

Calling and Compliance

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[0 : 00] The life of Abraham is a study that's well worthwhile in itself and we're going to look, God willing, for some time at Abraham's life just following through some of the incidents that we find recorded mainly in Genesis.

But you're soon aware as you begin to look at Abraham's life that you're not just looking at a life, it's not simply the life story of one man and the way that God worked in his life, the way that he came to know the Lord, the way that he came to serve the Lord.

There's all of that in it, but there's a lot more than that in it. It's more than just his life because as you study the life of Abraham, you're actually taken into God's great plan of redemption.

Abraham stands as a gigantic figure in his own right as a believer, but he also stands as such an important person in the way that God's revealing of his plan and his working of his plan in many respects there begins with Abraham in terms, as we'll see, of the narrowing of the focus now to one man and to his descendants.

And as we begin looking at it, it's very obvious, even from the very start of this account in Genesis, that this is a very pivotal part in not only Abraham's life, but in the history of the world.

[1 : 28] Because up to now, the emphasis has been on the world, on the whole mass of humanity, and on the way that through Noah, God has brought an assurance that he would never again destroy the earth with a flood, that his judgment would not come as it came in the days of Noah, but that he had something else in mind.

And as you see, the list of the nations there in chapter 10, and that's a very deliberate list that you find in chapter 10, of the nations descended from Noah. There is the generality of Noah, there is the generality of humanity, there are all the descendants of Noah, as Shem, Ham, Japheth gave rise to their descendants.

And then you come in chapter 12 to see that the focus really narrows so that out of all of that mass of humanity, grace is now homing in on one man.

Grace is coming to focus on Abraham as the one that God has called and chosen to be the beginning of this line, or a sense beginning, although it goes back further of course, but the beginning in this sense that he is choosing him out of all the rest to actually be the focus of his covenant, and that through him and his descendants, that covenant, that promise of God, that salvation of God is going to come to its fruition.

You see the development of this plan of God through Isaac, Jacob, and then the twelve sons of Jacob, they are the twelve, they become the twelve tribes of Israel.

[3 : 16] In other words, you have the forming of a covenant people, three generations on from Abraham, who begins this line that leads to Israel being formed.

And then from Israel being formed, you have the whole history of that through the Old Testament times, until you come to what Galatians 3.16 calls the seed of Abraham, where the promise that Abraham would have descendants through whom the families of the earth would be blessed.

And it comes to its apex in the person of Jesus Christ. That's the line that we have to follow through in the way that beginning with Abraham, all the way through to Jesus Christ, you have the unfolding, the continuous revelation of, and the working out of, God's redemption.

That's why Abraham is so significant. That's why this point in Genesis is so pivotal, so significant. And it's such an important point in the very history of the world.

Two things in this passage, as we begin looking at the life of Abraham. First of all, there's command and promise. The two things are combined together.

[4 : 37] God's command comes accompanied with God's promise. And that's, as we'll see, that's a pattern that you find throughout Scripture. God doesn't give you a bare command and nothing else added along with it.

Even when you come to the Ten Commandments, most if not all of them actually have reasons accompanying them or further explanations as to why these commands are actually given by God.

And that's God in His kindness telling us, this is what I demand that you do. This is my command for you. But here are the reasons why it will be good for you to do this.

Abraham is commanded to get out from his country and his own family, his kindred, his father's house, to go to a land that God will give him.

And although God will still add to this as Abraham's life develops, even there right at the beginning, God gives him reasons why this is to be a benefit to him.

[5 : 40] He promises that He will bless him, that He will make him a blessing, that He will actually give him a land instead of the one that he is actually leaving for God.

So there's command and promise. There's secondly, compliance and worship. And these two things always go together as well. As Abraham complies with the command and accepts the promise of God by faith, that compliance is accompanied by his worship.

And you cannot think of these two really separated. If we are complying with the instruction, with the command, with the revelation of God, then one of the ways that we will show that compliance, one of the chief ways, if not the primary way of showing that compliance, is that we worship Him.

Our worship of God is very intimately connected with our compliance with God's own requirements. And when we come to know God's word and to know God's demands in that word, when we accept that word and the authority of the God who speaks to us, when we comply with that, we come to express that compliance.

