

GENESIS Why The Beginning Matters

Study 11

The Abrahamic Covenant: When God Calls

Genesis 12-13

Recap

Genesis 1-11 is where God calls Creation into being, whereas in Genesis 12-50 God calls New Creation into being.

Humanity's failure	God's Blessing
The Fall (Gen 3)	Promise of a seed (Gen 3:15)
The Flood (Gen 6-8)	Promise of God dwelling in Shem's tent (Gen 9:25-27)
Babel and table of nations (Gen 10–11)	Promise of worldwide blessing (Gen 12:1-3)

Part 1 of 3: The Nature of the Call

Genesis 12:1 (ESV)

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

1) a) Discussion question. Compare Genesis 12:1-3 with Genesis 11:31 and Acts 7:2, was God's calling personal or a coincidence?

Quick Verse Reference	
<p>Genesis 11:31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there.</p>	<p>Acts 7:2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.</p>



b) Reflection and a discussion question. Which category do you think you fall in, in your work (paid/unpaid)? Do you think this framework is suitable to assess whether you are called or not?

c) Reflection question. The word church is called “*Ekklesia*” which is a combination of the word “*EK*” which means “out of or from” and “*Kaleo*” which means “call”. We as Christians are called out from the world to God and to Christ. Read Phil 3:12-14 the background information below and share your personal journey in this calling.

Background information

Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him. First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere. - Os Guinness

Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and

straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Part 2 of 3: The Promise of the Call

Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

2) a) Objective question. Select all that apply. What were the promises that God made to Abraham according to the video lecture?

- A. Great Land
- B. Great Nation
- C. Great Wives
- D. Great Kids
- E. Great Servants
- F. Great Camels
- G. Great Houses
- H. Great Career
- I. Great Blessings

b) Discussion question. Galatians 3:7-9 say that Gentile Christians like us will inherit the blessings promised to Abraham based on Genesis 12:1-3. What are the promises that we Christians receive?

c) Discussion question. Is the promise to Abraham conditional or unconditional? (Refer to Phil 2:1-13)

Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Part 3 of 3: The Challenge of the Call

3) Fill in the blanks. The calling was not an easy task like going on a vacation, it was a journey with challenges. According to the video lecture slide, fill in the blanks on what Abraham and Christians had to leave behind and what they had to embrace.

Leave	Embrace (Abraham)	Embrace (Christians)
Family	Children	Norms of kingdom
Culture	Land	New Heavens and Earth
Country	Influence on all humanity	Blessing on all humanity

Background information

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Acts 7:5

He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

Luke 14:25-28

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Genesis 12:10-13

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you

are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

4) Discussion question. Based on the video lecture and Genesis 12:10-13, what were the challenges Abraham faced?

-leaving the promised land because of famine

-lies about his wife

-endangers wife (cowardice)

-endangers his own promise of a nation

Genesis 12:16

He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

Genesis 13:1-2

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. 2 Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

5) Reflection question. Despite Abraham's mistake and choosing to lie, God still blessed Abraham. Share of times and situations in your life where God has spared you from a bad consequence of sin you deserve.

Genesis 13:7

And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

Genesis 13:14-18

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the Lord.

6) Reflection question. Despite so many challenges and even conflicts about the land, Abram built an altar after God made a promise to him on the land, recognizing God's intervention in his life. Although Christians, we are all susceptible to forget God's promise to us. How should

we remind ourselves and each other of God’s promises and recommit our lives to God despite the challenges in the journey to holiness and God?

Take Away

Part 1 of 3: The Nature of the Call	
Part 2 of 3: The Promise of the Call	
Part 3 of 3: The Challenge of the Call	
a. Belonging	But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession
b. Purpose	that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
c. Story telling	Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
d. Transcendence	Extends from now to eternity
1 Peter 2:9-10	

Case Study

Case 1 – Promises Out of Context
 Frank Tandy loved going to his church for the past 5 years. He used to be a struggling Remisier but since attending the church, his business had turned around. He was taught to claim the promises of God and he loved the verse Genesis 12:2 – “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”.

It is clearly stated here that Abraham would have great blessings. As children of Abraham who believe in God as Abraham did, he would reap the same benefits. He started expanding his business to various states and taking out huge loans.

1) a) Discussion question. Can you discuss the verse and explain how you would counsel Frank?

Model Answer

Frank has misinterpreted the verse because he has left out the reason why Abraham was given the blessing and the name and the nation. It was so that he would become a blessing to others and ultimately to the whole world in the next verse. He has selfishly concluded that it was all about him. He, like most folk interprets scripture purely in terms of what he can get out of it for his own benefit.

b) Discussion question. How does the call of Abraham teach us about our own call to His missions?

Model Answer

If we are called then we are called each to a mission. Just like Abraham was called by God to inherit these blessings that would ultimately result in him blessing the world, we too are called to the blessing of an intimate relationship with God by faith that will in the end wind up as a blessing to the whole world.

The blessing cannot be truncated to mean our own well-being alone.

c) Discussion question. How is our calling similar to Abraham's?

