

That Blessed Abraham
(Genesis 12:1-7)

Turn to Genesis 12. We're going through some OT turning points, key events in what God was doing with people. Today we will learn from Abraham. God blessed Abraham, and blessed him immensely.

We'll look at the blessing, and we'll also take a look at what Abraham's life was like. What happens to a person, and to their life, when great blessing from God comes to that person? It's probably not what you think. Anyway, Abraham's a good example.

At the start his name was Abram, and his wife was Sarai. Later God changed Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's to Sarah, and those are the names we remember best.

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. 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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." 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. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶ Abram 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. ⁷ The 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.

The Actual Blessing: Seven Blessings Plus One

1. *I will make you into 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 through you."*

And the 8th is important, too; it comes in v7: 8. *To your offspring I will give this land.*

Taken together, it's a huge package. God will make a nation from him, God will bless him, God will make him famous, God will protect him, God will give his family a land.

Abraham Left Much to Receive This

This blessing came with a call, Gen 12:1 - *Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.* The blessing came along with a call.

We should probably understand it this way: *Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you, so that I make you into a great nation*, and so on. In any case, God gave the command to go and the promised blessing all in the same sentence. The call to go can't really be separated from the blessing: one package.

We're not sure why it came that way, but it is clear that if Abraham had not obeyed the call to move, the blessing would not have come either.

Go from your country, your people and your father's household; all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Jesus: Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Go from your country, your people and your father's household; Jesus: No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields. Abraham left home and father and extended family and fields.

(The end of Genesis 11 says Terah, Abraham's father, died when he was 205. But if you calculate how old Terah was when he had Abram (11:26), and how old Abram was when he left Haran (12:4), Terah lived for 60 years after Abram moved out.)

It is a good and healthy thing to understand that when God calls us to himself and promises blessing, it normally means leaving things behind. In Abraham's case they were good things, as they were with the disciples.

Don't look for things to leave behind. God will make clear what to leave and when, as he did with Abram, and as Jesus did with his followers. But we should not act surprised.

The First Blessing

I will make you into a great nation. Gen 11:30 said, *Now Sarai was barren; she had no children..* Short, blunt, and brutal. More on this later; but understand one thing now.

There was no nation. No children. Abraham's line was going to die out. With him and Sarai, it would end. In Gen 11 there are ten generations from Noah to Abram; and that will end with Abram. His brothers will carry on his father's line, but Abram's line will end with him and Sarai.

Israel was the nation that came from Abraham. We say "God chose Israel." The OT talks about it that way, that God choose one nation, Israel.

But let's understand that *first God created* the nation. There was no nation coming from Abram and Sarai, not even a little one, not one person. It took 25 more years for Abram and Sarai to have one child. God created this nation out of nothing.

God first made a nation where there would not have been one at all, *and then* he chose *that* nation. That's how blessing came to all peoples. The nation itself is a gift, a miracle. That's the point of how long it took Abram and Sarah to have Isaac.

Abe's Blessing and the Big Story

Why is Abraham's blessing an OT turning point? We'll look back from Abraham, and then we'll look forward. Before Abraham, God tried twice for a relationship with the whole human race, and both tries failed.

God started with Adam and Eve, but they sinned, and there was trouble between their sons, and it ended up with the whole human race ruining themselves and the planet.

God sent the flood, and God tried again with Noah and his family, the only righteous people: a fresh start on earth. But there was trouble again in Noah's own life, and then with his sons. Noah cursed one of his sons, and so it went on from there.

When the human race got large again we have the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. It is not clear to us what the human race was trying to do in the tower of Babel, but this much *is* clear: *again* the human race turned against God, just as before the flood.

God wanted relationship *with the whole human race*. God's first choice was that *all humans* would be his people, and he would be their God. God wanted to take in *all* humans as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

That's what God wanted. He tried with Adam and Eve, and then he tried again with Noah and his family, even though God knew after the flood that all people were full of evil intentions from their youth. God's plan failed because humans wanted their own way.

For God, relationship with all humanity is just not a possibility. He wanted it, tried twice, failed hugely both times. Time for a different plan. (God never gave up, not even close.)

Instead of inviting relationship, God turned up the volume: he will bring blessing. God will make people fortunate. What exactly the blessing is, is not clear in Genesis 12.

We should assume that this blessing that comes through Abraham will someone correct or overturn what has gone wrong with the whole human race. The blessing will work against all people being full of evil intentions from their youth.

The blessing will bring forgiveness to them and change them. It doesn't say that. But since the blessing is God's reaction to the problem of human rebellion, we should assume that Genesis 12 already implies something like forgiveness and change.

The 7th line of blessing says, *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*. God still wants relationship with all humanity. God's plan in blessing Abram was to bring his blessing to every group of people on earth.

We sometimes think that God gave up on the whole human race, and decided to have a relationship with just one nation, Israel, and that followers of Jesus have taken the place of Israel, or added to Israel. Not so.

God's plan all along was to bring in the whole human race. This line, about blessing all nations, happens five times in Genesis. It's in the first blessing in Gen 12.

