

10. Stepping out of God's will

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A pastor received a call from a church that offered him a salary four times what he was then receiving. Being a devout godly man, he spent much time in prayer trying to discern what God wanted him to do.

One day a friend of the pastor met the pastor's young son on the street. "Do you know what your daddy is going to do?" he asked. "Well," replied the youngster, "My daddy's still praying, but mama's packing!"

Knowing God's will seems very tricky to many Christians. Sometimes we love His will, because it fits perfectly with our desire. Other times, we don't like what we are getting from Him, so we try to look for some loop holes to ignore His obvious will for us. Or it seems that the heaven's door is shut and there is no voice mail, e-mail or messenger coming from heaven to tell us what the Lord wants.

However, even though the Bible doesn't act like a fortune teller who does nothing but lie, but it gives us many guidelines to seek God's will in our lives.

In the first eleven chapters, it covers over 2,000 years. From Genesis 12 through 50, it took 350 years. In these first eleven chapters of Genesis we have seen the Creation, the fall of man, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. Now we are going to start to look at the life of Abraham, a.k.a. Abram.

A. THE FAMILY OF ABRAM IN UR OF THE CHALDEANS

Genesis 11:27-32 This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. 28 And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 Then 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 the father of Iscah. 30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child. 31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. 32 So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

We see here another evidence of divine election: God chose Abram in His grace! This is the beginning of the Hebrew nation.

Abram's story begins in Ur of the Chaldeans which was Babylon. He was from a family of idol worshipers and was probably an idol worshiper himself.

Because the name "Abram" means "Father," it must have constantly amazed those meeting Abram to discover he had no children.

Sometimes we can gain meaning from names in the Bible. The name 'Terah' means, "delay." The name 'Haran' means "parched, barren." When Abram was in partial obedience, then delay and barrenness characterized his life. When we delay in drawing close to God, we also experience barrenness.

B. GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAM

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, (1) To a land that I will show you. 2 (2) I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And (3) make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 (4) I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And (5) in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

We know from Acts 7:2-4 that this promise was made to Abram before he left Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram's partial obedience did not take God's promise away. Instead, it meant the promise was on "HOLD" until Abram was ready to do what the Lord said.

Please notice how often God says, "I will" in these verses. Genesis chapter 11 is all about the plans of man which turned into a great chaos. Genesis chapter 12 is all about the plans of God.

We find five promises of God to Abram and his descendants:

1) To a land that I will show you

God promised them the land they could have, if they obey Him.

The Israelites have never really occupied the land God gave to them. At the zenith of their power during the reign of king David, they occupied 30,000 square miles, but that is not all that God gave them. Actually, He gave them 300,000 square miles.

2) I will make you a great nation

God promised to make a great nation from Abram. He will have enough children and grandchildren and further descendants to populate a nation. There is only one country in the human history that was completely destroyed, but she came back to life and still is existing. The nation of Israel. Only by the grace of God and by the promise of God, this happened.

3) Make your name great

God promised to bless Abram and to make his name great. There is probably no more honored name in history than the name of Abram, who is honored by Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

4) I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you

This remains true today and is a root reason for the decline and death of many empires:

- When the Greeks overran Palestine area and desecrated the altar in the Jewish temple, they were soon conquered by Rome.
- When Rome killed Paul and many others, and destroyed Jerusalem under Titus, Rome soon fell.
- Spain was reduced to a fifth-rate nation after the Inquisition against the Jews.
- Poland fell after the pogroms.
- Hitler's Third Reich went down after its holocaust of anti-Semitism.
- Great Britain lost her empire when she broke her faith with Israel.

This is also one of the reasons why the United States has been so blessed so far. The United States was one of the first modern nations to grant full citizenship and protection to Jewish people and currently the only ally in the world. But the day U.S.A. stands against Israel, God will pull the plug and America will go down.

5) In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed

Not only Abram was promised blessing, but God also promised to make him a blessing to all the families of the earth. Through the lineage of Abram, we get to have the Savior of the World Jesus Christ.

The Lord's plans rarely accompany by reasons, but they accompany by His ever fulfilling promises. He says, "I'm not going to explain to you why, but I give you My promise."

A former New York Yankee second baseman, Bobby Richardson offered a prayer that is a classic in simplicity and dependency on God: "Dear God, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen." God reserves His best to those who leave the choices to Him.

C. PARTIAL OBEDIENCE

Genesis 12:4-5 So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.

