

Genesis 12:1-8

### *The Challenge Of Obeying God*

Next to Jesus Christ, Abraham is the most significant person mentioned in the Bible. Men like Moses and David were used by God to lead the people of Israel, but without Abraham there wouldn't have been a nation for them to lead. In fact, if God hadn't chosen Abraham out of the degenerate and pagan land in which he lived there might never have been a Savior of the world. See, it was through Abraham's descendants that Jesus Christ came to bless all nations.

Abraham's prominence in God's overall plan for mankind is obvious from the fact that Abraham's story takes up 12 entire chapters in the book of Genesis!

He is mentioned all through the New Testament and the old. Three different times he's called "the friend of God" and scores of times the Bible refers to Jehovah as "the God of Abraham."

In the New Testament Abraham is referred to in Romans, Galatians, Hebrews and James. All of this just shouts out how significant a man Abraham really was.

The story of Abraham begins in Genesis 12 and in some respect this is where the main story of the Bible begins. You might call what precedes Genesis 12 "compressed history." 2000 years are described in just 11 chapters of Genesis. Think about what we've studied so far; the creation of the universe, the creation of man and the fall of man. We've seen how rapidly sin multiplied and violence and wickedness spread until God finally brought the judgment of the flood.

After the flood again people multiplied on the earth and just like they did at first, they quickly turned away from God. In some respects the deterioration was even greater than before the flood.

We saw that 2 weeks ago with the Tower of Babel.

What a tragedy! God destroys the earth with the flood, gives people another chance to walk with Him, and it seemed like in no time they turn their backs on God and go their own sinful way.

But God is a God of love. Even in judgment, He was loving people and giving them another chance.

Now remember this, God hates sin. He hates sin with a holy and perfect hatred. More often than not we don't hate sin, we hate the effects that it has on us or other people, but we tend not to hate it. If we did we'd have a lot less problem with sin.

God also loves people. And just like we don't really understand what it is to hate sin, we don't begin to love people the way God does. His love is absolutely perfect.

So in the midst of all of this human decadence that once again permeates the earth, God begins to fulfill His plan to redeem the very people who had sinned against Him. And to implement this plan He chooses one man, Abraham, through whom He would bless all nations, in spite of their resentment and hostility toward Him. God was going to give humanity another chance.

Now into this dark, dark age of human history God calls Abraham.

**Turn to Genesis 12, page 11 Read verse 1**

*I. God Is Always Very Open About His Forgiveness Plan*

"Abraham," which means "Father of many" was first called "Abram" which means either "exalted father," or "the exalted one is my father."

Abram received a call from God.

We're not told how God made Himself known to Abraham, the Bible simply says God spoke to him. We don't know the mechanics of that, but we are told what He said. God said, "I want you to move out, away from your family to a new home."

Notice it was God himself who took the initiative in Abram's life. It wasn't Abram that made the first move toward God. Instead it was God who simply broke into Abram's life, and it was God who took the steps necessary to bring this man to himself.

It is interesting to see the kind of home that Abram grew up in. The kind of culture he was surrounded by.

**Joshua 24 page 215. Read verse 2**

As far as what Abram or Abraham did in his own life we don't know. But when the call of God came he was living in an idolatrous home in the midst of an idolatrous society. In recent years we've learned through archeology that the city of Ur in which Abraham grew up, was the center of worship for the Sumerian moon god Nanna. No doubt Abraham's father, maybe even Abraham himself, was a worshiper of this false God.

All of that becomes significant when we realize that Abraham's call is a beautiful picture of how God's deals with us today.

When God spoke to Abraham, Abraham was living in a pagan land, alienated from God, a stranger to the promises of God, living under judgment, doomed to destruction. Yet God breaks into this man's life and calls him to Himself. That's the way it is with every Christian today. As descendants of Adam, we are alienated from God, are living under the judgment of hell, and are doomed to everlasting judgment. Yet in grace God breaks into our lives through His Holy Spirit and calls us to Himself.

Abraham responded to that call. In chapter 15 we're told, he believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. And so it was by grace that he was saved and it was by grace that he became a key figure in God's purposes. Now God's call to Abraham involved several things. First, it was a command to leave his country and his family.

Abraham originally lived in an ancient city names Ur which was located in southern Mesopotamia. Ur is 4000 years old and at one time critics of the Bible classified Ur as a mythological place, along with the rest of the cities and people of this time.

