

Genesis 12

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Blessed to bless
~~The Adventures of Rocky and Bullheaded (Part 1 of 8)~~

“You shall be a blessing”

~~[Rocky is Abraham, Lot is Bullheaded.]~~ *For those who are with us for the first time today, we have been studying the book of Genesis. Each week we take a section or sections of the book and see if it has anything to say to us, as 21st century people. [for those online the text of the Bible as well as some extra notes are available at the end of the actual sermon]*

Growing up in an Orthodox Jewish home has its own rewards. We had days off from school whilst others had to attend. We had special hand signals and commentary that only we understood during worship services. Our whole system was so deeply engrained with us, that only we could make hide and hair out of it. As a young man growing up in the Cold War era, that is definitely a reward. We had our own food, no one else could prepare things for us. We walked to synagogue and those neighborhood ambles brought a sense of dignity and delight to us. Yet in all this, with all its commensurate reward and triumph, I felt that something was missing. What was missing was a relationship with God personally. I had plenty of religion, but lacked a personal connection with the Living God. We called him by title, and not by name. We were formally correct, but far away.

In today's reading, Genesis 12, we see the first Jew, Abraham, Father of the Faith, who is going to have his first real conversation with God, and enter into a life of faith. He doesn't always get things right, as we shall see, but he always carries on in faith. Faith does not, therefore mean perfectionism, but it does give us a sense of well-being and of purpose; faith drives us toward God and toward His purposes; faith is a reward and brings the reward of the pleasure of God.

As far as the blessing of God, let's divide the lesson this way. [They are] the promise of the blessing; the purpose of the blessing, the conditions of the blessing, the channels of the blessing and finally the benefits of the blessing, which is really simply The Blessing, itself. Let's read the text. Gen 11.26 through chapter 12

Let's read another passage today as well. Hebrews 11. 6-10.

We now begin the history of the Jews specifically as a nation. We see God moving from the universal, that is, dealing with all humanity as one, to the particular, that is, Israel. Abraham, the First Patriarch, walked before God (cf. Noah) and was tested with 10 trials, according to the rabbis, which also according to them, produced 10 miracles later on in Israel. This particular story today however, is not so miraculous, as it is definitively human. Today we see two stories, first the Call of Abraham and secondly the Egyptian Deception. If I were writing a book about my ancestors, I would have put the first and left out the 2nd, to be sure. But God is not like me, and aren't we all glad about that!

You might know the story of the idols and Terah. Terah is an idolater who runs an idol shop. Little statues of gods are available for sale. The legend goes that Abram one day meets God and therefore cannot fathom the lie of idolatry. He enters his father's store and smashes all the idols, that is, all but one. And into that one's hand he places a sword. When his father returns from his errands, Terah discovers the ruin and says, "What happened, my son?" Abram replies, "It's obvious; the idol beat up the others." Terah tells his son that these are nothing but stone and have no life in them, to which Abram replies, "Then why do you worship them if they are not alive [and *by implication*, you have more power than they do.]" This took place in Abraham's 52nd year. They say he was born in 1948 (from Creation) and that he was called in the year 2000. For reference we are in the year 5762 today.

Blessings are pretty commonplace, aren't they? We say, 'would you like to say the blessing?' and we mean saying grace before meals. If someone sneezes, even the deepest of heathen will say something like, "God bless you." If you win the lottery or McDonald's monopoly, you say, "what a blessing." Today let's look at the blessing in the life of Abram, our first Father.

The promises of blessing

"Anyone who adopts Judaism is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father. These men are of Abraham's household, and he it is who converted them to righteousness." (Rambam)

We will be a great NATION. (Goy gadol), So Jews were the originally named Goyim in the Bible. The promise is of propagation. It is also wealth. I will BLESS you (prosperity for the individual Abram). The blessing is also one of fame. I will make your NAME GREAT. Compare the situation in last week's reading with the Tower of Babel. They wanted to make their name great, but failed. God said, in effect, not Babel, but Israel will have a great name. This name will be so great that others will be able to enter into this blessing from outside, if they will just pass on this blessing and dwell in it.

Secondly the purposes of the blessing

We are blessed so that others can have a blessing. It is like a spring or a fountain and not a test result. In other words, we were designed as a people to be inheritors who pass on our inheritance to others, without losing any of it ourselves. Tolstoy said, "The Jew is that sacred being who has brought from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illumined the entire world with it. He is the religious source, spring, and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions." Of course he is talking about Western religions and not Buddhists or Taoists etc, but his point is still that which God has said, "You shall be a blessing."

