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## WHEN GOD CALLS, PART TWO

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I want to start with a little game this morning. Let's see if we can figure out the most frequently named people in the New Testament. I don't mean using expressions like, "Moses said..." because those aren't actually about the person himself. I mean, who is actually talked about the most in the New Testament? The first one should be easy. Who wants to start?

[In order: *Jesus, Paul, Peter, Abraham*].

Isn't that surprising? Abraham is talked about more frequently in the New Testament than the apostle John, John the Baptist, and even Moses. Here is why: Abraham is held up as an illustration of the Christian life. I know that some people may take offense at that, since Christianity is supposed to have started (by secular and other religious reckoning) with Christ; but the New Testament authors didn't see it that way, nor does God. The Old Testament is the foundation for the New: "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed."

Abram is regarded by three religions as one of the greatest holy men who have ever lived; but the Bible shows us that he didn't start out that way! Abram is a picture of the man of faith, and we see that the man of faith started out just like the rest of us. In other words, Abram is not just a picture of the man of faith; he is a picture of the man or woman that any of us can become when we respond as Abram did to God's call.

Last week we talked about God's call to Abram and related that to God's call to all men. We all start just as Abram did. Therefore, we can see in the life of Abram a picture of the life of faith. He starts out as an idol worshipper in a pagan city. As we continue to study his life, we will see a seed of faith begin to grow in his life. He will stumble, he will fail, he will make some very bad decisions; but he will press to become the man God wants him to be.

What an inspiration! God's people are "works in progress." We can be difficult, can we not?

To dwell above with saints in love,  
Oh, that will be glory!  
To dwell below with those I know,  
Well, that's *another* story!

So the story of Abram is a template for the story of each of us. The stories of the Old Testament are there to point us to the truth revealed in the New. Romans 15:4 makes this clear:

*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

I love what Rev. Ray Stedman had to say about this important truth:

The Old Testament is designed to be a picture book, illustrating with fascinating stories the spiritual truths presented in the New Testament. This is especially true of the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and the book of Joshua, for in the life histories of men like Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, we also have a symbolic representation of the progress of spiritual growth.

One of the most convincing proofs of the inspiration of the Bible is the facility with which the Spirit of God takes simple history — facts as they were lived out day by day — and recorded them in such a way as to weave together a totally accurate pattern of the development of spiritual life. In other words, what took place physically in the Old Testament is a picture for believers today of what takes place spiritually in their own growth in grace.<sup>1</sup>

What an encouragement! Are you yet imperfect? Do you know anyone else who is? Then be assured that God is at work, accomplishing in us what He accomplished in that great man of faith, Abram.

Let's read Genesis 12:1:

*Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:*

God here speaks to Abram, possibly for the first time. At this point, notice that God does *not* reveal His whole plan. He gives Abram enough light, enough revelation, to take a first step of faith.

Abram must leave his country. He must leave Ur of the Chaldees. It was not that long ago that Ur of the Chaldees was supposed to have been a primitive city of mud-bricked dwellings; but archaeology informs us that Ur was a wealthy, sophisticated city with many “modern” trappings, including a library and a university, and an estimated peak population of perhaps 65,000. Writing is evident everywhere, even on the bricks. A ziggurat, or temple tower, was also found there and can be seen to this day.

On a sidenote, this ziggurat held a clue to something else in the Bible. Long after Abram's day, the city of Ur was deserted. The last Babylonian king mentioned in the famous list of kings visited the site and began to restore the old ziggurat. For many years, historians had access to that list of kings which showed that Nabonidus was the last king of the Babylonian Empire; but the book of Daniel in the Bible made it clear that Belshazzar was the last king. The critics mocked the Bible, claiming that they had proof that the Bible was wrong. But the ziggurat at Ur held the key, because when Nabonidus restored it, he left messages there, one of which was about his son, Belshazzar, whom he had made co-regent and left in charge while he was away. We now know that Nabonidus was a “travelin' man.” While he was gone, his son was in charge, and if anything happened to Nabonidus, Belshazzar would become the king; but Nabonidus was still considered to be “the top dog.” That is why Belshazzar offered to make whoever could interpret his dream the *third* most powerful man in the empire. Did you ever wonder about that? Why didn't he make him the second most powerful? Well, now we know! Dad was on top, but gone; Belshazzar was number two, still considered *a* king but not *the* king; and whoever interpreted the dream would be number three! That office didn't last long, though, because the empire was gone within just a few hours. But I digress.

Abram was called to leave the old *country* behind: the world with its false comforts and pleasures and

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1 Ray Stedman, “The Beginning of Faith,” 1968. Available at <http://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/genesis/the-beginning-of-faith>.

distractions. He would leave the old mindset, the old worldly philosophy, the old quest for material gain, behind.