They said, "Who ever heard of Ur? Sounds like OZ. It's just one more example of why you can't trust the Bible. It's full of ancient fokelore."

Then in 1922 a British archeologist named Sir Charles Leonard Wolley excavated the city of Ur.

Ur actually means "city" in both Sumerian and Akkadian. Ur is located near Nasiriya, about 365 km south of Baghdad. As it turns out, Abraham wasn't just some strange wandering Bedouin from the backside of the desert who didn't know anything. Ur. was one of the most important cities in the world. It was a busy commercial center located at what was then the mouth of the Euphrates River.

The city covered about 4 square miles and had a population of about 300,000 people. Excavations show us that the houses were made of brick and white washed. They stood two stories high, some with up to 20 rooms.

I can remember the day my grandparents got indoor plumbing in their house. Modern inventions, right? They had indoor plumbing, sinks, and toilets, in Ur in 2000 B.C.

They had a highly organized educational system and in the schools the students, who wrote on clay tablets, studied square and cube root.

Abraham didn't live in a tent out battling sand storms. He lived in a comfortable, prosperous city. And yet God called him away from all of this because He had other plans for Abraham.

A second thing that was included in Abraham's call was a promise. Back in Genesis 12.

### **Read Verse 2,3**

There are four great covenants found in the Bible. The Abrahamic, the Palestinian, the Davidic, and the New Covenant.

- The Palestinian, which you find in Deuteronomy 30, promised Abraham's descendants the land of Palestine.
- The Davidic, in II Samuel 7, promised a throne and a government.
- And then the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31 promised salvation for Israel. The new covenant is based on the blood of Jesus Christ. All who believe fall under this one, whether you're physically a descendant of Abraham or not.

The Abrahamic is foundational to all the others. There was one condition to this covenant and that was that Abraham must move out to the place that God would show him.

God was going to establish the Jewish people as a nation through Abraham so that He could bring the rest of His plan to pass.

Once Abraham moved out there were 3 promises made with no conditions attached.

#1. A promise to Abraham: God would make a great nation through him. His name would be great and he would be a blessing.

#2. A promise to Abraham's descendants: They would be a great nation. That implies lots of people with a homeland.

#3. A promise to Gentiles: All families of earth would be blessed. Salvation would come to the world through Abraham's descendant, Jesus Christ. This covenant was repeated over and over again. Not only to Abraham but also to Isaac and Jacob.

Back in Genesis 3:15 God promised to send the seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. At times it looked like the opposite was going to happen and Satan would stop God's Savior.

God had to banish Adam and Eve from the garden. He had to banish Cain to be a wanderer. He destroyed all but 8 people in the flood. He brought judgment at the tower of Babel.

And now again we find the earth overrun with darkness and sin. But here God reveals His purposes to man.

Up until this time God had been dealing with mankind as a whole.

Suddenly, He takes what appears from the human standpoint to be a completely new approach toward mankind. He began to prepare a new nation, one that would be responsible for carrying God's revelation to the world and through whom the Redeemer would finally come to work out God's plan of salvation.

*I. God Is Always Very Open About His Forgiveness Plan*

*II. There Is Always A Price To Pay For Disobedience*

God's plan wasn't always going to go smoothly because it involved human beings with their sins, weaknesses and short comings. God's will is always accomplished, and yet the Bible says it's accomplished through clay pots and so we find problems along the way.

On the surface it might look like Abraham obeyed God without any kind of inward struggle. God said go and Abraham went. But a careful study of Bible, along with a

careful observation of human nature, makes it obvious that it wasn't such a smooth transition.

I believe that the reason that God made such a point about Abraham leaving his father's house and homeland was because God wanted him to make a complete break with idolatry. As long as Abraham had the influence of his father's idol worship Abraham would never really completely follow Jehovah God.

But Abraham was only partly obedient. You will notice that 12:1 starts, *Now the Lord had said to Abram.* The New Testament says in Acts 7:2 *The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran.*

And so God had spoken the words of 12:1-3 to Abraham while he was still in Ur but look back at **11:31-32**.

For some reason Abraham couldn't break with his father. In fact, it says Terah took Abraham and Sarah and Lot and left Ur to go to Canaan.

We're called to honor our father and mother. But when a man and woman marry, God says they form a new family unit and the husband now has the responsibility to provide godly leadership.

For some reason Terah was still running the show in the family and this was probably why God was so specific about Abraham leaving him. As long as his father, who was steeped in idolatry, was directing the family, God's plan wouldn't be fulfilled.

