

CALL OF ABRAHAM.

February 25, 2007

Introduction.

Please turn to *Gen.11:26 – 12:8; Acts 7:1-5; Heb.11:8-12.* (read). In *Ge.17:5* the Lord changed Abram's name to Abraham. And in *vs.15* He changed Sarai's name to Sarah. For the sake of convenience we will use the names Abraham and Sarah in our study.

Ur And Haran.

Before we begin looking at the account of God's call to Abraham, let us look briefly at the two cities of Ur and Haran. Both cities were separated from each other by over **500** miles. Both cities were very important, well developed and thriving commercial and cultural centers. Archaeological excavations have revealed that the houses were made of brick and whitewashed. Most houses stood two storeys high. The larger houses had between ten to twenty rooms. They had equipped kitchens, good plumbing and sanitation. Artifacts discovered show that the education level was high and the art and workmanship were described as magnificent. When it comes to religion, both cities were idolatrous. They were thriving centers of moon worship.

Terah And His Sons.

With that information in mind, let us turn our attention to Terah and his sons. In *Gen.11:27* we read, "Now these are the records of the generations of Terah."

Terah was a descendant of Shem, Noah's oldest son. We are told that Terah had three sons, Abraham, Nahor and Haran. This listing does not mean that this was the order of their birth. Some believe that Abraham was the youngest son. Noah's sons were listed as Shem, Ham and Japheth. (*Gen.7:13; 9:18*). But the order of their birth was Shem, Japheth and Ham. (*Gen.9:24; 10:21*).

Terah and his three sons lived together as an extended family in Ur. Terah was the established head of the family and his sons, even though they were married, lived under his authority. The verb **"took"** in *Gen.11:31* tells us that Terah is the head of the family and Abraham is still living under his father's authority. Terah and his sons were not poor. *Gen.13:2* tells us that Abraham "was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold." The same was true of Lot. We are told in *vs.5* that he also had "flocks and herds and tents." *Gen.14:14* tells us Abraham had a private army of **318** men.

We are told in *Gen.11:28* that Abraham's brother, Haran, died in the land or city of his birth, Ur. Haran was survived by three children : two daughters and a son, Lot. Haran's daughter, Milcah, was married to Nahor, her uncle. Nahor and Milcah were the grandparents of Rebekah. (*Gen.24:15*).

As for their religious beliefs, Terah and his sons were idolaters. Most likely they were also moon worshippers. In *Josh.24:2* we read, "Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods." Note the emphasis, "they served other gods." As a matter of fact Nahor's family remained idolatrous even though they seemed to have some knowledge about Yahweh. (cf. *Gen.24:31, 50, 51*). *Gen.31:30* shows that Nahor's son, Laban, was an idolater. He accused Jacob of stealing his gods. In *Gen.35:2* Jacob commanded his family to get rid of all foreign gods that were in their midst. Bear in mind that Jacob's wives were Laban's daughters.

An argument has been made from *Gen.31:53* that Terah's sons were worshippers of the Lord. Please turn to *Gen.31:53*. When Laban made his covenant with Jacob, he said, "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." You would notice that in all three instances the word "God" has a capital "G". If the God referred to here was the same, one would expect the verb "judge" to be singular. But the verb "judge" is plural, indicating that the god of Nahor and the god of their father Terah were not the same as the God of Abraham.

You would notice also in the verse that Jacob did not swear as Laban requested. Jacob swore by "the Fear of his father Isaac", that is, **the God of his father Isaac**. In this case, the word "Fear" should have a capital "F". Abraham ceased to be an idolater when God appeared to Him and called him and he obeyed that call.

The Journey to Haran.

In *Gen.11:31* we are told that Terah took Abraham and Lot and left Ur for Canaan. But after traveling for just over **500** miles, they came to Haran. As we noted previously, Haran had much in common with Ur. Haran was also a thriving commercial and cultural center. And the residents of the city were moon worshippers. After the long journey, Terah must have felt right at home in Haran and so, he made the decision to settle there. The verb "settled" speaks of a sustained residency.