Model Answer

He is called to be blessed in an intimate relationship with God just as we were.

d) Discussion question. Share how you too had to leave your culture to answer His call.

Model Answer

Like Abraham, we must leave the places of our own comfort and familiarity. We must instead rely upon His word which is totally counterintuitive to our own natural worldly wisdom in the way we conduct our business and live our lives.

Case 2 – Culture

Harbinderjeet Kaur is the CEO of a large accounting firm that is very busy. She is also the major shareholder. During an evangelistic meeting, she came to faith in Jesus. The speaker challenged her to step out in faith to trust God and she did.

She attended church regularly and went to a Life Group to be a disciple. However, her life group leader shared how when Jesus calls anyone He calls them to leave their own culture and take upon themselves a Christlike culture.

The culture at her work is to do some creative magic for the accounts of certain high-net-worth firms in order to keep their business.

2) a) Discussion question. How can Harbinderjeet Kaur display a Christlike culture at her workplace?

b) Discussion question. Consider Abraham's call by God to go into a land that God will show to him. What culture did he leave?

c) Discussion question. Consider Daniel in Daniel chapter 1 and chapter 6. In wanting to honor the Lord, he did not succumb to the pressures of the culture surrounding him. What cultures did Daniel stand up against in these 2 instances?

Case 3 – Flippancy towards Sin

Harriet and Henry were a Christian couple (deacons) who were driving down the Federal Highway one day when they were unceremoniously pulled over by a highway patrol officer for speeding. Harriet was doing 75km/h at a 50km/h zone and she was going to get a speeding ticket and points taken off.

She immediately reached for her pocket and dangled an RM50 note before the officer who snapped it up like a hungry shark and promptly drove away. Henry was upset and embarrassed that his wife would do this. They argued about it. They had little money to pay the RM300 fine and that "this was the only way", said Harriet. She added that if Henry was a better provider then she would not have to be forced to pay the officer off. It was all his fault.

She added that the beauty of Christianity was the grace Jesus shows all of us. She would quickly say a prayer for forgiveness and rely on the grace of Jesus. She never gave the matter a second thought. She continues to be active in the church. Henry was not so quick to feel at ease, he felt it was a sin and they should not have done it. He grieved over the matter. He could not bring himself to confess the sin of omission as he did nothing to stop his wife from bribing the officer at the time. He stewed over the matter for months and could not accept that Jesus could forgive him nor could he even forgive himself. He does not want to go to church anymore

3) a) Discussion question. Who has the right attitude toward the failure of sin in this case, and why?

Model Answer

Harriet presumes upon the grace of God. There are many who have a sense of entitlement where God exists to serve them. She views the world still from her own narrow viewpoint and does not see sin as God sees it. She is flippant with sin and is not particularly bothered with it. Yes, there is grace but she is presuming upon it, taking it for granted. There is no genuine grieving or embarrassment or remorse over her sin. She is blind to it.

Henry has a better attitude toward sin. He is grieved, embarrassed, horrified, and even more repulsed at his own weakness of the flesh that enabled the situation to arise. This is the right attitude but where he is wrong is that he does not rightly appropriate the Lord's grace. He should understand that the action is wrong, grieve over it, determine not to fall again, ask for forgiveness and then move on.

His excessive preoccupation with sin is a sign that he is relying on his own efforts to maintain a high moral standard. He cannot forgive himself he cannot allow the Lord to forgive him.

b) Discussion question. What is the right attitude to failure in our walk of faith? What are the pitfalls of failure?

Model Answer

The child of God needs to be fully repentant all the time and fully depend on the grace of God.

One must understand the gravity of our sin, mourn over it, and acknowledge our weakness to sin but always strive towards living a life that pleases God knowing fully well that we will fail and when we do, we have a wonderful Saviour who will out of His grace forgive us.

It is a delicate balancing act.

The pitfalls are like Harriet, who has no inkling of the gravity of sin and dangerously lives a life that will not bear any fruit in the end. She is possibly delusional about her true spiritual state. She may not necessarily be even a believer.

The other extreme is people like Henry who once they fail often can never go back to God. They depend on their own strength to overcome sin and have never really fully understood and appropriated the wonderful grace of God seen on the cross. Jesus invites people like Henry to take up His yoke for it is easy. The motivation for obedience is love, not performance.

Case 4 – Israel

Daniel was attending a talk in which some Jewish people were selling bonds in order to raise money to help the Israeli government build more and more settlements which would cruelly displace more Palestinians as they would first raze their settlements to the ground.

The church leader supported this and said that God's covenant with Israel meant that God would never abandon Israel and that our money would be His way of preserving Israel. Daniel was troubled.

4) a) Discussion question. If you are Daniel, should you help and buy the bonds?

Model Answer

Christians as described by Paul in the letter to the Galatians are inheritors of the covenantal promises of Abraham, not the physical descendants. We come into the promises by faith in Jesus Christ, the promised seed through whom all the nations will be blessed.

b) Discussion question. Does this mean that Israel will not be judged since they are God's chosen people?