There is always a price to pay for disobedience to God and Abraham paid that price for 15 years. He traveled only as far as Haran. The name Haran means "dry" or "parched". And those terms literally are characteristic of his life for those 15 years. For all practical purposes those are wasted years. There's no record that Abraham built any altars there or prayed.

There is no record of any revelations or encouragements from God, no appearances, no progress, no victory, no growth. Instead those were totally barren years until God once again stepped into the picture and removed the hindering cause by taking the life of Terah.

Haran was a city just as idolatrous as Ur and still in the land of Mesopotamia. In fact, Ur and Haran were the two main centers for worship of the Moon god.

God had a plan for Abraham but while Abraham was close to his father, experiencing the security of family ties and support, he neglected God's call.

But still even though Abraham was having difficulty in making the complete break, God waited. Finally God had to take Tarah out of Abraham's life before he would turn his eyes again on what God wanted him to do.

Disobedience to God is a dangerous thing. There is always a price to pay. How typical this is of the lives of so many of us today. We believe that Jesus died for us but we don't want to make a clean break with the world system. We don't obey some of God's clear commands.

We say, "Well, no one's perfect. God understands. I'm not doing that bad."

And the sad thing is that God must sometimes deal with us in judgment before we begin to obey him. That God must take away things from our lives because they hinder us. **Back to Genesis 12**

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*II. There Is Always A Price To Pay For Disobedience*

*III. Obedience To God Always Leads To Assurance From God*

Finally, at 75 years of age Abraham obeys. **Read 12:4**

Now we don't want to be too hard on Abraham for his partial obedience because he did need to be taught and to mature in his faith. In fact, in the next 12 chapters we're going to see that Abraham was a lot like most of us. He had a whole lot more maturing to do. Remember he had a pagan background and no copy of the Bible like we have today. We can certainly praise Abraham for the obedience that he did show.

And now we see Abraham's faith developing strength. The trip to Haran with his Dad wasn't such a big change. He maintained his close family ties and he headed for a city very much like the one he left.

The trip from Ur to Haran wasn't very difficult. The land was good, fertile and lush

and maybe the closer they got to Haran the more Abraham was tempted to forget about God's call.

But leaving Haran for Canaan was the true test of Abraham's faith. This time he was headed for a place he'd never been before, and getting there meant traveling across a boring desert.

Gene Getz writes, Knowing something of Sarah's temperament from other scriptural accounts and particularly at this stage in her spiritual development it doesn't take too much imagination to reconstruct what could have transpired between this man and wife.

In other words Getz is guessing that on top of everything else, this trip would have produced some real tension in their marriage. Could you guys who are imagining telling your wife that you're moving her far from the comforts of home. And when she asks where you're going you have to say "I don't know yet. But we're going anyway."

That would have been another reason for Abraham to consider just forgetting about this whole trip.

But Abraham had learned some lessons in his wilderness of Haran experience. Now he was ready to take the risks that obedience to God demands.

### **Read verses 5-6**

The trip from Haran was long and monotonous. The land was desert and wasteland. Tradition records that they eventually arrived in an oasis near Damascus. In fact, a small village near the city is still called by Abraham's name. Josephus, the Jewish historian, records that a suburb of Damascus in his day was identified as the "habitation of Abraham."

But Abraham didn't stay there. He'd learned his lesson well. How easy it would have been to settle down, to stay in this place permanently or even to turn back. How tempting for Abraham to rationalize and convince himself that he had "obeyed enough."

How we need to guard against excusing ourselves from complete and total submission to God's word. We are masters at excuses!

Think about it, God has commanded us to love one another as He has loved us, to forgive one another as He has forgiven us, to be holy as He is holy. It's so tempting to stop short of fulfilling biblical directives.

Sometimes God's way is really hard. It seems unnatural. (That's because it isn't natural. It's supernatural and takes God the Holy Spirit to enable us.) So it usually doesn't take us long to convince ourselves that our half-hearted attempt at obedience is enough.

We think things like, "I can't commit to teaching or helping with the children at church. I have too many other things I want to do than to make any commitments like that. I don't want to forgive my mother. She doesn't deserve it. Yea, I get angry and blow up but hey, that's just the way I am. I have red hair, don't I?"

"I believe in Jesus. I read the Bible every Sunday I'm in church. I'm not a drunk or a criminal. That's gotta count for something with God."