We come to express indeed our glad acceptance of God's terms by worshipping Him, by setting up an altar in His name.

[7 : 07] So let's look at these two parts of the passage. First of all, the command itself and the promise that accompanies it. Now God said, the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And this command came to Abraham before he actually left Ur of the Kaldes. We read in the previous chapter that his father Terah took himself and others of the family, that he took them as far as Haran.

And that Terah died in Haran. But when you go to Acts chapter 7 and verse 4, that's Stephen's recounting of the history of the people of Israel, his own ancestors in his great defense.

It's a great chapter, Acts 7. It gives you a lot of additional insight into some of the things that the Old Testament speaks of. And this is one of them, that God had in fact called Abraham before he left Ur of the Kaldes.

He left Ur of the Kaldes, his native city, because God had called him out of there. And it's very likely that God had worked in Terah's life as well, in order to see that God had a special place for his son Abraham.

[8 : 27] And that accompanying Abraham and the promise of blessing was something that would benefit him too. In any case, they reached Haran and Terah died there.

Now the Lord had said to Abraham, Go out from your country. In other words, Abraham leaving Ur of the Kaldes was not for personal reasons. He didn't think that he could make a better career somewhere else than he could in Ur of the Kaldes.

It wasn't because the economic situation forced him out of Ur of the Kaldes. It wasn't reasons like that, that actually induced Abraham or constrained him to leave where he was brought up, where he was born, the place that he was familiar with, at the stage of his life, and go somewhere else.

It was God's calling. It was God's revelation of himself. And that's exactly what you find in the scriptures. For you and for me as well, on what do we base the big decisions of life, yes, and even the small decisions of life, if we're in the business of pleasing the Lord?

Well, we come to the revelation of God. We come to the way God has revealed himself. People don't understand this, of course, unless they live by the terms of God and have in themselves a faith in this God that looks to him and looks for his guidance.

[9 : 50] People will tell us we're somewhat mad actually listening to the voice of God that we're wrong in the head if we think that these things of the Old Testament are way back to the days of Abraham have any relevance whatsoever today.

Yes, you could say, they would say to us, people like Abraham believed that God was speaking to them, but we know better nowadays. Well, not only do we know that that's true of Abraham, you could say, yes, we know better nowadays because God has added to what he actually revealed to Abraham.

And he still speaks to us through his word. This is his word, this Bible, as surely as his word came without a Bible to Abraham.

Now, Ur of the Chaldeas was a pagan place. Abraham's people, we're told, were moon worshippers.

Some of the discoveries that have been made in archaeology are, of course, significant. And they tell us some things that the Bible itself doesn't necessarily specify, but the people that Abraham belonged to were worshippers of the moon.

[11 : 02] At least that was one of the deities that they worshipped. And here's the great thing, in that Ur of the Chaldeas, in that city of moon worshippers, in that pagan place, there is this one man that God has his eye on.

And this one man that God has his eye on, the future of his people, the future of the world, the future of the church, the future of God's plan, is actually focused on that one man.

Who would have thought that when you actually come to ask the question, through whom is God going to carry forth this plan, who would have thought, well, it's going to be through this man, Abraham, who lives among pagan moon worshippers in a place called Ur of the Chaldeas.

Let's always remember that God is the God of the unlikely. That God is the God who does things that to us would seem very unlikely, if not impossible.

Unless you and I lament the fact that there is such a declension around us spiritually and morally, that we are living in a generation of idolaters as well, that we are living in a generation that has abandoned all thoughts of God, at least those that actually openly do this.

[12 : 23] I know there are plenty of people that don't, but the fact is, as you look around you, and as you hear the kind of things that are said about the Bible, about God, about the idea of living for God, and serving God, about accepting Christ and the place of Christ, just think what God is able to do, even with a pagan heart.

He can change that just in an instant. And He can call people that are presently serving other deities and bring them like He brought Abraham, not only to serve himself, but to be amongst the most prominent people ever in the history of the church.

Never forget what God is able to do. Pray that God will work in the way that He worked in the Lord of the cold days to bring significant people to the blessing of the world.