No mention is made of Nahor. But it is apparent from *Gen.24* that Nahor also made that journey to Haran. In *Gen.24:10* Haran is identified as "the city of Nahor." Terah died in Haran at age **205**. We are told in *Acts 7:4* that after Terah's death that Abraham left for Canaan.

The Journey To Canaan.

The question arises : why did Terah take his family and leave Ur? We find no answers to this question until we come to **Gen.15:7**. Here we are told that the Lord said to Abraham, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.” When we combine the Genesis account with the Acts account, we get this order of events :

- 1). God appeared to Abraham while he was still in Ur.
- 2). Abraham set out with his extended family for Canaan but ended up settling down in Haran.
- 3). Terah died.
- 4). Abraham moved to Canaan.

In **Gen.12:1** we read, “Now the Lord said to Abram.” This could also be translated, “Now the Lord had said to Abram.” The questions we must now ask ourselves are : (1). Did the Lord speak to Abraham a second time in **Gen.12:1**? Or (2) was Abraham recalling the commands God gave to him? Two facts are clear : (1). The Lord did appear to Abraham at Ur. (2). The Lord brought Abraham out of Ur.

There is a **third factor** I want you to note which seems to point in the direction that God did appear to Abraham a second time in Haran. In **Gen.12:1** we read, “the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house.” In **Gen.24:4** when Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac, he said to his servant, “you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” In this verse Abraham is identifying Haran as his country and his relatives would be Nahor’s extended family. As one writer noted, “*My country and my relatives* recall the divine commissioning of Abraham at Haran.” (Matthews).

Now I want you to picture the scene for a moment. Abraham is an idolater. His extended family and all the residents of the city of Ur are idolaters. They worshipped gods they could see and most likely, gods they had made. One day the true and living God

appeared to Abraham. We are not told in what form God appeared to Abraham. Did Abraham see God? Did Abraham just hear a voice? We are not told. The Lord gave to Abraham a command and a promise.

As we come to examine the command and the promise, I want you to keep two points in mind. *Firstly*, from a human perspective God's command defied all human logic and common sense, given the cultural context of Abraham's life. *Secondly*, from the record we have before us, it would seem that Abraham had no evidence that this God who has appeared to him would be able to keep His word and deliver on His promises. Let us examine the command.

The command is in *Gen.12:1*. (**read**). The command is literally, "go forth yourself". The command is emphatic and urgently demanding. (**Currid**). Just in case Abraham missed the emphasis on "**yourself**", God went into specific step by step details. He commanded Abraham to leave with urgency his country, his relatives and his father's house and go to a land that God will show him. Note the repetition of the word "**from**" which reinforces the radical separation that God required from Abraham.

The command is set out in a sequence from less intimate to more intimate : country, relatives, father's house. In this sequence you can feel the increasingly painful movement of the Divine wedge as it seems to violently separate Abraham from everything that was familiar to him and that he would have held very dearly to his heart.

Abraham was commanded to sever ties, to leave the security and comfort of a country and city he knew, the security and comfort of relatives and friends he knew and the security and comfort of his father's household and go to a land he did not know, to people he did not know and among whom he would have no relatives and friends. Bear in mind that Sarah was barren and any hope Abraham would have had in finding an heir would have been in his father's household.

Note further that God did not give him the name of the place he was supposed to go to. God simply said to him, “to the land which I will show you.” So, as **Heb.11:8** emphasized, “he went out not knowing where he was going.” To obey this God who appeared to him was like embracing death. Abraham had to die to his former life in order to live in the new life God was calling him to.

John Walton wrote, *“Abram must decide whether to abandon his land in favor of the land Yahweh offers. He must decide whether to abandon what family he still has in favor of the family Yahweh promises (against all logic, given Sarah’s infertility. He must decide whether to set aside his blessing, his inheritance, for the inheritance Yahweh describes. The initiative offers much, but its cost is significant. Abram must trust Yahweh to deliver what He has offered in order to give up so much that Abram already has to gain.”* As we shall see, the demands the Lord made of Abraham, the father of faith, is no different to the demands the Lord Jesus made in the gospels of those who would become His disciples.

