

Text: Genesis 11:10 - 12:3

Title: "God's Promise to Bless"

Time: April 20, 2008 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The man Abraham is mentioned in 277 verses of our King James Bibles. The first of these happens in the passage before us this morning. Abraham is highly significant to both our Old and New Testaments.

If you open your New Testament to its very first page, you will begin to read about the son of Abraham. At the beginning of the church, as Deacon Stephen boldly faced his persecutors, he began his defense by referring to the glory of God that appeared to our father Abraham. When the apostle Paul wrote a letter to fully present a dissertation on the theology of the gospel, he begins explaining justification by faith with the question, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our father, has found?" When Christ explained the glories of heaven to those who would listen, he referred to that place as sitting in Abraham's bosom.

But the Bible also clearly speaks of the consequences of misinterpreting the importance of Abraham. John the Baptist warned against letting a connection to Abraham keep you from repentance (Matt. 3:8-9: "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.") Jesus shocked those suspicious of His newfound friendship with the tax collector Zaccheus when He declared of him, "he too is a son of Abraham," explaining that "the Son of man had come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:9-10).

Perhaps no one gives us a clearer understanding of the difference between the correct and incorrect interpretation of the importance of Abraham than does the apostle Paul in Rom. 9:8, where Paul explains: "it is not the children of [Abraham's] flesh who are children of God, but the children of [Abraham's] promise are regarded as descendants." God's promise to bless Abraham makes him one of the major themes of the rest of Scripture, and our passage begins to cover this promise or covenant between God and Abraham. I want us to learn 4 things about God's promise to bless in the Abrahamic Covenant from this passage.

I. God's promise to bless preceded Abram (11:10-32).

Application: The descent of Shem echoes back to Gen. 9:27, which spoke of God's dwelling in the tents of Shem, as well as Gen. 3:15, where Eve was promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.

As important as Abraham is, the promise God made to Abraham is part of a much bigger picture than he in the plan and purposes of God. It is a plan and purpose that stretch from the fall of man in Genesis 3 to the end of the book of Revelation. God intends to bless man who has sinned, and this blessing is bound up in the promise of a descendant, first of Eve, then of Shem, then of Abraham, Jesus Christ. The work of Christ for our salvation is a fulfillment of miraculous and ancient promises given by God and recorded for us in the Old Testament.

One detail about the promise given to Abram has been difficult for Bible interpreters to reconcile with Stephen's description of the account in Acts 7. We read in Gen. 11:26 that Terah was 70 yrs old when he became the father of Abraham, and that he was 205 when he died. This would

make Abraham 135 years old when Terah died. We are also told in Gen. 12:4 that Abraham began to travel to Canaan from Haran when he was 75 years old, 50 years prior to his father's death. The problem is that Stephen told the Sanhedrin that Abraham left for Canaan after his father died, and no one in the Sanhedrin tried to stop and correct him.

There are a number of possible answers to this question, but I think the best is the one that sees in Gen. 11:26 the same non-chronological list of children that we had with Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Remember that of these three, Japheth was the oldest (10:21). Shem is mentioned first because he is chosen as the forefather of the promised descendant.

It is likely that the same thing is happening in 11:26, where Haran is likely older than Nahor and Abram. Notice that Haran is the first to become a father and the first to die (vv. 27-28). Notice also that Nahor marries Haran's daughter about the same time Abram marries Sarai.

When God chose Abram to receive this promised blessing, God once again chooses to work in a special way in the life of one who is not the firstborn. One of the major themes of Genesis is the truth that in terms of birthright, the older will serve the younger (Seth by Cain; Shem by Japheth; Abram by Haran; Jacob by Esau; and Ephraim by Manasseh). God communicates his promised blessings this way because He wants us to understand that God's promise is always based on His grace, not on our achievements, qualifications, or heritage.

God's promise to bless the younger child Abraham preceded him, because it is a promise that is designed to reveal

His gracious plan of salvation from eternity past. The promise is as old as God's grace.

II. God's promise to bless cannot be stopped by obstacles (11:30).

Application: Sarai was barren (see Rom. 4:16-22). The gift of obstacles often accompanies the gift of promise. There are segments of Christianity that teach that the existence of obstacles when it comes to experiencing God's blessing is never a part of God's plan for us. An obstacle to blessing is always thought of as some perversion of God's plan that is our fault. It is always because we have not had enough faith or because we have not given enough money to the televangelist.