So there's God's command. He came and said, Get out, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And then He gave Him the promise.

And the promise has three things, three elements in the promise. First of all, I will make you a great nation. See the background in Genesis 10 there as we mentioned, this list of the nations, the whole of the world that came to be populated following Noah and his sons.

[13 : 52] Well, there is the contrast, there is the comparison that these nations of the world, the way in which the nations develop from that, here is God saying, I will make of you a great nation.

I'm not going to take these nations of the world and elevate them all so that they will come to be prominent and renowned. I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to build a great nation around you or from you.

I'm going to take you and I'm going to make you the beginnings of what I'm going to complete as a great nation, as a great people, my spiritual people, not just the Jewish people, my spiritual descendants of Abraham, they are going to be a great nation.

They're going to be a people that will be prominent and through God's grace, special people. A great nation.

And I will make you and bless you and make your name great. That's the second thing. I will make your name great. And when God makes someone's name great, it doesn't mean he's going to make that person into a person that's stuffed with pride.

[15 : 09] It means the opposite. Making him a great name means that that person is going to become hugely significant. And you see that against the background of chapter 11.

Just as you see the great nation against the background of chapter 10, so you see the great nation, the great name against the background of chapter 11. What do you find in chapter 11?

It's human pride and human ambition trying to reach up to heaven without God. Trying to do it by their own abilities. Trying to do it by their own ingenuity.

By their own plan in this tower of Babel. Let us build. Let us make bricks and water. And let's build ourselves that city and the tower with its top in the heavens.

Let us make a name for ourselves lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth and the Lord came down. Let's make a name for ourselves.

[16 : 07] They are the people of the world without God. Without faith in God. There they are trying to preserve themselves. To preserve a heritage for themselves. To actually advance in such a way that their name is going to be preserved.

They are going to be people of great renown. They are going to ensure that whatever else happens their legacy will be lasting. They will have descendants.

They will have a great name for themselves. They are going to build a great nation. They are going to build a great name. They are going to last forever. And God says to Abraham I will make your name great.

God checks the ambition of human beings.

And by his grace and the power of his grace turns things around so that he will make a great name of Abraham but it will be in a way of salvation in which God himself is superior and not human beings.

[17 : 38] And that is still the case. much of what you find politically not only in our country but in Europe and throughout the world much of it is tower building.

Much of it is tower building without God. Much of it is an attempt to build a lasting legacy that others will benefit from when we are gone. But you build it without God and it is going to topple.

One of these days God will come down and bring confusion instead of unity. That is why we have to look to God himself to build names and to build nations and to build lasting legacies because only grace can do that.

And when grace does that it is permanent. It lasts. It does not actually come to an end. I will make of you a great name and you shall be blessed.

I will bless you and you will be a blessing. Notice how the two things go together. I will bless you and you will be a blessing. In other words the blessing of God by which Abraham was going to be blessed was something that others would benefit from as well.

[18 : 50] And there is an element of that in the lives of all Christians in the lives of God's people in every age. We don't receive the blessing of God so that we just internalize it and keep it to ourselves.

It's not designed so that it will just benefit us only. You receive the blessing of God if you have family so that your family will benefit from it so that your children will come to inherit that blessing as well.

You receive a blessing from God so that your husband wife or parents or children will come to be blessed from it. So that your neighbors will come to be blessed from it. You receive a blessing of God so that communicating that blessing of God by His grace others will come to be blessed through it also.

That's why we live. That's what Christian religion and Christian witness really ought to be about. It's not just receiving blessing it's being a blessing to others too.

Is that what our heart your heart and my heart today set? Is that our vision for our life in this world? Is that really what we're looking at in terms of what it means to be a Christian?

[20 : 02] What it means to be a human being? It's not just to seek blessing but to be a blessing. To be by God's grace a means, a channel of bringing blessing to others.

Well of course in Abraham's case it was going to be much above ours because he was going to be the one through whom the families of the earth would be blessed. Through his descendants such great blessing would reach out and flood over so many people in the world to make them a people of God.

But this is his promise to him. It involved blessing and being a blessing to him and a blessing through him. So there's a great nation a great name and also thirdly a good land.