Abram was called to leave his *kindred*. He is called to leave those who influence and shape and mold his life.

Abram was called to leave his *father's house*. Yes, he must abandon the most influential and comfortable place in his life. He must leave his father's house behind.

Just as Abram was called to leave all behind, so we are called. Again, the words of Ray Stedman ring true:

This is where a man stands when he first hears the gospel. He may have grown tired of the land of Ur, for it is a land of darkness, of weariness of soul, of spiritual hunger and death. Yet when the call of the Word of God comes to him, there is much that seems desirable in the old life. He hesitates to leave, feeling the pull of these things upon him. Undoubtedly, Abram felt this hesitancy. The land to which he was called was unknown. It could not be known until it was experienced. But he could not deny the reality of God, and he could not evade the clear command: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we should carefully consider the content of God's promises to Abram. So far we've looked at the part Abram was called to do. He was called to leave, and he was called to go: leave the old behind, and go to the new place under God's guidance. Genesis 12:2-3:

*And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:*

*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

Notice that the promises are *God's* promises. Do you see how many times God says, "I will"? If Abram takes the first step, if Abram ventures to the place God is showing him, then God will do the rest. It's a done deal. God will do all the work of bringing these promises to pass. David Guzik notes that Genesis 11 is all about the plans of man, but Genesis 12 is all about the plans of God.<sup>3</sup>

*"I will make of thee a great nation"*: This is a national promise for Israel. We will see this promise fleshed out in more detail in the chapters to come. In brief, God promises Abraham about 300,000 square miles. Currently Israel only possess about 12,000 miles. This is a promise yet awaiting fulfillment, in God's due time, most likely during the events that unfold in the book of Revelation.

*"I will bless thee"*: This is a personal promise. God certainly did fulfill this, as we shall see. God multiplied Abram's possessions, family, spiritual life—everything!

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2 Ibid.

3 David Guzik, "Genesis 12--God's Call of Abram; Abram in Egypt." Enduring Word Media, 2006. Available at <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/0112.htm>.

*“I will make thy name great”*: This also is a personal promise. As we noted, Abraham is considered a pillar of three major religions. He is the Founding Father of the Jewish nation. He has been known from his own day right down to the present, and his name is heard all over the earth. How many other people in history can make that claim? Not many. Even the ancient conquerors, rulers of massive empires, were largely forgotten until modern archaeologists found them.

## OZYMANDIAS

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

*“And thou shalt be a blessing”*: Again this is a personal promise, but this is one that we can claim. Just as David declared in Ps. 23:6, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me,” we can leave behind a legacy of blessing. God’s grace at work in our lives allows us to be a blessing to others, both within our lifetimes and resounding long afterward.

*“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee”*: This is both a personal blessing and a national blessing for the Jewish people. It has been literally fulfilled many times over. The Jewish people stand by the graves of the empires that have treated them cruelly. No other people have been the subject of so much hatred and violence; and yet they are still among us, and still retain their distinct identity.

When the Greeks overran Palestine and desecrated the altar in the Jewish temple, they were soon conquered by Rome. When Rome killed Paul and many others, and destroyed Jerusalem under Titus, Rome soon fell. Spain was reduced to a fifth-rate nation after the Inquisition against the Jews; Poland fell after the pogroms; Hitler’s Germany went down after its orgies of anti-Semitism; Britain lost her empire when she broke her faith with Israel.<sup>4</sup>

*“And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”*: This is indeed a mighty promise! It is personal to Abram, national to the Jews, and universal to us. It is, in fact, a narrowing of the promise given to Eve. God had said that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. At this point, God

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4 Donald G. Barnhouse as quoted by David Guzik in “Genesis 12—God’s Call of Abram; Abram in Egypt.” Enduring Word Media, 2006. Available at <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/0112.htm>.

reveals that this seed will come through Abram's line. From the time of Eve until the time of Abram, we hear little of this promise; but it is God's purpose to bring this promise to fulfillment, even when He is silent about it. We see it here again. It is part of the "crimson thread" that runs through the Bible from cover to cover—the thread of a promise of a Redeemer, and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Let's "fast forward" from this promise to the fulfillment of it in Jesus Christ. Jesus declared in John chapter 3 that He would be lifted up (on a cross), and when that happened, He would draw all men to Himself. God draws, and if we respond, He does the rest. It is God and God alone who saves us. We can't work for it, we can't earn it, we can only respond to God's finished work in faith. That is the lesson of Abram. How will we respond?