To the contrary, even before we are told about God's will in regard to the promise (12:1-3), we are told about God's will in regard to the primary obstacle (11:30). Did you notice that two, not one, of Haran's daughters are mentioned in v. 29 right before we are told in v. 30 that Sarai was barren? Commentators are not sure why Ischah is mentioned, but it may be that she was the natural choice for Abram, who for some reason went for barren Sarai instead. One can imagine the tension that this obstacle of barrenness may have presented Abram and Sarah in this regard.

But the struggle and tension of obstacles are temporary. Ultimate victory is secured by God's promise. Paul tells us the two reasons Abraham's promise came with an obstacle: "yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:20-21). The obstacles grow our faith stronger, and that stronger faith then brings greater glory to God.

III. God's promise to bless requires obedience (12:1-3).

Illustration: We normally think of the response to a promise as faith and the response to a command as obedience. That is, of course, correct. Yet biblical faith in God's promise always results in a changed heart and life that now seeks to obey God's command. We are blessed because of the promise, and then we are obedient because we are blessed. In this way, God's promise to bless requires obedience. Note some things about biblical obedience from Abraham's example.

A. Obedience often requires leaving things behind.

Application: The Abrahamic covenant begins with a command for Abraham to leave the gods of his fathers and follow Yahweh (12:1; Josh. 24:2). What do we need to leave behind this morning to obey God?

Leaving things behind often involves uncertainty regarding what is ahead. We need faith in God's revelation ("unto a country that I will show you"). The promise to show becomes a promise to give when Abram follows the Lord's command to come see (v. 7). God rewards faith in the reliability of His revelation.

Leaving things behind often involves a growth process that takes some time. We need patience with God's people who still have not left some things behind. Abraham is very slow to leave things behind as he learns to obey God. (The promise and command of Gen. 12:1-3 came prior to the history of Gen. 11:31-32; see Acts 7:1-4). Still, God's promise to bless still pursued Abram and patiently awaited his obedience.

B. Obedience often results in blessings that we cannot achieve while disobeying.

Application: Note that Abram's obedience would result in his becoming a great nation and possessing a great name. Those achievements were the goals of those who disobeyed the Lord at Babel (11:4). The disobedience of Babel ultimately failed to achieve the blessing that can only come through obedience. Ours will too.

C. Obedience often requires using our blessings to bless others (v. 2; 17:1).

Application: As the nation of Abraham (Israel) fulfilled the command to be a spiritual blessing with their great name and blessing from God, God would bless those who blessed the nation and curse those who feebly pronounce a curse on the nation. Israel did not obey this command, so history is replete with instances in which God blessed nations that were cursing Israel. Some day complete obedience through the salvation of the coming Messiah will bring Israel complete conditions of blessing (Zech. 8:13).

Note also that God's cursing is different than man's cursing (two different Hebrew words). God's cursing is judicial and a just response to sin; man's cursing is blasphemous and selfish. When God curses he operates within His jurisdiction; when man curses he operates as though he thinks he is God, way outside of his proper jurisdiction.

IV. God's promise to bless is the promise of Abraham's Son (12:7).

Application: The obedience of Christ makes Him the ultimate blessing, "And in you all the families of the earth will

be blessed" is a reference to what Christ would mean to everyone, whose knee shall bow one way or the other (Phil. 2:8-11). Note some things about this ultimate blessing, Abraham's Son.

A. Abraham's Son is a royal king.

The great name of Abraham is connected to his royalty. In Gen. 17:6, God promises Abraham that he would be a father of a great line of kings. The story of the patriarch ends with the same promise given to Judah (Gen. 49:10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.") Ultimately, "every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the father."

B. Abraham's Son is history's climax.

Jesus Christ is the end of a great plan: "And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." He is where everything is headed. What will you do with Jesus is the same question as what is your ultimate destiny going to be? What will this coming future mean to you?

C. Abraham's Son is a worldwide blessing.

God blessed Abraham with the promise of Christ so that all of us could be blessed with the promise of Christ. Whosoever will may come! God promised that Jesus would come and die for your sins, and Jesus kept that promise.

Conclusion: How should we respond? Hear again John the Baptist on the correct way to think about our relationship to Abraham, "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repent-

ance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham." We need to repent, admit that we are sinners, and ask Jesus by simple faith in His promise to Abraham to save us from our sins. Will you do so today?

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching