

GOD CALLED ABRAHAM

Genesis 12-14; 18,19

Key Verse: 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.-

God created the heavens and the earth by his great, almighty power. He created human beings in his own image; he blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (1:26-28), God granted Adam the Garden of Eden, and he granted him his word-to be to him like the bright morning star is to a navigator on the high seas (2:16,17). Adam should have taken this word as his key and used it to fulfill his mission to subdue and rule the world. But he succumbed to the temptation of Satan (who had abandoned his mission) and abandoned this word (cf Jude 6). Adam fell and became a child of destruction; his descendants also became slaves of sin, children of wrath and destruction. Cain suffered in fear and meaningless work all his life. He had to spend his life under God's curse, living as a restless wanderer on the earth (4:11,12). He became a fatalist, expecting to be killed any time by anyone. He was alive, but he was like a dead man. In chapter 6 we see that all people were polluted by sin and became only flesh. God judged the world and destroyed it with a flood. But the sin problem was not solved (8:21). God had compassion on the world. He promised never again to destroy the world by a flood (9:11). He made a covenant of life with all creatures (9:12). For the sake of those who believed his covenant promise and lived by it, he made a redemptive plan to be worked out in the course of history. In chapters 12-36 we read how God made a covenant. To fulfill it, he called and trained Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In this lecture we will study about God who called one man, Abram, who believed his covenant promise. He wanted to make him a source of blessing for all people. This lecture is divided into three parts. First, God's calling to Abram and the covenant promise he gave him; and with this, how Abraham responded to this call. Second, how Abraham's life changed after he accepted God's call. Third, a comparison of the final days of Abraham and Lot.

I. God called Abram (11:27-12:9)

The Lord God called Abram. "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'" What were the times of Abram like at the time God called him? It is important for us to examine the background of those times. And what kind of promise did God give Abram when he called him? We must know the details of God's promise.

First, the background of the time (11:27-14:24; 19). The time of Abram was a time when men lived without God. People who live without God are like orphans, people without parents. They live in fear. They suffer many agonies. They are bound by sin. The

writer of Genesis says that the great cities of that time, Sodom and Gomorrah, were like the garden of the Lord and the land of Egypt (13:10). We can imagine that their culture was highly developed and that they had an abundance of material wealth. Not only had worldly culture advanced greatly, but also sin had grown and spread (13:13).

In 14:1-12 we see the political situation of that time. There were many small nations fighting among themselves. But there seemed to have been two power blocks centered on two powerful kingdoms which exerted influence on smaller nations. The two power blocks fought each other for what may have sounded like good, high-sounding reasons; actually, they were like two dogs fighting over an old bone. There were kings and of course many soldiers (14:14). There must have been a great difference in standards of living and great differences in class and rank. When the angels visited Lot in Sodom in chapter 19, the men of the city gathered outside his door and shouted for him to bring his visitors out so that they could have sex with them. This means that the men of that city were homosexuals. Their eyes were blinded by sin and curiosity; they abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion (19:4, 5; Ro 1:27).

When we examine these passages, we see that politics, economics and culture had advanced very much, and simultaneously men's inner lives and souls had become depraved. Morals and ethics were too corrupt to imagine and the gap between the rich and poor revealed an unjust society. It was a time when men ruled over other men harshly and money and material things ruled all men; God was left out of men's lives.

And what about the intellectual and spiritual climate of those times? The creation order of God was turned upside down. People served many idols. It was a time when polytheism was practiced. One scholar wrote that 3,000 gods were worshiped (Donald J. Wiseman). The worst of the superstitious practices was the practice of offering children as burnt sacrifices to gods.

How miserable a man must be if he resorts to burning his eldest son to appease the gods. This is not just an old story about other people. It is a direct way of telling us how much people who live without God suffer from fear and how much they must agonize.

In our times cults are proliferating because of the fear in men's hearts. One such cult made tickets to heaven and sold them for \$500 and \$1,000 each. The men who made and sold the tickets were crooks, of course, but the people who were so full of fear of death that they could not but buy such tickets were really pathetic. There is a certain professor who received a Ph. D. in chemistry from a famous university in the United States. He became a professor in the college of engineering at a famous university in Korea. He was a highly educated intellectual, but when his first daughter and first son were born, he was so full of superstitious fear that he went to a well-known witch doctor, Kim Bong Soo, to ask him to name his children. Do you see what this is saying? Not only the highly educated professor, but also many beautiful girls in the flower of youth go to such witch doctors. Most of the people of our times have at least one neurosis apiece.