And we end up dry and fruitless and we don't encounter God's blessing.

Well, Abraham had been called to Canaan.

And Abraham kept his eyes on the goal. He'd been temporarily side tracked before by his own father. But not now. Abraham kept going until he reached Canaan.

God honored Abraham's faith and obedience as He always does. Once he arrived at the place he was supposed to be God appeared to him again.

It is when we are disobeying God that it often seems as if God isn't speaking or leading us. But obedience to what God has plainly said brings an awareness of God's assurances.

**Read verse 7 - through "land."**

As far as we are told this is the first time God has directly revealed himself to Abraham since Ur 15 or 16 years before.

God waited until Abraham obeyed before He gave him reassurance. When we are living in heartfelt obedience to God we are walking in fellowship with God. God

communicates with us. And this is the point that Abraham has reached in his growth process.

It was like now Abraham had completed the transition from an idolatrous environment to worshipping the one and only true God.

### **Read verses 7b - 8**

Twice in the space of two verses we read that Abraham built an altar to Jehovah. What a striking statement this must have been to his pagan neighbors that Abraham and his family were different. Their sacrifice and their worship weren't made to some idol of wood or stone, but to the one and only true and living God, the creator of heaven and earth.

Gene Getz has a book called *Abraham, Trials & Triumphs*. In that book he draws 4 excellent applications from Abraham's life so far. I'd like to use his applications to try and draw how they apply to your life and mine.

#1. *God is very patient with us.* He understands our weaknesses, our struggles, our problems.

If anything stands out in these verses it's God's patience with Abraham. God knew it was a struggle for Abraham to leave his homeland and family. So God was patient with Abraham even though he was slow to obey. It would have been better in the long run for Abraham to have made the break and just jumped right in and obeyed. But sometimes God lets us learn the hard way. He doesn't directly force us to do His will even though His way is best.

Of course it's possible for us to think we can misuse God's patience or take advantage of His grace and so we need to remember lesson 2.

#2. *God will not and cannot be manipulated.* We will always pay a price for disobedience, even though it is partial obedience.

Even though Abraham was moving in the direction of Canaan, he still hasn't obeyed God's direct and specific command. He was still under the influence of his pagan father. So God eventually removed his father from the scene, freeing Abraham to obey.

Not only that, but God didn't speak to Abraham again and confirm his promise to him until he actually arrived in the land of Canaan. Until he had specifically obeyed.

There are times when we wonder why God seems so far off and unreal to us. Sometimes it's because we're trying to manipulate God. For some reason we get the idea that God has guide us through life and comfort us and sustain us, even though we're living in a state of disobedience.

The solution is to confess our sins and start obeying God. Then God will honor our obedience. He is promised never to leave us nor forsake us. He is always there. The problem lies with us, not God. He is close to us but we are not always close to Him.

*#3. Powerful lesson - The fact that we have disobeyed God in the past doesn't mean that we can't change the situation in the present.*

Sometimes our decisions or actions of disobedience to God can have serious, long lasting consequences.

Commit a crime and end up in jail and you have long term consequences to deal with.

Do IV drugs and get AIDS and you life is forever changed. Some sins have life-long repercussions. But it's exciting to know that whatever our surroundings or circumstances it is never too late to begin obeying God.

It may be a little tougher in jail, or in drug rehab but God is always ready to forgive and to bless a life that is totally committed to Him.

Remember, Moses was 80 when he led the Jewish people out of Egypt. Abraham was 75 when he left Haran.

*#4. We have to understand how God makes his will known today.*

Sometimes I hear Christians make the mistake of expecting God to duplicate the same method and patterns he used to reveal Himself to Abraham. Remember, even though God's nature and character never change He does work in different ways at different times in history.

In the story of Abraham we find an important beginning point in God's revelation to

people. Before the Bible was written down God appeared to certain individuals and spoke directly to them. Today we have the Bible which is the divine record of those events, plus clear-cut commands that specifically spell out God's will for us. We don't need to wait for God to speak. He has already spoken.

God has spoken and He's spoken through the record of the Scriptures.

A lot of confusion about God's will would be cleared up if Christians would realize that God has never promised to tell us every turn and decision in life. A lot of things I see done in the name of God's leading are obviously the desire of the person doing them. God becomes an excuse.

God has already given us commands. We are to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and then present our bodies as living sacrifices to Him. If we do, then we have the freedom to serve Him and God will bless as we do.

Is it a challenge to serve God? Absolutely.

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