

“Blessed to be a Blessing”

Genesis 12:1-5

10.10.21

Introduction

The story of Abraham begins at the end of Genesis chapter eleven with a little back story about him and his family. Abraham was a native of Ur of the Chaldeans, which was another name for ancient Babylon. After the death of his brother, Abraham’s father, Terah, takes his family and they set out for the land of Canaan. However, for reasons unknown to us, they end up settling in a place called Harran, which was in Mesopotamia.

The next chapter begins abruptly with YAHWEH, the God of the Bible, calling Abraham to leave his father to go to the land of Canaan. It is unclear why YAHWEH has chosen Abraham as his agent, but YAHWEH promises Abraham that if he will go, he will be blessed. More specifically, Abraham and his descendants will prosper, they will live in peace, they will be revered among the nations. A good paraphrase would be, “You’ll be living the good life,” or “you’ll living the dream.” God goes on to tell Abraham that he and his descendants will bless all the nations of the earth.

But here’s the dilemma: Abraham does not know YAHWEH. Abraham is from another nation that has its own gods and at this point in the story, YAHWEH is a stranger. How is Abraham supposed to trust his word?

To be clear, the challenge is not really for Abraham to leave his country. He had already done that when he migrated from Ur to Harran with his father. It would seem that Abraham would have little attachment to Harran. Therefore, the call is to leave his father, Terah.

The story seems clear that Abraham would be the primary heir of his father’s estate; but if he follows God’s call, he will forsake the blessing of his father’s estate. Abraham would be giving up his inheritance. As the old saying goes, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Does it really make sense for Abraham to give up a sure thing to follow the promises of an unknown God?

On top of everything else, Abraham is already seventy-five years old when God calls him. He’s collecting social security. He’s ready to retire and enjoy his inheritance, which we should probably assume is just around the corner.

This call—this invitation places Abraham stands at a crossroads. If he stays with his father, he will be blessed. But if he is willing to trust God, Abraham will be blessed to be a blessing.

Theological Implications

I think we all find ourselves at this same crossroads regardless of whether we realize it or not. We have this carrot dangling in front of us that we call “The American Dream.” The American Dream doesn’t necessarily ensure that we will have more money than we know what to do with or that we will all live in mansions; instead, the American Dream simply consists of this idea that each generation will do a little bit better than the last.

There’s nothing inherently wrong with this idea, other than that it is a bit short-sighted. This vision causes us to settle for less than what God intended. Safety, security, and comfort are words we might use to describe the “blessed life,” and our hearts might be filled with gratitude for what we have; but God has more in store for us if we are willing to listen—God wants to bless us so that we might be a blessing.

It is so easy for us to pick the safe and easy option. It is what we are culturally conditioned to do. It is easy to stay in our “Harran” and live out the typical existence—it is much more difficult packing things up and following God to unknown places.

Yet Abraham’s example lays the foundations for biblical stewardship. His willingness to follow God teaches us that Abraham saw the purpose of his life as more than simply taking care of himself. Instead of simply choosing to be blessed, Abraham chose to be a blessing.

Stewardship is acknowledging that the gifts that we have received do not really belong to us. In his letter to the churches, James reminds the earliest Christians that “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...” (James 1:17, NASB). All that we have, our time, our talents, and resources all belong to God. God has simply entrusted them in our care. Therefore, we miss the point when we are willing to be blessed without using what we have been given to be a blessing.

One of the most powerful passages of Scripture is in the Book of Hebrews. The author reminds the earliest Christians that Abraham, along with many of the heroes of the Bible, “were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13, NIV).

In other words, Abraham did not receive all the promises. He didn’t get to reap the fruit of his faithfulness—but Abraham wasn’t doing it for himself. He was being a steward of the gifts that God had given him to bless the future generations.

When we practice biblical stewardship, we don’t have ourselves in mind and how the decisions we make will directly benefit us—we give of ourselves to bless the future generations.

As we continue the conversation about stewardship over the next month I hope you'll ask the question, "Am I seeking the blessed life, or is my primary drive to be a blessing?" Are we going to have extravagant faith like Abraham? Are we going to be willing to make sacrifices and trust God in radical ways so that we bless the future generations regardless of how it impacts us?

Reference Tools

Alexander, T. Desmond & Baker, David. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. 2003. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Brueggemann, W. *Genesis*. 1982. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Sarna, Nahum. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*. 1980. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.

Walton, John, Matthews, Victor, Chavalas, Mark . *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. 2000. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1-15*. 1987. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Share a fun camping story with the group.
2. In the message, Pastor Jonathan distinguishes between being "blessed" and "being blessed to be a blessing." Have you ever thought about the difference? How would you explain it in your own words?
3. How is Abraham's example of faith applicable in this season of your life? Have you ever left the comfort and security of something that seemed sure to answer God's call? If so, what did that look like for you?
4. According to the Book of Hebrews, Abraham did not receive all of God's promises in his life. Instead, he was following God's call to bless future generations. How can you/we take the blessings we have received and use them to bless future generations?
5. How have you listened for God recently?

6. How can we pray for you?