

# THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

*A Meditation on Genesis 11:27-12:3*

After the flood, Noah blessed his son Shem, and from his descendants the Messiah would eventually come and fulfill the promise of Genesis 3:15. As we've mentioned before, history is moving in the direction of the fulfillment of this promise, which is one reason why the genealogies are so important. Generation by generation we're tracking the faithfulness of God's Word as we await the crushing of the serpent's head.

Shem's descendants migrated *to the east*, and united with Nimrod and his ungodly descendants in the land of Shinar, where they labored to build his kingdom called Babel or Babylon. The tragedy of course is that the godly line turned away from the true God, and became entangled in the worship of false gods, and this included Abram's father, Terah. Hundreds of years later Joshua referred to this false worship: "And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods'' (Jos. 24:2).

In Genesis 29:1, Jacob journeyed to the land of the people *of the east*, the land of his relatives, and we see Laban the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, worshiping false gods. When Jacob finally fled from Laban years later, Laban was upset because somebody in Jacob's household stole his gods (Gen. 31:30). I have to be honest, this cracks me up. Can't you hear Laban explaining to his family as they gathered for worship, "There will be no worship of our gods today, because they have been stolen. Let's pray for their safe return."

Then one of his little children asks innocently, "Daddy, who should we pray to?"

Laban's frustrated retort with a flushed face is, "Oh, never mind."

But even those in Jacob's household had foreign gods that had to be put away (Gen. 35:1-4).

Centuries later when Joshua replaced Moses as the leader of Israel, we notice that idolatry is still an intense issue: "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Jos. 24:15).

Now if Terah turns away from the true God and his son, Abram, follows in his footsteps, the promise of Genesis 3:15 will be thwarted. God will not allow this to happen, He remains faithful, even when we turn away. So He calls Abram out of a pagan land and out of a pagan family: "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you'" (Gen. 12:1).

At this point we need to be clear about the order of events. If we just had Genesis 12:1-4 to go on we would conclude that God called Abram *after* his father died. We might assume Genesis 12:1 follows 11:32 chronologically. But it doesn't. It's not uncommon for the book of Genesis to give us events and then go back in time, and this is one of those occasions. The call of Genesis 12:1-3 actually took place *before* Terah died. Moreover, the call came to Abram, not when he was in Haran, but when he was back in Ur of the Chaldeans. Then Genesis 12:4 picks up the story in Haran after Terah died. I know this is the correct order, due to the added insight provided by Stephen. Recounting Israel's history, Stephen notes, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia (i.e. Ur of the Chaldeans), before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living" (Acts 7:2-4).

Stephen also gives us insight into the manner in which God called Abraham. He said, "The God of glory appeared to...Abraham." (The appellation "God of glory" is only found in one other Scripture, Psalm 29:3: "the voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders..."). Stephen doesn't say, "The God of glory *said* to Abraham." Rather, "The God of glory *appeared* to Abraham." One commentary on Genesis said, "We don't know how God appeared to Abraham when He called him." But I think Stephen knows. It seems that God manifested His bright, blazing glory to Abraham in a theophany—a physical appearance of God. A.W. Pink says, "The 'God of glory' was in vivid contrast to the 'other gods' mentioned in Joshua 24:2" (*Gleanings in Genesis*, p. 138).

It is also possible that this glorious appearance was nothing less than an act of sovereign, saving grace. I say this, because if Abraham (Abram at this time) was worshiping false gods, due to his upbringing, there had to be a point of conversion. We tend to think of salvation in terms of believing, and that is biblical. But that is not the only way that the Bible talks about salvation. For example, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6 describes salvation, not as believing—although that is assumed—but as *seeing* the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: "In their case

the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Could it be that Abraham would describe his conversion in a way that is almost identical with Paul's? We can't say with certainty, but it's at least a possibility. What we can assert with certainty is that Abraham responded to the call with faith; if he didn't have faith earlier he has it now. Hebrews 11:8 tells us, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

What can we glean from this? To begin with, God can save *any* family at *any* time from *any* culture He pleases. Thus, we should never be fatalistic about our family of origin. Maybe your father, and his father before him, served other gods, so what? If God opens your eyes to see His glory in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and He calls you, put away the false idols and worship Him. When you turn to the true and living God, you have no idea what ripple affect that will have on past, as well as future, generations.

In Genesis 11:31 we're told that *Terah* took his family from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, which is what God had told *Abram* to do. Now Terah and his family get side-tracked in Haran for some unknown reason, but why was Terah leading the family to Canaan in the first place? It's quite possible that the God of glory appeared and called Abram, and then Abram told his father about it, and he too believed the Word of the Lord and was converted. Some are critical of Abram, since God told him to leave his "father's house" and he didn't. But maybe he did. Perhaps he left his father's house, but his father didn't leave him. There's more than one way to interpret these events. Earlier we saw in Joshua 24:2 that Terah is described as a pagan, but in Genesis 31:53 he, as well as Nahor, is said to be a worshiper of the true God.

So if your parents aren't believers don't give up hope. On the flip side, if your children or grandchildren aren't Christians, continue to pray for them and witness to them. Interestingly, Noah was still alive during Terah's life, since he lived 350 years after the flood. How discouraging it must have been for him to watch his descendants turn away from God, and to do so only a few hundred years after the flood. We often think of Noah as a "herald of righteousness" *before* the flood (1 Pet. 2:5), but was he any less a "herald of righteousness" *after* it? Noah died before Abram was born, so he never lived to see Terah's conversion, but if I had to venture a guess, I would say that he died in faith knowing that it would happen, because of God's promise in Genesis 3:15.

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