

This passage raises the question 'What does God call us to?' And how do we know his call?

Some people seem to hear God's call so clearly and vividly.

Others seem to hang on longingly. Waiting for God to speak to them.

Others think he's silent and remote. Or perhaps that he doesn't exist.

Genesis 12 is the first chapter in our new teaching series. Centred around the theme of Promise.

The series will take us through to Genesis chapter 25 over these coming weeks. Bible Study guides to accompany these messages will be available on line.

As we look at the events of Genesis 12, we are going to be reminded that, when it comes to the Christian life, it is possible to be faithful and flawed at the same time.

To take God at his word, and yet continually to take matters into our own hands.

The bible mentions self-control as a gift of the Spirit. It's meant to be characteristic of the Christian leader.

But we have mistaken this for a desire for controlling things ourselves. Abram becomes the example of "the faithful and the flawed" as he responds to the call of God in this chapter.

But I want us to look at the one who is faithful and knows our flaws. The true hero of Genesis 12. The Lord himself.

Firstly, the Lord's call. Secondly, the Lord who calls. And thirdly, those the Lord calls.

The Lord's Call

So many of the shifts from one phase of biblical history to another, as happens at the end of Genesis 11, are marked by genealogies. It's the bible's version of ancestry.com.

God reminds us that he works through the generations to achieve his plans. Which reach into eternity.

From the conclusion of Genesis 11. V 31. Abraham's father is Terah. They are living in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans. Around 2100 BC.

Polytheism is the culture of the day. Well over 300 different gods were being given homage in this thoroughly religious culture.

It's quite possible that Abram's father Terah may have been a dealer in idols. A reference in Joshua confirms for us that Abram's father worshiped other gods.

V 31 of chapter 11 tells us that Terah and his family are on the move. They are looking to move, of all places, to Canaan.

They got as far as Harran and settled there. Perhaps the market for peddling idols was attractive for Terah. Perhaps it seemed like a good place to live. We're not sure. But there they stayed.

Abram's home life is a reality-check for us when we think about the calling of God.

Abram's not the grey-haired wise man suited for the role. Not the step-above-the-average human being. Not the believer well versed in the ways of the Lord. Fit for ministry. Full of gospel potential.

He's a pagan. Living in the world of the multi-god. Where idolatry is an industry and religion is a supermarket. Probably taking on the faiths of his family and cultivating a religious heritage.

What was the Lord thinking?

As we enter Genesis 12, Abram is no longer bound by the call of his earthly father, but is called by the Lord of Heaven and earth. The promise-making and promise-keeping God.

There's no miraculous conversion experience here. The passage is remarkably economic when you look at the way it's described. V 1...

Read vv 1-3

And the writer tells us, v 4:

Read v 4

We can summarise God's call to Abram like this. Three parts...

- 1. Abram was called to a new land**
- 2. God would make through him a great nation.**
- 3. Abram's name would be great, so that he would be a blessing to others.**

Abram's position does not seem a difficult one on face value. He can either obey. Or he can reject the call. Very much like the garden of Eden.

The passage doesn't debate the point. V 5. Abram departs from his then home. Taking his considerable family and possessions with him.

By verse 6 he has arrived at his destination. The place God has promised would be his.

Now Abram is no dill. He may be in the land God has promised him. But the last sentence in verse 6 identifies a slight problem.

At that time, the Canaanites were in the land.

According to God's call in verses 1-3, a great nation requires large population, large territory, and a 'large' name.

Abram is going to be leading a large people. Dwelling in a large kingdom territory. And having a large name.

This is the Lord's calling. Secondly, then, What of the Lord who calls?

The Lord who Calls

As the account of Abram unfolds throughout these chapters, we discover that being called by God is a call to be distinctive.

For Abram, the life of multi-faceted religion, superstition, pluralism, relativism and the many other "isms" that lead to idolatry, are to be a thing of the past.

Now he would be called to be like the God who called him. The call is closely tied to the caller.

The living God would require Abram's exclusive allegiance and commitment.

Now he would be faithful to one God, the sovereign and ruling creator of all the earth. He would be called to serve a holy God and none other.

He would be called to trust the Lord against the odds. To father a great nation. Yet his wife Sarai was barren.

Two New Testament writers describe him 'as good as dead. It appeared that his family had little future when he responded to the caller.

