

Book of Genesis – Part VI

Genesis 12-14 – “The Coming of Abraham”

God’s actual plan of salvation begins with the call of Abraham. At this point in the account he is still Abram. His new name will be the sign of this change in status as is also the case with his wife who goes from Sarai to Sarah. God’s promises of a special people and a special land are immediately threatened by human ignorance and faithlessness. Yet this will be the essence of the Biblical story of salvation. God remains faithful even in the face of human failure (II Timothy 2:13).

I. The Call of Abraham

1. God’s call of Abraham is one of the most pivotal events in Scripture. After the prologue of the first eleven chapters, we now enter into the historical unfolding of God’s plan of salvation. There are several notable features of this call.
 - a. No reason is given why God calls this man specifically. Unlike Noah, we are not told that Abraham is blameless in his generation or righteous. In fact, we are later told that Abraham and his family worshipped false gods (Joshua 24:2).
 - b. Abraham is told by God to “go.” Yet he is not told what his destination is to be. He is to go to a country which God will show him (12:1; Acts 7:1-3; Heb. 11:8-10).
 - c. Through Abraham and his descendents, the nations will be blessed (12:2). God’s blessings and curses will be given through Abraham and his descendents (12:3).
 - d. Abraham takes his family with him on his pilgrimage. We are not told what reaction they have to being uprooted and sent off to an unknown destination.
2. The human threat to God’s call – 12:10-20
 - a. This is one of the most puzzling but also most provocative accounts in Genesis. There are two very similar accounts in the same book (Gen. 20:1-18; 26:6-11).
 - b. To understand the irony of this story, we need to understand the wife/sister relationship of this period. A man could in effect adopt the same woman as a sister into his family as well as marry her. A wife/sister had a stronger status in the family than a wife alone had. Sarah then was a wife/sister of Abraham.
 - c. Immediately following the account of Abraham’s call, we read that he and Sarah go into Egypt. This prefigures Israel and Jesus’ later

journeys to Egypt which are essential to their role in God's plan of salvation (Ex. 1:1-8; Matt. 2:14-15).

- d. We read that Sarah was a very beautiful woman (12:11). Nothing is said here of her being of advanced age, although we have already been told that she was barren (11:30).
- e. Fearing for his own safety, Abraham persuades Sarah to say only that she is his "sister." He is afraid that if he identifies himself as her husband, the Pharaoh will kill him so he can take Sarah as his wife (12:12-13). Given Sarah's wife/sister status this is a "half truth" which nonetheless is a complete deception.
- f. Thinking that Abraham is only her brother, the Pharaoh takes Sarah into his palace and rewards Abraham (12:15-16).
- g. The critical point here is that the promise that Abraham and Sarah will have a great number of descendents (which will also include Jesus Christ- Matt. 1:1) is already in jeopardy through Abraham's actions.
- h. God intervenes to keep Sarah from being the permanent wife of the Pharaoh, who is understandably upset with Abraham for having deceived him (12:17-19).
- i. At this early point, we see that God's plan of salvation does not depend on human action. In fact, God carries out his plan in spite of human frailty and failure (Isa. 59:14-17). **This is the first clear demonstration in Scripture of God's grace overriding human activity, cf. I Rom. 5:8; Tim. 1:12-14.**
- j. The irony of this early account continues with the discussion between Abraham and his nephew, Lot, regarding the land they will choose (13:1-7).
- k. Abraham gives Lot the first choice (13:8-9). Lot chooses the land that appears more fertile and appealing. Unknown to him, he is choosing the future location of Sodom and Gomorrah, names which will live forever as symbols of depravity and the object of God's judgment (13:10-11; cf. Deut. 29:32; Isa. 13:19; Matt. 10:15; II Peter 2:6). Abraham's more rocky choice will be a future land of promise. The lesson here, of course, is that appearances are deceiving. Lot's choice has echoes of Eve's choosing the forbidden fruit because it was "a delight to the eyes" (Gen. 3:6).

II. Abraham the Warrior –Genesis chapter 14

1. We come now to an important but unfamiliar story of Abraham's role in a local war.
 - a. There is a war taking place between four local kings and five other kings (14:1-9).
 - b. Abraham, with a little more than three hundred men, enters the war on the side of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, leading them to victory (14:13-16). Abraham gets involved so he can rescue Lot and his family. This is in spite of the depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah (13:13).

2. The real importance of the account emerges in the aftermath of the war-14:17-24.
 - a. Abraham meets Melchizedek who is both a king and a priest. He is the King of Salem, a name which means peace and foreshadows the future Jerusalem (14:18).
 - b. Melchizedek brings offerings to Abraham including bread and wine. He also praises "God Most High" and blesses Abraham (14:19-20).
 - c. The somewhat mysterious Melchizedek is one of the most important figures in the Old Testament. He is clearly a type of Christ. We read later that he is a priest "forever." Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6; 6:19-7:3. His gift of bread and wine is also a foretelling of communion (14:18; Mark 14:22-24).

III. Key Lessons in This Passage

1. God takes the initiative in the salvation of the human race (12:1-2).
2. God's choice is based on himself not on any human accomplishment or achievement.
3. Obedience to God's call is essential. Yet this obedience must often be carried out without knowing the specific goal or destination to which God is calling us (12:4).
4. God intervenes in our lives in surprising ways (12:1, 17).
5. God's promises are clear but God may not reveal how those promises will be carried out (13:14-18).
6. God's plan cannot be frustrated by human failure or weakness (12:10-20).
7. God remains faithful to God's own promises. Yet we need to realize that God's agenda may be different from our own.

Questions for Us -

1. How does God call us and intervene in our lives in ways that surprise us? How do we sense that God may be calling us to something that is unfamiliar and new to us?
2. How are we like Abraham and Lot in making choices which lead us into situations which are contrary to God's will (Gen. 12:11-13; 13:10-13)? What are some of the ways we may have seen God intervening in our lives to protect us from the consequences of our own choices?
3. Abraham for Paul is a great example of someone who lives by the promises of God (Rom. 4:16-20). Abraham does not live to see the fulfillment of these promises (Gen. 12:7; 13:16). What can we learn from his example of living by faith in promises not yet seen?