Let us examine the promise now in **vss.2-3. (read)**. Note the five-fold repetition of **“I will”**. This is the language of Divine sovereignty. The promise has seven parts to it :

- 1). I will make you a great nation.
- 2). I will bless you.
- 3). I will make your name great,
- 4). You shall be a blessing.
- 5). I will bless those who bless you.
- 6). I will curse those who curse you.
- 7). In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

This seven-fold promise hinged on the first part. Sarah was barren. Abraham is **75** years old and Sarah is **65** years old. And the Lord is saying, “I will make you a great nation.” **“Nation”** speaks of people as a political unit with a common land, language and government. The promise was astounding and would demand nothing short of an astounding miracle to fulfill it. Could Abraham believe that a nation would come from

barren Sarah? Paul wrote in **Rom.4:18**, “In hope against hope [Abraham] believed, so that he might become a father of many nations.”

Now picture Abraham for a moment, calling a family meeting of his wife, his father, his brother, his nephew Lot and their families and trying to explain all this to them. The true and living God appeared to me. Abram, who is this true and living God? Is He going to appear to you again? Can we meet Him also? Can we talk to Him? Abram, can this God really perform miracles? Has He performed one for you to see? Abram, what kind of God is this who will tell you to forsake your country, your relatives and your father’s household to follow Him? What does this God have against us?

Abram, do you know the name of the country you are going to? You say that He is the true and living God. Do you know that for sure? How do you know you can trust Him to deliver on all His promises? How do you know that He is able to protect you from all the dangers you will face from strangers and animals? By the way, where would you live? What? In tents? You mean you are going to take Sarah away from this beautiful house with all these wonderful facilities and take her into a strange land to live in a tent?

As word spread, Abraham’s relatives, friends, neighbors and others came around asking about this strange God he had seen and who had put all these crazy ideas in his head. The questions, the taunts, the rings of laughter, were getting to Abraham and making life tough but he remained intent on leaving Ur. Finally, Terah decided that if Abraham was intent on leaving, he would have to accompany him. He had no intentions of allowing Abraham to leave alone and embark on this foolhardy journey in obedience to this strange God who had appeared to just once and spoken to him.

Despite the fact that he was intent on leaving, Abraham did have his doubts. And so he agreed that his extended family should accompany him. He would obey God and leave his country and his relatives but he would take his father’s household with him. He would stop the Divine wedge at the point of forsaking father, mother, brother and other close kin. Of course, as we noted from **Gen.11:31**, Terah is in charge and when they get

to Haran, he decided that was as far as they would go. Terah would allow Abraham to obey this new God, but only so far.

I want you to note an important point here. Abraham was commanded by God to radically separate himself from his father's household and, by implication, his father's authority. He must remove himself from being under his father's authority and place himself completely under God's sovereign authority. Instead Abraham would obey God under the control of his father's authority and thus give to God a limited obedience.

Abraham stayed with Terah in Haran until Terah died. And it would seem, the Lord graciously came to him a second time with His command and promise. *Gen.12:4* tells us that Abraham obeyed God. The verse says, "Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him." And in *vs.5* we see who is in charge. The verse says, "Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew." Note the verb "**took**". It is the same verb found in *Gen.11:31*. Abraham finally asserted his rightful authority and took charge of his life and the life of his family. But even then, the question must be asked : was carrying Lot with him an act of compromise? Was the carrying of Lot a little extra insurance just in case he needed it?

Why did God choose and call Abraham? The answer is simply : God's sovereign grace. Why, as it seems, did God come to Abraham a second time with His command and promise? The answer is simply : God's sovereign grace. God's was not gracious to Abraham because he was a good person. He was an idolater. Furthermore, his first attempt to obey God was half-hearted. He obeyed God but he obeyed under the terms of Terah's headship. He obeyed in keeping with the demands of his culture. And that's not what God wanted. God wanted an obedience that was counter-cultural. I have two sets of applications to make today.

