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Genesis 12-13

“A Calling and a Blessing”

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Genesis 12 introduces the narrative of Abraham. His life will dominate the succeeding thirteen chapters, which means that his life story makes up about 25% of the book of Genesis. Abraham's name appears more than 300 times in the Bible, and he's mentioned in 11 of the 27 books in the New Testament. Jesus often refers to Abraham, in the gospels.

Hebrews 11 is known as the Hall of Faith, and most men and women of great faith are mentioned in one verse, however, Moses gets six verses and Abraham gets twelve!

Historically, three world religions trace their beginnings back to Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Next to Jesus, Abraham is probably the most important person in the Bible. From Abraham's seed comes the nation of Israel, and Jesus, the Messiah.

When you consider the genealogical record of Genesis 11, you see that Abraham was born 292 years after the flood, and that he was a descendant of Noah's godly son, Shem. Noah and Shem were still alive when Abraham was born. Abraham was 58 years old when Noah died, and Shem actually outlived Abraham by 35 years.

Because sin was taking a toll on the human race, length of life was in steep decline. Noah lived to be 950 years old, and Shem lived 600 years, but Abraham only lived 175 years. It's obvious that sin not only brings disease, deterioration, and decline, but death.

His birth name is Abram, which means, “exalted father” or “my father is exalted.” God will later change his name to Abraham, which means, “father of a multitude.” In [Romans 4:16](#), Paul calls Abraham, “*the father of us all.*”

How did this man rise to prominence, and what was it about him that caused God to choose him to be the progenitor of the Messianic line and of the Jewish race? The facts demonstrate that there isn’t an obvious reason or reasons. When God called him, he was a 75-year-old, Gentile living in Iraq. He had a pagan father who worshipped pagan gods, and he’s even married to a pagan woman. And to make matters worse, Sarai is his half-sister (same father but different mother). That’s his resume! So you have think, “Why in the world would God choose this guy?!”

In this study we’ll learn more about the unique story of Abraham, as well as the principles of what God did then and what he’s still doing today, and how he uses flawed, ordinary people to do his extraordinary work, and to make his name known.

God Chooses To Use Flawed, Ordinary People To Do His Extraordinary Work

1. Paul writes about the way God works when it comes to using people in [1 Corinthians 1:26-29](#): *“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”*
2. There wasn’t anything special about Abraham that would cause anyone to say, “He’s God’s man!”
3. Abraham has a few significant problems, including being self-centered and lying.
 - a. In this culture, at this time, if a powerful man like Pharaoh wanted to add a beautiful woman to his harem but she was married, he would respect the marital bond and would not take her, but if her husband happened to meet a tragic, sudden, untimely death, then she would be available!
 - b. The Bible tells us that Sarai was very beautiful, so Abraham knows that if they go to Egypt, Pharaoh will want her, which is remarkable because Sarai is 65 years old!
 - c. In [Genesis 12:13](#), Abraham tells Sarai to lie and tell them “*you are my sister,*” so they won’t kill him, and instead, shower him with lots of gifts as the brother!

- d. According to [Genesis 12:16](#), Abraham, gets rich off of this lie.
 - e. His primary concern is saving his life, instead of defending his wife.
 - f. [Genesis 12:17-20](#) tells the story of God's intervention, and how the pagan is the one who has to speak truth to the man God's chosen.
 - g. It's also noteworthy to point out that this same situation happens again 25 years later ([Genesis 20](#)), when Abimelech, king of the Philistines, takes Sarai into his harem after Abraham lies again and says she's his sister.
4. God's selection of Abraham is simply a matter of his sovereignty at work.
- a. [John 15:16](#) – “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.*”
5. In [Genesis 12:1](#), the Lord told Abram, “*Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.*”
6. God doesn't tell him where to go or how to get there, he just told him to take one step at a time and trust that God would reveal himself along the way.
7. Sometimes God is big on direction, but low on details, and that's where faith comes in.
8. Faith involves trust and obedience.
9. The Lord doesn't always give all of the details to us because he knows two things:
 - a. Sometimes the details are overwhelming, so he only reveals what we need to know, as we need to know it.
 - b. If we knew everything in advance, then we'd have no need for faith.
10. It's as though we say, “Lord, give me clarity and I'll have faith!”
11. God, however, says, “Give me faith, and you'll get clarity.”
12. [Genesis 12:2](#) – “*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.*”
13. It's interesting to note that God scattered the Babylonians who determined to build the Tower of Babel¹ for the express purpose of making a great name for themselves, but in Abraham's case, God chose to make Abraham's name great.