I will bring you to a land that I will show you. And when they came to when Abraham came to Canaan the Lord appeared again to him in verse 7 and said to your offspring I will give this land.

So he built there an altar to the Lord. In other words this is where you begin to see something more of the spiritual significance of Abraham's life as you see God's plan opening up and revealing itself to us.

[21 : 13] Because Canaan came to be not just a land literally that Israel came to occupy hundreds of years after this but it came as we see from the teaching of the Bible and the likes of Hebrews 11 it came to be what we call a type which is really something that describes a figure or an illustration of something higher than that.

You can tell in the Old Testament there are types of Christ. David as king is a type of Christ. the sacrifices on the day of atonement are a type of Christ.

They are an illustration of something that they point to that are above themselves the death of Jesus. And in this instance as well Canaan is a type of that inheritance the spiritual inheritance that God has for his people in eternal life with him in heaven forever his kingdom in that sense.

And that's what Abraham actually saw because when you go to Hebrews 11 verses 9 to 10 you can see that's exactly what it said by faith he went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land.

Why does it say that? Living in tents with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise. He came into Canaan geographical Canaan literal Canaan and God had promised that land to him and to his descendants but Abraham by faith looked above that.

[22 : 51] He wasn't going to inherit Canaan himself literally but he knew that it figured that it illustrated something better something higher because he looked forward to a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God and then that's where Hebrews applies this point.

People who speak thus make it clear they are seeking a homeland if they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out they would have an opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one.

So there you see is the wonderful teaching that's beginning to develop as you look at the life of Abraham the promise that God gave along with his command involved this wonderful promise of an inheritance and Abraham saw Canaan as a type as an illustration as a figure as a representation of the spiritual homeland that God promised to all who believed in him.

Let's ask a question where is your city where is my city what's the capital city of your life and of your lifestyle can you say with Paul as he wrote to the Philippians our citizenship is in heaven a place from which we are eagerly expecting a saviour the Lord Jesus Christ that's Paul is saying that's our capital city that's the city that has foundations the lasting one the one that's going to go on forever the one that's secure for us and bring security to us where is your capital city what's the capital city of your life what does your life revolve around what is it that you're looking forward to what will it be like for you when in your life and my life the city of this world is at an end here's what

Abraham saw by faith but these blessings were not arrived at without compliance and obedience and we have to look briefly at that now compliance and worship so Abraham went in verse 4 as the Lord had told him and Lot went with him when you go to Hebrews 11 again and back to verse 8 there's a very interesting combination there doesn't quite come across in translation as it is in the original Greek text the combination of called and obeyed because literally what it says is by faith Abraham went called obeyed and the word called and the word obeyed are placed right next to each other in the text in other words the writer to the Hebrews is concerned to tell us that as soon as Abraham had God's call in his mind he obeyed there was no delay between the call and the obedience the obedience was an instant compliance with the call the faith that

[26 : 14] Abraham exercised was a faith in which this obedience this compliance was immediately evident and that so it is of course with faith in yourself and myself too wherever you have faith in God acceptance of God's promise compliance with God's command you have obedience you have that compliance along with the call the command there are many things that Abraham could have argued when that call came to his age for one thing when he left Haran who had been called before then when he left Haran he was 75 so he was a good age when he left Ur of the call days he could have argued that at this stage of life surely God wasn't wanting him to leave where he was and go all of this distance to a land somewhere that he was going to yet show him that he knew nothing about at that stage until he actually came to

Canaan and the Lord revealed that this was the land he didn't know where he was going to end up he didn't know where the land was that God was going to give him all he knew was that God was going to give him a land that he would show him and he could have argued surely not at this stage of my life Lord nothing's ever too late for God and you may be here today and saying is it really worthwhile now my coming to commit myself more fully and more openly to God surely God is not now calling me at this stage of life and in these present circumstances even if it's not your age maybe it's something else in your circumstances maybe it's as you see it yourself and you know that God is calling you to himself and calling you to come to him and to witness to him and to be openly his in the world surely you're saying well you may be saying surely

