

The Blessing of Abraham

Genesis 11:27-12:9

Covenant Waterfall, 23 January 2022

Read

Pray

Introduction

On New Years' Eve I received the news that the son of one of my colleagues at Mukhanyo, took his own life. He was just 20 years old, had been the dux of his school, head boy, first team in sports – wonderful guy. But suffered from depression. He had been canoeing with his dad that morning (something they often did), afternoon parents found his body in a room at home. Absolutely tragic, senseless, heart-breaking. So many questions. Harsh truth is that is a reminder of the sin-cursed reality in which we all live.

This morning, back in Genesis, chapter 11-12 – looking at God's calling and God's blessing of Abram (Abraham). In the midst of a messed up, sin-cursed world, after the Fall, God sovereignly called out Abram and blessed him, promised him and his descendants a land of their own and that through him, all the nations of the world would be blessed. What we are going to see this morning from this passage is that trusting in Jesus Christ, we too share in these same blessings of Abram.

- Abram, son of Terah
- Abram, blessed by God
- Abram points us to Christ

A. Abram, son of Terah (11:27-32)

Let's remind ourselves of the context of our passage: go back to beginning – Adam and Eve enjoyed a blessed existence in the Garden of Eden, freely worshipped God, lived unhindered

in his presence. Fall into sin changed all that, fell for the lies of the serpent – result – cursed, death came into the world, cut off from God’s presence, expelled from the Garden.

Yet not all was lost – first gospel promise in Scripture - Genesis 3:15, God promised that one day he would send a seed of the woman, descendant of Eve to crush the head of the serpent – break the curse of sin and death, forgive sins and restore his people to himself in blessing.

Journey through Genesis so far – seen hints already of how this gospel promise will be fulfilled – God has chosen an elect line – Seth, Noah, Shem – working out his gospel promises to redeem a people for himself, pointing to Someone greater, promised Messiah who will do it all.

Also seen the tragic descent of the world into sin after the fall. Cain murdering Abel, utter depravity of mankind – God was sorry that he created man (Gen 6), and so judges the world by sending a flood. Even after the flood, still sin-cursed world – Tower of Babel (Gen 11) – mankind sets itself in opposition to God.

This is where our passage kicks off, Gen 11:27-30

Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. ²⁸ Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹ And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Here we are introduced to Terah and his family. In the preceding verses we see that Terah is a descendant of Noah’s son, Shem – elect line. Terah has three sons – Abram, Nahor and Haran. Born and bred in Ur of the Chaldeans (v.28) – what would later become known as Babylon (modern day Iraq). Terah’s eldest son, Abram, who soon becomes the focus. Hebrew sounds like “I will bless”. Terah, Abram and all the family are pagans. Joshua 24:2 tells us that they “served other gods”, not Yahweh, the Living God.

Evidence of this – marriages – Abram marries his half-sister, Sarai. See this later in Genesis 20:2. Terah is her father as well, different mother. Marrying your sister explicitly forbidden in the law, Leviticus 18:9.

Verse 30 then tells that that Sarai was barren, she could not have children. Very important point to remember. Verses 31-32 then tell us the Terah leaves Ur, taking his son Abram and Lot, his grandson and decide to trek to the land of Canaan. But instead of settling there, they decide to settle down in a place called Haran, about midway between Ur and Canaan.

B. Abram, blessed by God (12:1-9)

It's at this point that Genesis begins to zoom in on Abram. Remember, before this point, Genesis 1-11, focus has been on the whole world. Now, focus on one man and his family – whose descendants will become the chosen nation of Israel. Basically from here, the rest of the OT focuses on Abram and his descendants.

In verse 1, God speaks to Abram: **“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.”**

Remember, at this point, Abram is an idolater, a pagan, a worshipper of “other gods”. Yet in spite of his sin and idolatry, the Lord finds him, calls him and chooses him. Abram wasn't seeking the true God, no God sovereignly sought him out. See this pattern throughout Scripture – it's God who seeks his people out (Moses, David, Paul), even us – God chooses us, we don't chose God (Jesus, John 15:16). Initiative always with God. God calls Abram to himself, and from his family, to a land that he will show him.

Verses 2-3 continue:

“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Having called Abram, God now makes a series of unconditional promises to Abram. Firstly – God promises that he will make Abram into a great nation. Secondly – God will bless him and make his name great – that he will be a blessing. Thirdly – God will bless those who bless him, and curse those who dishonour him. Fourthly – that through Abram, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Those are some incredible promises! But we need to understand how improbable they must have sounded to Abram. Remember from ch.11:30, we saw that Abram's wife, Sarai can't have children. He is also landless – somewhat of a nomad. Now God is promising him that despite all odds, not only is he going to have children, but his descendants are going to become a great nation, that all the nations of the whole earth will be blessed through him, and that he will have a land of his own.