The Unsaved.

Firstly, to those who are not Christians. God's salvation call to you is the same, in principle, to the call He gave to Abraham. The Lord Jesus said in *Lk.14:26*, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." In *Matt.10:37* Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." And in *Matt.16:26* Jesus asked, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The most difficult choice Abraham faced was leaving his father's household. Sadly, he failed at this point. The difficult questions must be asked : How do you forsake those who are closest to you for God? How do you forsake those who have given to you love, security, the start you needed? How do you forsake those who have been there for you in the difficulties and challenges you faced?

How do you forsake your family god or gods you have known, believed in, and worshipped, declaring them to be false gods in order to serve the one true and living God? The family ties we have today do not compare to the families ties that existed in Abraham's day. It is the same quality of family ties that existed in Jesus' day when He made those statements regarding discipleship to Him.

Discipleship to Christ means that Christ must have the priority in your life. Christ gives to His disciples a cross to bear, a cross that symbolizes the most violent and painful form of execution. Christ's point is this : in becoming His disciple, you must die to everything else, regardless of how violent and / or painful that death is. Nothing must come in between Him and you. There must be no double-mindedness. There must be no half-heartedness. There must not be any compromises. The one who would be a

Christian, who would be a disciple of Christ, is required to be completely devoted to Him, to forsake all and follow Him.

The ultimate test of this devotion is in the question : are you prepared to lay down your life for Christ? Are you prepared to die for your faith in Him? If you are not prepared to die for Christ, then you are not ready to live for Christ. If you are prepared to die for your faith in Christ, then you would not allow mother, father, brother, sister, spouse or children to get in the way of your love for Christ and your obedience to Christ.

I want to make it clear to you that like Abraham you are an idolater. You may not be worshipping the moon god or some other god like that, but if you are not committed to and worshipping the true and living God, you are an idolater. Like Abraham, you are not worthy of Christ. Like Abraham, you not worthy of nor deserving of God's saving grace. What you rightly deserve is God's wrath in this life and eternal hell after death.

Yet the gospel of God's grace in Christ is coming to you today. Why? The simple answer is : God's sovereign grace. God is calling you today. God is commanding you to repent today. God is commanding you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation today. Today, you can forsake all and stand alone before God with respect to your eternal salvation. Or you can choose to stand alone before God on that final day of judgment and hear the awesome words pronounced against you, "Depart from Me into the eternal fire." (*Matt.25:41*).

The Christian.

Secondly, I speak to the Christian and especially to those who are the next generation in this church. You are responsible before God to bring the gospel to your generation. The burden, responsibility and challenge of the Great Commission the Lord gave in *Matt.28:18-20* is yours in the same manner it has been to every previous generation.

You are commanded to make disciples of all the nations. You are called to become fellow-workers with God. (*1Cor.3:9*).

Now, let me make myself clear. The Great Commission has been given to every Christian. Every Christian has been commanded to make disciples. Every Christian is responsible to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about your faith in Christ. (*1Pet.3:15*). Every Christian is called to be a witness. (*Acts 1:8*). Every Christian has been chosen by Christ to go and bear fruit. (*Jn.15:16*). Every Christian is called to be a fellow-worker with God.

Now there are a variety of ways in which you can become involved in the carrying out of the Great Commission. You can devote yourself to earnest fervent prayer and even fasting for the conversion of the lost. (*Rom.10:1*). You can bring people to hear the gospel preached. (cf. *Jn.4:29; Acts 10:33*). You can share tracts. You can conduct home Bible studies. (cf. *Acts 20:20*). You can give financial support to evangelistic activities. (cf. *Phil.4:15-19*).

But the primary manner in which you must do this is by sharing the gospel with sinners. It does not matter how weak your efforts are. The Bible says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (*Rom.10:17*). The point of issue here is not in the weakness of your efforts but in the power of the word of God. If you are not speaking the word of the gospel to people, as God gives opportunity or open doors (*Col.4:3*), then you are failing in the primary fulfillment of the Great Commission. Whatever excuse you may offer for such failure is just that, an excuse.

Now, every generation faces the challenge expressed in *Matt.9:36-38* and *Isa.6:8*. Please turn to *Matt.9:36-38*. (read). You, the young people and children of the next generations, I want you to understand two things.

Firstly, the reality is that there will always be a shortage of workers in a harvest that is plentiful. Why must this be the case? This keeps the people of God on their knees. This

keeps the people on God dependent on God. This is God's harvest, God's work, and it must be done totally dependent upon God. The shortage means you cannot simply presume that you will always have the kind of quality pastors you will need. This kind of presumption is rooted in arrogance. This kind of presumption is rooted in the second temptation Jesus faced. (*Matt.4:5-7*).

Secondly, if God does not raise up shepherds after His own heart to lead you, to watch over your souls and to feed you His word, you will become like the multitude Jesus saw, distressed, dispirited and scattered. In *Jer.3:15* we have the Lord's promise, "I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding."

But this promise must be coupled with the command to pray in *Matt.9:38*. This promise must become the foundation of your prayer to God to give to His church pastors after His own heart. Jesus said, "beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." The verb "**beseech**" also means "**to beg**".

"**Beseech**" calls for prayer but the focus is not merely on begging but begging with urgency. Why? The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Why? The people without the gospel and / or without true shepherds are distressed and dispirited and in need of compassionate praying hearts. As you beg in prayer, you do so standing firmly on the promise. And you are told to ask the Lord for pastors who are workers, men who will truly work in the Lord's harvest.

The second passage is *Isa.6:8*. We read here, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" You cannot stand on the promise of *Jer.3:15* and urgently pray, as commanded in *Matt.9:38*, for the Lord to send forth workers into the harvest without dealing with the question posed in *Isa.6:8*.

You who are parents, you cannot pray for the Lord to provide pastors after His own heart for your children with facing the question : what if the Lord wants my son? As a matter of fact you should not even dare to pray *Matt.9:38* and *Jer.3:15* without first saying, *“Lord, I have a son, I offer him to you.”* *“Lord, I offer you my daughter to be the godly wife of some true shepherd You are raising up.”*

You young people should not even dare to claim the promise of *Jer.3:15* and pray *Matt.9:38* for your generation without honestly facing the question in *Isa.6:8*. You cannot pray, *“Lord, send someone”*, without praying, *“Lord, what is Your will for my life?”*, and declaring, *“Lord, not my will, but Your will be done in my life.”* You will quickly discover as you honestly and prayerfully face this question, that you are suddenly in Abraham’s shoes, being called upon to make Abraham’s choices and to exercise Abraham’s faith and trust in God as Abraham did.

You will discover what Abraham discovered, that you cannot answer the question and make the decision under your father’s authority and your mother’s wailings. In order to answer the question posed in *Isa.6:8* you will have to radically separate yourself from your father’s authority and your mother’s emotional manipulations and bring yourself completely under God’s sovereign authority.

If you embrace the Divine wedge that violently separates you from all you know and love, from all that makes you secure and gives you comfort, from all the dreams and hopes you had for yourself and others had for you, you will discover that you also have become something of a stranger and an outsider in your father’s household, among your siblings and among your relatives.

This morning, Abraham’s God is coming to you and saying, *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”* Abraham’s God is asking you this question : *Who shall I send, and who will go for us?”* Abraham’s God is calling upon you to set aside all your earthly dreams, all the earthly comforts and security that are within your grasp, all the promises of inheritances to be handed down to you and to come and follow Him.

Your choice is as follows : (1) you can spend your life working to build and protect your own physically welfare and future or, (2) you can spend your life working to build and protect your generation's spiritual welfare and eternal future. The questions are : which is God's will for you? And which will you choose?