The 2nd is Gen 18, where God is talking to himself: 18:18 - *Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and **all nations on earth will be blessed through him***. The 3rd is after Abram offered Isaac: 22:18 - *and **through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me***.

The 4th is to Abraham's son Isaac, in 26:4 - *I will make your descendants [Isaac], as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and **through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed***.

The 5th time to Abraham's grandson Jacob (28:14) - *Your descendants [Jacob], will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All **peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring***.

The God of Abraham has come to us. We Gentiles who have heard about Jesus, who've been forgiven, whose lives have been changed, who have relationship with God and hope for the future: it is all because God is still keeping that old promise to Abraham.

There are many followers of Jesus in the world today, and although the number is not growing very fast in Canada, overall in the world there is strong growth. The biggest blessing to all the nations is Jesus the Christ himself, and all he brings.

Jesus is the God's answer to the evil intentions of every human, and Jesus is God's answer to the human race that keeps turning away. Through Jesus God brings people back.

And God still wants all those people out there whom he does not have yet. We are still like Abraham. God still wants to bring his good fortune to others through us.

So do good to all, treat everyone well - God wants them. And let's take chances to tell people that we follow Jesus. God wants them as much as he wanted us. That blessing that's going to all the nations is still going out.

The Life of the Blessed and Obedient Abraham

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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Abraham got this remarkable blessing from God. It came with a call to leave his homeland and go somewhere else, and Abraham left and went somewhere else. So what would life be like for an obedient person who had gotten a blessing like that from God?

Troubles - there were still troubles. By Gen 12:10 there is famine in the land, and it is severe. "Leave your homeland," said God, "and go to the place I will show you."

This Abraham does, and soon after he arrives there is a famine. Has he missed God's plan for his life? Make a mistake? No.

The famine is bad enough that Abraham has to leave, go to Egypt. And Abraham was afraid to make that trip. He did not want to do that at all, but he had to in order to live. *I will bless you*, said God. Is this blessing?

I will make you into a great nation. Abraham and Sarah had no children. Abraham was 75 and Sarah 65 when God called them out of Haran, and they waited 25 years before Isaac was born. That's a long time, considering they were old and childless at the start.

God was making a point: when this child comes, it will be a miracle. I am creating out of nothing the nation that will bring my blessing to the planet. A long 25 years.

Protection and Fear

Gen 12:10-13 - *Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.* ¹¹ *As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are.* ¹² *When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live.* ¹³ *Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."*

Abraham had enough faith to leave everything and go to Canaan, but he did not have enough faith to trust God in Egypt. It does not really make sense, but we're all like that.

He did not trust God to care for him, and he basically gave away his wife, the mother of the great nation God would make.

Gen 12:17 - *But the LORD afflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai.* God protected Abraham and Sarah both. Abraham certainly did not show faith in that situation, but God took care of him.

The same thing happened more than twenty years later, recorded in Gen 20:11. Listen to Abraham explain himself to that king: *Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'* ¹² *Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife.* ¹³ *And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother." '*

Did you get the last line? 20:13 - *And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."*

This did not happen just twice. It happened every time they entered a new town. Abraham never learned to trust God to protect his life.

God had promised that a great nation would come out of Abraham, and that had not started, but Abraham did not believe.

By Gen 20, God had made clear that Sarah would be the mother of this nation, but still in Gen 20 Abraham gives his wife away everywhere he goes, in order to protect himself. How many times did God rescue Sarah and Abraham?

So this immensely blessed Abraham lived with ongoing troubles, and ongoing fears, fears that got him into even more troubles, and God was faithful to him in those troubles, too.

Trust and Obedience

Genesis 22:1-3 - *Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey.*

Abraham did not speak, and he did not wait: early the next morning he was in action. There is no greater act of obedience to God in all the Bible. Abraham did not argue, and he did not wait. A person could not pass a test better than Abraham passed that one.

Abraham and Us

We're talking about Abraham's life because he's an important model for us. This very blessing, the one to Abraham and to his descendants, comes to Gentiles who trust in Jesus. That's one main teaching of Galatians (3:8-9, 14, 28-29; 4:28, 30-31).

We are blessed as Abraham. We, like Isaac, are children of promise and inheritors of that blessing. But we have fears, and we have troubles, and our lives do not look to us as if we live under a huge blessing from the Creator. So we have trouble believing it's true.

Remember that of the eight blessings that Abraham received from God, only a tiny bit of that had happened by when he died, 60 years later. Looking back, we can see that God blessed Abraham in his own life, if we look for the right things; and overall God kept all those promises. But Abraham died still looking forward to most of it.

God wants to encourage us with this story. He's using it to remind us that he's utterly committed to seeing us through, to making us fortunate, and to making others fortunate by means of us.

We get important things right, as Abraham did. We leave things behind to be God's people. We also have troubles that are not our doing, and we make mistakes that bring us distress. In all this, God is faithful to us. He is still determined to bring us into relationship with him, and to keep us there, and to use us to call and invite others. Our blessing and our call are not much different from Abraham's. Neither are our lives.