In v1, God spoke to Abram that he should leave the country, his father's house and relatives. Abram now is taking his daddy and nephew with him. Lot will not be a blessing to Abram as we will find out in future study. He will be nothing but trouble and inconvenience to Abram.

This is partial obedience by Abram. A partial obedience to the Lord is a complete disobedience to Him.

D. ALTER BUILDING ABRAM

Genesis 12:6-9 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. 7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. 9 So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

Did you notice that the Lord didn't appear to Abram while he was in Haran? But now he is in the place where God wants, the Lord appears to him again and remind him His promises.

The tent speaks of the pilgrim who trusts God one day at a time and is always ready to move. The altar speaks of the worshiper who brings a sacrifice and offers it to God. Interestingly at Abram's location, Bethel which means "the house of God" was on the west, Ai which means "the heap of ruins" was on the east, and he was traveling toward "the house of God."

E. LAPSE OF FAITH

Genesis 12:10-13 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his

wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. 12 Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."

A famine in the place where God is leading! What a great disappointment this must have been to Abram and his family! God was testing their faith, to see if they were trusting the Lord. Instead of remaining in Canaan and trusting God, they went down to Egypt. Did you notice that Abram didn't ask God if going to Egypt was what God wants? Did you also notice he didn't build an altar while he was in Egypt? He sure didn't.

Egypt symbolizes the world, the life of self-confidence, lust and carnal life. But Canaan illustrates the life of faith and victory. Note that they went "down to Egypt." Any step away from God is a step down from Him just like Jonah did.

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Abram was not wrong for being concerned about famine and feeding his family. But Abram was wrong in thinking God could not provide for his needs in the place where God called him to live. After all, God called Abram to Canaan, not to Egypt.

Abram, like most of us, found it easier to trust God in the 'far-off' promises than in the 'right-now' needs.

In many occasion, we generally don't want to depend on God's promises, because His promises is unseen. Yet, what we have and what we can do are something tangible. We'd prefer not to trade in those tangible things with God's distant and yet-to-be-seen promise.

Let's say, you are driving your Ford Pinto with 200,000 miles into a mall parking lot. The owner of the Ferrari dealership comes to your Pinto and looks around and kicks your tires and hands out his business card to you and say, "How about a straight trade-in? You take any one of the Ferraries from my dealership lot, I take your Pinto." You ought to be a crazy not to take his Ferrari. Yes, you don't see that Ferrari in that mall parking lot, but you know the Ferrari dealership owner has many beautiful brand new Ferraries. You can take for his words or blow him off. That is like what the Lord is doing with us. A straight trade-in: our sins, hopelessness, worry and one way ticket to hell for His holiness, righteousness, peace, love and an eternal life in heaven.

Can you believe what Abram is asking his wife to do? "By your beauty, I can save my hide." What a jerk! This was actually a half-truth. Sarai was Abram's half sister. Yet a half-truth is a whole lie. Abram's intent here was clearly to deceive, and he trusted in his deception to protect his skin instead of trusting in the Lord.

If we want to do something wrong, we can always find some flimsy excuses to do it. If we can't think of any excuses ourselves, the devil is more than happy to supply them.

By the way, do you know how old Sarai was? She was 65. But the long life span of Abram and Sarai also explains her beauty at that age. Since Abram lived to be 175 and Sarai to be 127, this 65 years old was only middle age for her, perhaps corresponding to what we think of as early thirties.

F. THE ULTIMATE REBUKE

Genesis 12:14-20 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. 15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way." 20 So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

What a shame that believing Abram should be rebuked by an unbelieving king! It is a sad thing that non-believers has better handle on how the believers should live than believers in Christ and rebuke them for it.

Someone has said, "Faith is living without scheming."

G. APPLICATIONS

1) We must be willing to think.

God made us thinking beings, and He guides our minds as we think things out in His presence and in His way.

2) We must be willing to think ahead and weigh the long-term consequences of alternative courses of action.

As we dwell on the long-term consequences of alternative course of action, we can see what is a wise thing to do.

3) We must be willing to take godly advice.

There are always people who know the Bible, sinful human nature, and our own gifts and limitations better than we do. To say, "No" to godly advices is saying, "Yes" to the consequences that follows.

4) We must be willing to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves.

We must ask ourselves why we feel a particular course of action will be right. After that we must compare it against the Word of God.

5) We must be willing to wait on the Lord.

"Wait on the Lord" is a constant refrain in the Psalms and it is a necessary word, because the Lord often keeps us waiting. While we wait on the Lord, we get to know His heart and His will. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God.