Despite these adverse circumstances, Abram is called to take a simple yet powerful step. To take God at his word. To believe the promise.

And, as Abram stood in Canaan and pondered how he would be the vehicle for a great people in a great land with a great name, it must have all seemed so distant.

And the Lord appears to remind him. V 7.

Read v 7.

The geography of verses 6 through 8 is the geography of the land of Canaan. The territory was being marked out in anticipation of the blessing to come.

Abram builds altars to the Lord in response. We cannot make too much of this. It was probably what Abram was used to doing when he worshipped other gods.

But, there was no longer silence from his gods. The true living God speaks. And his word is to be obeyed.

How do we respond to the call of God? What do the called do when they hear the promises of God? The last third point...The Called.

Those the Lord calls

It would be wrong to presume that Abram understood all the implications of his new life. In time, they would unfold before him. We'll hear about this in the coming weeks.

What did Abram do as his future prospects were revealed to him by the living Lord?

The same thing you and I do. Take matters into our own hands.

In the second half of this chapter, we see where his ingenuity leads him when he decides to move to Egypt. To seek food because of the famine in Canaan.

V 13. In a desperate but no doubt what he thought 'clever' plan, he presents his wife as his sister for protection from Pharaoh. He takes matters into his own hands.

For fear of Sarai's beauty putting his life at risk, he puts Sarai's life in danger.

Faithful Abram now shows himself as flawed Abram. His actions are the very opposite of the sacrifice we know is at the heart of the gospel.

V 16 tells us initially it merits him favour. Many possessions. Security. Safety. Very much like the home he'd left behind when he was called.

Only problem was, the Lord didn't seem to think it was a good idea. Means to an end doesn't appear to be a divine strategy.

Even the Pharaoh knew it was wrong. His ethics appear better than Abram's.

After the wonder and expanse and potential of the Lord's promises. A great nation. A great name. A great land.

Abram's seemingly willing response of obedience. So quickly undone.

Abram had encountered the living Lord who ordained plans for his future. And his best response when opposition arose was 'I got this.'

Does this feel at all familiar? I know God loves me. But as for the plans for my life? 'I got this?'

Or, perhaps it's more subtle. God is calling me. But generally only to the things which make me more successful. Not to the costly or sacrificial.

In a remarkable act of grace, it is only through the Lord's over-ruling that Abram is released from Pharaoh.

Allowed to leave with all his family and possessions. It won't be the last time we see the Lord rescuing his own from Egyptian rule.

The bible's story line is the constant struggle and faithlessness of God's people. Against the continued sovereignty and faithfulness of the God who calls them.

Time and time again the Lord will call frail and fallen human beings to achieve his purposes. Abram's descendants will be the line through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. V 7.

Read v 7.

Offspring means literally, to your seed. Singular, as the footnote in your bible may indicate.

The New Testament writer Paul explains this in Galatians 3:16:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

Time and time again the Lord called frail and fallen human beings to achieve his purposes.

Time and time again these figures took on Messiah-like proportions as they showed their potential for obedience, and yet their failure in their sinfulness.

Until God called the one who is neither frail nor fallen. Called him to enter our world. Live by his word. Fulfil all his promises.

Jesus Christ. The true human. Of the line of Abraham, as Matthew's genealogy tells us.

Jesus would be the ruler of a great nation. The Body of Christ.

Jesus would inherit a great land. The Kingdom of God where he dwells as the resurrected Lord.

Jesus would be given a great name. The name above all names.

God called his son to give his life on the cross. Raised him to life. Exalted him to rule. As he promised.

He promises that life to all whom he calls. In Christ, the invitation to be a part of Abram's family is universal. Available to all.

Everyone is called. Take God at his word. Believe the promise. Acts 2:21:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

We are going to hear about Abram's messy life in the coming weeks. At points we are going to want to cheer him on. At other times, we'll ask how he could have got it so wrong.

Genesis 12 says if are contemplating the call of God this day, then you can be certain of these three things:

1. You are being called
2. The call is from the Living God
3. You are being called to Christ. To enter the Kingdom of God.

The promises of God, from Abraham to Christ, tell us that what has fallen may be repaired.

We may be helpless, but we are not hopeless. For God is calling us to himself.

Has he got your attention?

Let's pray.