¹ [Genesis 11:4](#) – “*Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'*”

14. The difference is that one was prompted by pride, and God promoted Abraham.

God Chooses To Make A Name Great
So His Name Can Be Made Great Throughout The Earth

15. God chooses to lift us up so we'll lift him up!
16. The Lord chooses to give certain people success, influence, and name recognition, so that the knowledge of him can spread everywhere that person's name is known.
17. **2 Corinthians 2:14** - *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him."*
18. God wants each one to spread the knowledge of him, but he specifically gives some people local, national, or even a global platform to reach a broader audience.

God Chooses To Bless Us So We Might Be A Blessing

19. **Genesis 12:3** - *"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*
20. When we are a blessing to others and make the Lord known, we are reflecting his generosity to others.
21. We need to be careful that we do not misunderstand the blessing of God as being equated with prosperity, as if to suggest that the poor and disadvantaged who love the Lord are outside of his blessing or that they lack faith to get what is rightfully theirs.
 - a. God's financial blessing is not a right or an entitlement that you can demand or expect just because you're a Christian.
22. At the same time, we shouldn't move to the other extreme and completely deny the blessings of God, and believe, as some do, that poverty is associated with godliness and wealth is associated with worldliness, and that you can't be successful or rich and still be a Christian.
23. Both extremes – Prosperity Gospel and Poverty Gospel – are unbiblical.

24. [Deuteronomy 8:18](#) - “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.”
25. [Psalm 115:12–15](#) - “The Lord remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, he will bless those who fear the Lord – small and great alike. May the Lord make you increase, both you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”
26. In fact, there are more than 80 references to “God’s blessing” in the book of Genesis alone!
27. God clearly makes some people wealthy and successful, but he does so that those people can be a funnel of his blessings for the Kingdom.
28. The Lord does not bless a hand that is closed; he chooses to bless those who give to be a blessing to others and to make God’s name known.
29. When we choose to bless others, we can know and share in his joy.
30. The Christian ethic is not that we use people and love money, but that we use money and love people.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Genesis 11:31–12:9, 12:10–16](#) and [12:17–20](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Read and discuss [1 Corinthians 1:26–29](#).
 - a. Allow the people in the group to share their experiences about times when they’ve seen the Lord “choose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”
4. Have there been times in your life when God chose to make your name great?
 - a. How did you handle the situation?
 - b. Did you have a sense of false piety, and wonder why God would choose you?

5. Allow the people in your group to share their thoughts about Pastor Gary's illustration concerning Denver Bronco's quarterback, Tim Tebow, as someone whose name the Lord has allowed to become "great" during the current NFL season.
 - a. Read these recent articles to find out more about what others are saying about Tim Tebow and his witness for Christ.
 - i. The article is titled *Honest to God* in the print version of the Sunday, January 8, 2012 edition of *The Washington Post*.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/redskins/nfl-playoffs-2012-with-broncos-tim-tebow-everything-you-see-is-true/2012/01/07/gIQAzgvhP_story.html
 - ii. The article is titled *God's Other Quarterback* (Ben Roethlisberger) in the print version of the Sunday, January 8, 2012 edition of *The Washington Post*.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/who-is-gods-quarterback-tebow-roethlisberger-and-american-evangelicalism/2012/01/05/gIQAS6VcfP_story.html
6. Read and discuss **John 15:16**.
 - a. What are examples in your life when you were selected and appointed by the Lord to bear lasting fruit?
7. Abram was called to leave his country, his people and his family and go to a new land where the Lord's promise to make him a great nation would be fulfilled. (**Genesis 12:1**)
 - a. Share experiences about times when the Lord has called you to do something by faith.
 - b. How did your faith in the Lord involve trust and obedience?
 - c. Was the Lord big on details or direction or was it one step at a time?
 - d. Read and discuss #9a and #9b above.
8. Read and discuss **2 Corinthians 2:14**.
 - a. What are some examples of times when you've "spread everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him"?
9. Spend time talking about the unbiblical extremes of Prosperity Gospel and Poverty Gospel.
 - a. Read and discuss **Deuteronomy 8:18** and **Psalm 115:12-15**.
 - b. Have you experienced the joy of the Lord by being a blessing to others?
 - c. Discuss this quote from Pastor Gary: "The Christian ethic is not that we use people and love money, but that we use money and love people."

10. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: understand that God calls ordinary people, just like the people in the group, to do his extraordinary work; know that God may choose to make their name great because they will make his name great; to see God's blessing as an opportunity to be a blessing to others and to share in his joy.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).