nations? God made it clearer to Abraham when he told him in chapter 22:18, "...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." God fulfilled this promise by sending Abram's offspring, Jesus Christ, through his line. Jesus is the source of blessing to all peoples of all nations because he died on the cross for the sin of the world. Through Jesus' death and resurrection salvation has come to all peoples of all nations. And whoever believes in Jesus "shall not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16) This is the true blessing, because What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?" [Mat 16:26].

When God calls us, there are things or people we may need to leave. "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you," It is the beginning of a life of faith. When we begin the life of faith, we must break away from our past lives. Family, home, my own country are not necessarily bad. But when we depend on these human things, we cannot wholly trust and obey God. For some people, to go from our own country and our father's house is a spiritual decision which results in a new and better relationship with our human families. We become independent by becoming dependent on God. For others, it means actually leaving physically, breaking human ties. In every case, however, the earthly things which we once trusted and to which we once clung for security and help must be surrendered as we take hold of God's word and begin a new life of obedience to him. God has called you and me into a new life. Amen!

God does not abandon us or leave us stranded somewhere. Instead, by leaving our past sinful life we are making a new and more personal relationship with God. We learn to depend on him alone. I was only a selfish sinner, full of human ambition mascaraed as though am following Jesus. I wanted to be great, known in the world, and so I was driven to study hard, compete with others and always comparing myself with others. However, over the years the lord has humbled me, to learn and see that true greatness come from submitting to His word. God’s word anchors a person in the midst of storms and victories of life. To remain focused on his calling and purpose. I used to think that greatness is when am popular in my field, being a person wanted in events of my research field and career. Though these are still a temptation for me. However, pursuing these things would require me to compromise my role as shepherd and director of this ministry. For example, becoming a professor was one of the things I admired in the journey of becoming great. However, when I was applying for my promotion, I was so behind with my promotion portfolio, my CV was not even up to date. There was still so much to be done. My deadline submission was on a Wednesday and Tuesday night is our leaders bible study which I lead. I was tempted to ask we postpone the study, however, somehow, I was anchored by God to focus on my calling of being a shepherd and leader of our ministry. Because in any case, leading to our Tuesday bible study, I was also not good with my time management, but here I was willing to compromise God’s work of leading the study for my promotion application. I could repent from that idea, and continue to lead the study. I even thought I could cheat my obedience and make the study short, so I can return to finishing my application portfolio. However, once we are in a bible study, God’s word is so good, I forgot about my plan and enjoyed His word with fellow leaders. However, I have been failing over the years to believe God and his promises. I can stand here before you and deliver a sermon yet, though am on campus daily, I still view it as my work place and not my perish, or my calling to be a source of blessing to campus students, through sharing the word of God with them. I was reminded again about this through preparing this massage, and I pray to obey God’s command, to firstly repent and trust Jesus so I may participate in God’s great work of saving young souls for his kingdom. Amen!

**Part II: Abram Response**

Look at verse 4, “So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.” God said “Go,” and “Abram went”. He obeyed, in spite of all the challenges and difficulties, fears and uncertainties. Listen to how Abram’s obedience and faith are described in Hebrews 11:8-10: “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 by faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

"So Abram left as the Lord had told him..." We don't know about Abram's theology. All we know is that he believed the word of God and that he showed his belief by obeying God's command. In the New Testament, when Peter received Jesus call, "Follow me", he left his boats and nets and followed Jesus. James and John left their father and servants in the boat and followed Jesus. (Mk 1:16-20)

We read in verse 5 that Abram took his wife, nephew Lot and headed for the land of Canaan. Look at verse 6-7, “6Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land 7The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.” When Abram arrived in Canaan he looked around and saw the Canaanites. They were strong and war-like. They lived in walled cities. But when the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land," (7) Abram believed God and in verse 8 he built an altar. It was an altar of thanksgiving a form of worship. It was like a flag planted to claim the new land. He did not own even a foot of land, but in his heart, he claimed the whole land because God had promised it to him. He went to a place between two of the most powerful cities and built another altar. There he called on the name of the Lord. He had no army and no walled city. But he trusted the Lord. The Lord God was his shield and his protection. So he could live by faith, without fear, in the land of the Canaanites.

Look at verse 10, “10Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.” This was Abram’s compromise in his life of faith, a low point. He had to rely on his human tactics, lie about his wife being his sisters and nearly led his wife to commit adultery and sin before God. Ultimately God could help Abram and protect Sarah his wife and they could leave Egypt and return to Canaan [11-20]. However, what did Abram do? In verses 3-4, we read that Abram went to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built his altar. It was there that Abram called on the name of the Lord. The altar became an altar of repentance and an altar of a new beginning. Abram, God's servant, must live by faith, not by human calculations.

In this life of pilgrimage, a life of God’s calling, we may fall, we may begin to calculate and do our own thing. However, that only leads to separation from God, if that happens may we repent and return to God’s altar and call on the name to the lord. Amen!

**In conclusion,** God often calls His people to leave their comfort zones to walk by faith. God had a new life purpose for Abram. Our basic fundamental calling is to follow Jesus, to repent of our sinful life and obey Jesus. If we are clinging to the life we have now, we could very well be missing out on the life that God wants to give us. May God help us to hear God's calling and respond to God's calling as Abram did and be a source of blessing. Amen!