Lord not right now surely I've got so many other things to do but you see for Abraham nothing was more important than God's call nothing God had to come first and if God was calling him even at this hour of the cold days and go to a land that he would show him later on that's what Abraham did it's never too late and it's never too early and it's never to be concluded that our circumstances are not right for doing what God is calling us to do if you know that God today is speaking to your heart whatever he's actually saying to you don't leave it don't leave compliance for another time it's too important for that God is too special for that and

God's circumstances are always right to do what he calls us to do so there's Abraham's compliance and all of the arguments that could have be brought against it well we're sure he didn't whatever was going through his mind we're not told but we're told that he instantly complied and then he worshipped as you see there as he went through to Canaan when they came to the land of Canaan Abraham passed through it to the land to the place at Shechem to the oak of More or it could be a terebinth tree but it's a kind of tree an oak and More the Canaanites were then in the land and the Lord appeared to him and said to your offspring gave this land so he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him now there's a number of things in that that are very interesting God was saying to him I'm going to give you this is the land I'm going to give you the land you're now in the land of Canaan and this is the land that I told you about when I called you when you were new of the cold days this is now it

I'm going to give it to you and to your descendants but the Canaanites were then in the land occupied how am I my descendants possibly going to actually take this land how shall we come to occupy and own and take possession of this land look at these Canaanites that are in the land they're far more plentiful and far more powerful than we are he didn't argue like that he accepted God's word maybe he couldn't explain himself how it would happen but that didn't interfere with his faith there's a lesson there for us as well and when he began in the land of Canaan at the Oak of Moreh in all likelihood we're not told specifically but in all likelihood this was a sacred place it was very much the case with the Canaanite religion especially that large trees like this Oak at Moreh would have been chosen significantly for pagan worship for actually offering offerings to the pagan gods and while we're not told that that was the case it would appear very likely to have been the case in any case what Abraham did was significant he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him what does that really say it's saying not just that Abraham worshipped

[31 : 53] God himself personally and that his worship of God here was something that showed his compliance with and his acceptance of the word of God what Abraham effectively is doing is saying this place is now for God this place is going to be consecrated for the God who has appeared to me and called me and brought me to this place whether it was a pagan place of worship or not it was certainly a pagan place in a pagan land and Abraham is now determined that instead of that it will have an altar to the Lord he's taking it over for God he's placing his mark upon it or God's mark upon it and although he didn't stay there as we see he moved south very soon after that he left behind at the oak of Moray something which would be significant for generations to come he left an altar to the Lord when you and I move on and especially when you move on from this life will the most prominent thing that people see we've left behind is an altar to the

Lord wonderful that isn't it he built there an altar to the Lord from there he moved south he moved to the he pitched to his tent on the east of Bethel with Bethel on the west and I on the east there he is you see he built an altar there at Moray from there he moved to the hill country and then verse 9 and Abraham journeyed on still going towards the Negev the region in the south and you see what you're seeing in that picture in that description is that wherever Abraham goes he builds an altar to the Lord Abraham is actually consecrating taking over this land for God he consecrates it for God now there's something for your life for my life today just to take that with us and to think about it and think about what it means for us every step we take in life every move on in life we build an altar to the

Lord we do it for the Lord we imprint the Lord's name in that next move in your career the next move in the development of your work the next move in terms of your family life whatever it is whatever move it is as you move on as a Christian make sure that you're leaving an altar to the Lord where you were and that you're erecting one where you go that you're consecrating the land of your journey to the Lord your God that's what your life is for that's what a Christian life's about it's taking over territory for God in the way that your life interacts with other lives and that as they see you even if they don't agree with you the one thing they will never be uncertain of is that your life is about God and living for him and consecration to him and for him and as you move on step by step with your life so you're taking in more more and more territory to be marked for

God so Abraham a command and a promise a compliance and worship and already we're beginning to see how big God is in his life and what a mark he's going to make for God as he travels on in his life let's pray Lord our God we thank you for the grace that operates in a way that empowers us and enables us to live for you we pray for that grace Lord to be working in each of our lives here today and we pray that as we go on through life concern will be to market for you to set up our altar to you and to do so in a way that will be visible even for generations to come so Lord we pray this and seek that you would accept us now and hear us for

Jesus sake Amen