How then does Abram respond to these promises from God? Verse 4 carries on:

“So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.”

Despite the seeming impossibility of God's promises to him, verse 4 tells us that Abram simply “went, as the Lord had told him.” In other words, Abram believed God's promises, he received them by faith and so was obedient to God's call to go to the land that was promised to him.

Verses 5-6 then tell us that Abram, Sarai and his nephew, Lot gather all their belongings and set out to the land of Canaan. Remember Canaan, Ham's cursed son and Noah's grandson? Yes – it's his cursed descendants who are now the inhabitants of the land that God has now promised to Abram.

Verse 7 continues: **“Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.”**

Arriving in the land of Canaan that God has promised him, God then appears to Abram and makes another promise – that this land will belong to all his offspring, his descendants (Hebrew = seed). What does Abram do after God promises the land to him and his offspring? He builds an altar to the Lord. Altar? Place of worship. Next verse, 8, another part of land of Canaan – near Bethel (Heb = house of God) – builds another altar and worships the Lord.

So what is going on here? God is being faithful to the gospel promise he made in Genesis 3:15 – crush the head of the serpent – to reverse the curse in this world. How is this so? Remember Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, cut off from God's presence because of their sin? Now God is granting a new Garden to Abram and his descendants - his

chosen people – the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. Like Adam and Eve, who lived a blessed existence before God's presence before the fall, now Abram and his descendants are also promised a blessed existence in the Promised Land before the presence of God. This is precisely why Abram starts building altars all around the Promised Land and worshipping God. God is reversing the curse by blessing Abram and his descendants, giving them a land of their own – enjoy these blessings and live before God – just how God had always intended.

Promise not only for Abram and his descendants, but as we saw in verse 3, “all the families (nations) of the earth” will be able to share in these blessings, instead of the curse that is all around us.

C. Abram points us to Christ

How does this affect us? We're all too aware of the effects of the sin-cursed world in our own lives – personal tragedies, loved ones suffering, brokenness in relationships, death and sickness. Reality of our own sin – default setting for idolatry – make everything else except God the centre of our lives – leads us into all sorts of trouble, live lives independently from God. Problem is if we persist in our sin, persist in bearing it ourselves, we will one day have to also bear the curse for our sins. Curse for sins? Eternal death, hell, wrath of God.

Good news – instead of bearing the curse, we too can share in the blessings of Abram. How is this even possible, since none of us are his descendants in the flesh? None of us are ethnic Jews, all Gentiles. Fast forward to the NT - Galatians 3:7-9 says:

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Incredible truth here is that actually we are counted as sons of Abraham if we share his faith. Since he ultimately had faith in Jesus, if we have faith in Christ, like him, we are also called sons of Abraham and therefore entitled to share in the same blessings that God promised him. Galatians 3:29 goes on to say, **“And if you are Christ's, then you are**

Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” This is why God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, quoted here in Galatians 3:8, was that it would be through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. So you and me who share Abraham’s faith, faith in Christ – share in his blessings.

What then are these blessings? No longer are we under the curse! Saw – outside of Christ, in our sins – deserve the curse – all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. But Galatians 3:13-14 declares that:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Because Jesus, promised seed of the woman, was cursed on our behalf (death on the cross), instead of receiving the curse that our sins deserve, through faith in Christ, we receive the blessing of Abraham – the promised Holy Spirit. We can now experience life before God’s presence, his Spirit sustaining us in this sin-cursed world, while we await the main blessing that is to come.

What is that main blessing? Same Promised Land that God promised to Abraham. No, not a piece of land in the Middle East - that was just a type and a shadow of the real, everlasting land to come. Hebrews 11:13 says that Abraham died not having received the things promised, but only having seen them from afar. V.16 – Abraham “desired a better country, a heavenly one.” True Promised Land? Heaven, the new creation, the city of God. *That’s* the real blessing, *that’s* the real prize.

Now – still experience the pain of our sin-cursed reality. Yes, in Christ we are no longer under the curse, blessing of the Spirit, assurance of our sins forgiven, conscience cleansed, know God as our own Father – many blessings of being in Christ now. But the ultimate blessing is this – that, like Abraham, we will dwell with God forever in the true Promised Land, where he will be our God and we will be his people. Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming

down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

Amen