And this is true even when we don't want to be a blessing. Reluctance is often irrelevant as God wants to have his way of grace and pleasure in the world, amen? The message of grace and faith did not begin in Matthew chapter one. In fact, "it is especially in connection with this central part of Paul's theology that he argues in great

detail in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, that already in Abraham, salvation came precisely by grace and through faith rather than by works of the law." (Ronald Hals, Grace and Faith in the OT)

The purpose of blessing is that all families of the earth will be blessing themselves in Abraham. So although God moves to deal with Israel as the particular, He is not intending the blessing to stay in one nation alone. He has always the universal in mind. Rabbi Hertz says, "a flask of balsam when sealed and stored away is imperceptible; but opened and moved about, its sweet odor is widely diffused."

The rabbis (Gen Rab 47) say that the Patriarchs, the Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were chariots. A chariot is designed to carry a king. If it gets filled with extraneous burdens, and it has no room for the king, it is no longer a chariot but a wagon.

Conditions of blessing

Circumcision is not mentioned in today's text, although many Jewish people will assert that it is the condition of the blessing. Neither is Torah observance at all even forecast in today's lesson. The conditions listed are three, summed up in chapter 11 of Hebrews as faith. They are leaving country, relatives and house.

This is something that is hard to do, as I have had to do it I might understand some of it. Leaving country is never easy. No one down the road will understand your culture, your history, your former life. No one down the road will be your people. It's

always going to be a foreign existence you have. Hence in chapter 11 of Hebrews we read, "by faith he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Not only did he this with the country of his birth, but also with his relatives. This is a more severe test. And finally with his own father's house. Each step of condition required is a further test of faith. And Abraham went out, looking for God.

The channels of blessing

Some that I listed today are priests, priestly people, the congregation of Israel, prophet and ruler. Let me explain. Abraham will meet the priest Melchizedek in a couple chapters. As a result Abraham's blessings will be given to Melchizedek and visa versa. The priests later on, the cohanim will derive from Abraham's loins and thus are certainly blessing channels.

The congregation of Israel is a channel of blessing, as one man believes and later there is a household of 13 million Jews in the world today. Look with me at verse 5. The souls he gathered are new proselytes. So says Rashi. The slaves were the possessions; the souls were people who came to believe what he believed. Anyone who insists that Jews don't proselytize don't know the history of our people, nor of the

word, "proselytize." It meant 50 years ago, to convert to Judaism. So who would be doing that but Jews?

Don't miss this point. If the channel of blessing is through our efforts of sharing our faith, then what is evident in this passage is even more incumbent on us as covenant people today? We ought to be sharing our faith one person at a time and hoping to make converts today. It is a good and noble thing so to do. The next Jews for Jesus newsletter has much on this one. You will like the lead article by John Piper, about evangelism and apologies.

Finally today we deal with the Benefits of the Blessing

I've already alluded to them a bit, but they are Land, Heritage and Heir. Land, that is, the inheritance in the land of Canaan, later Israel. The heritage, thus replacing the heritage of Ur of the Chaldees Abraham's former land, of people and a new culture. Really a whole new nation and religion. And finally, an heir, a seed. Sixteen times in Lech Lecha, today's portion, we read Zarecha, that is, your seed. Who is this one who will come who will be like Abraham, but greater yet? We get a clue here and there in this text, but really it's not clarified until the baby Y'shua is born in Bethlehem nearly 2000 years later. Y'shua the Messiah, the Serpent bruiser of old, puts us in relationship to the Father. He gives us rights to the blessing of Abraham. Faith in Him brings God's pleasure to us.

Faith is taking God at his word. That's it. Plain and simple. Take God at His word. What did He say about Y'shua? What did he say about you and your sin? What did he say about how to get right with God? Faith has always been the key.

Brothers and sisters, we have eternal life due to the Saviour, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His covenant. His teaching is great, but it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God and give us pleasure with Him.

If you have never experienced this eternal and new life about which we are speaking, if you are yet outside the relationship with God, then pray with me. If you haven't yet been restored into communion with Him, then why not pray this prayer and ask God to forgive you of your sins, whatever they might be, and come home to pleasure with God?

Lord forgive me in the name of the Messiah, the Serpent Bruiser, Y'shua himself. Forgive me for all my sins, and make me clean again. Give me eternal life in the name of Y'shua and make me born again. I trust you.

Actual Text