Model Answer

Israel needs to be judged on the basis of its dealings with the Palestinians. The fact that they received the Abrahamic covenant does not absolve them of any evil that they inflict on others. The promises of the covenant are fulfilled in the church today, not in political Israel.

c) Discussion question. How is the covenant a source of comfort and the basis of faithful living

Model Answer

The covenant means the world to us today, it means that we are recipients of all the blessings of Abraham, and that we are the friends of God. That we have a future and a sure hope. That we can confidently live a life of faith and leave the results to Him

Case 5 – Faith

We are called to live by faith and not by sight. It is easy for us to fall prey to what we see before our physical eyes but we tend to forget that our home is in heaven (a city not made with hands) and not on this earth.

Just like Abraham, we are called to go out into a land that God will show us. And just like Abraham, we are leaving the comforts of this earth for a heavenly possession.

5) a) Discussion question. Abraham sojourned in tents instead of the comfort of a permanent home. How are we (as sojourners) similar to Abraham? Refer to 1 Peter 2:11.

b) Discussion question. Abraham followed the Lord personally (not because of his friends or family). How do we follow the Lord personally?

Model Answer

We all have to 'leave' in that we must follow Christ whether or not the rest of our family and friends do, whether or not it is 'accepted' in our culture and class. Fervent Christian faith is extremely unpopular in many social and family circles, and we may have to take a lot of ridicule and ostracism in order to be true to the call.

c) Discussion question. Abraham followed the Lord unconditionally (not knowing where he will be going). How do we follow the Lord unconditionally?

Model Answer

There is a strong tendency for spiritual seekers to do a 'cost-benefit' analysis when thinking about Christian faith. They ask: "If I give my life to Christ, will I be guaranteed a protected, happy life?" Or they want to know exactly what changes will be required. They ask: "If I become a Christian — how much money will I have to give away? Will I have to change the way I spend my money? or will I have to change my sex life? And how much?" But just as Abram is called to go to "a land I will show you" we are called to follow Christ simply because we owe it. We can't possibly foresee even a fraction of what that will entail. A person who bargains, who says, "I'll obey if I know what is coming, if it looks like it will be worth it" is not really listening to the call at all.

God is saying, "Take your hands off your life! Give up your right to self-determination! Stop living according to what seems to profit, benefit and please you."

d) Discussion question. Abraham followed the Lord by trusting in His grace. What does it mean to trust in God's grace?

Model Answer

As Paul indicates in Galatians 3, Abraham's faith is analogous to trusting in Christ. Saving faith is not saying, "bless me because I am believing so well and so hard!" Saving faith is saying, "all the other things I thought could be significant and secure, I turn from and put all my hope in you." God will now be his only wealth, honor, safety, and approval. Abraham is being called to transfer his trust from his own abilities and efforts to resting wholly in God's miraculous

intervention in history. Namely, all the promises depend on the miraculous, “impossible” birth of the ‘son of promise’. (See below question #e). That is how we become a Christian — not by trying very hard to live in a certain way, but by giving up all efforts at self-salvation and turning to Christ as Savior.

e) Discussion question. Abraham found his security in the Lord, not in his wealth, in his class, in his country, or in his culture. How do we find our security in God?

Model Answer

Any person who has been changed by the gospel will find that they have a new ability to critique their own class and culture. They have security in Christ so that now they do not need to cling to a sense of their own cultural superiority and do not need as much to have the approval of their own kind. This gives us every mature Christian some ‘critical distance’ that enables them to relate to people of other races and classes better than they could have before. In other words, everyone in Christ is called “to leave” their country and their people.

“The courage to break his cultural and familial ties and abandon the gods of his ancestors out of allegiance to a God of all families and all cultures was the original Abrahamic revolution. In the same way, Christians ‘depart’ from their original culture. Christians can never first of all be Asians or Americans, Russians or Tutsis, and then Christians. Christians take a distance from the gods of their own culture because they give the ultimate allegiance to the God of all cultures and his promised future. But [now in Christ] departure is no longer a spatial category; it takes place within the cultural space one inhabits. It involves neither a modern attempt to build new heaven out of the world nor a postmodern restlessness that fears to arrive anywhere. When they respond to the call of the gospel, they put one foot outside their culture while the other remains firmly planted in it. Christian distance is not flight from one’s original culture, but a new way of living within it because of the new vision of peace and joy in Christ.”

– Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*

Another commentator also shows how the call of God always changes the way we relate to our culture.

By leaving Ur and Haran, where moon worship was the dominant cult (the name Terah is related to the Hebrew for ‘moon’, Abram would be set free from the drag of the familiar culture... and the ancestral tradition as far as these were idolatrous...”

– Joyce Baldwin, *Genesis 12-50*, p. 29.

In short, the radical call of God to Abraham comes to every person, who must 'leave the gods' of his or her culture. Every culture has idolatrous aspects that become clearer in the light of the gospel. As we distance ourselves from those 'gods', we set out on a journey of sorts. We no longer relate to our own culture as we once did. There is a new flexibility, a new creativity. We abandon some things in our culture, revise others, and maintain others. We can see ways in which our own culture and people are wrong. We can relate to those outside of it in a new way.