So the people of our times live in darkness and fear. It is as if the sun had grown cold and the people of the earth were awaiting death in cold darkness. Our times have fallen into such darkness and fear because men have abandoned God. But though men have abandoned God, God has not abandoned men. He had great compassion on mankind. To save such men, God called one man, Abram.

Second, God's command (1). The contents of God's call to Abram are in Genesis 12:1-3. These verses contain a command and a promise. "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'" (1) These are the words of command which God gave Abram when he called him. When God calls a man, he first gives him a command. Abram, a man immersed in his times, was already 75 years old. His father's name was "Terah." "Terah" means "delay" (11:31b). Terah also intended to go to the land which God would show him, and he left Ur of the Chaldeans with his family. But when he reached Haran, he hesitated and delayed going on until finally he died there in Haran. God's command to Abram was to leave his homeland and his relatives and his inheritance from his father. For a man like Abram, with deep roots in present reality, it was indeed difficult to leave these things. But as difficult as it was, this command of God was also very, very important to him. When God called Abram, he commanded him to abandon his sick lifestyle, his sick way of thinking, his perishable worldly inheritance. This was not easy. But the severing of worldly ties and the breaking of worldly relationships was preparation for making a new relationship with God.

One girl is in the sixth grade. From among all the boys and girls in her class she was chosen class monitor. She says that when she gets married she is going to take her mommy and daddy and her dog with her. But if she does that, her husband won't like it. At a wedding, the bride's father takes her hand and escorts her to the altar. But when she comes out, she is on the arm of her husband. Of course, this doesn't mean that her relationship with her parents is completely severed. If we want to receive God's calling and make a new relationship with God, like the precious daughter who must leave her family to be united with her husband, we must leave our old lives. In the New Testament, when Peter received Jesus' call, he left his boats and nets and followed Jesus. James and John left their father and servants in the boat and followed Jesus (Mk 1:16-23).

God's command does not end with a command. God promises to bless those who obey his command. The blessing is called a covenant. So Christianity is called a covenant religion. When we become Christians, we take hold of God's word of promise and enter a covenant relationship with God.

Third, covenant (2,3,7). Read verse 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." God promised childless Abram that he would become a great nation. He promised a nameless old man Abram that he would become famous, that his name would be great. And he promised to give the promised land to Abram's descendants. People seem to want many things, but the things people really want are all found in these promised blessings-- children, honor,

land. God commanded Abram to leave his native land, his father's house and his kindred, but he gave him all the blessings that it is possible for human beings to have. We can see from this that God's covenant is a covenant of blessing to all who obey him. And we can see that the one who blesses is God. God commands his chosen man to leave his native land and his father's house, so that he can pour out his blessings upon him.

I must discover God's command to me-and the covenant promise of which I must take hold. Otherwise, my faith becomes a mere superstition, or at best, a humanistic kind of religion based on my own works and faithfulness. Unless we study the Bible in detail-and as a whole-we cannot base our faith on God's covenant. Even if we study the Bible diligently, unless we focus our attention on the covenant, which is the heart of the Bible, we will only select the things we like and find easy to believe and do. If this is the case, we cannot become real Christians. We must believe God's word of the covenant absolutely.

"You will be a blessing" (2). "And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (3). "To your offspring I will give this land" (7). From these words we can see that God did not call and bless Abram for himself alone. God had a great purpose to bless all people of the world through him. We are God's chosen ones, children of his covenant. But if we hold our faith and blessing for ourselves alone, or for our own families or church, something is fundamentally wrong. Such believers among the Jews were the ones who nailed Jesus to the cross. These verses also teach us that when our faith is based on God's covenant, God not only blesses us but also he establishes our children and their descendants as children of blessing. This is great faith. God wanted Abram to have such faith. If we want to become God's children, we too must have this faith. We must have this blessed faith from the very beginning of our Christian lives. I can obey God's command when I know that I am doing it not just for myself, but also for the sake of God's blessing on my children and on their children. I can endure the momentary pain and loss involved in leaving my native land, my family and my father's house when I know that God will use me in his redemptive work and that I and my descendants will be a source of blessing for all people. I must have this great faith. It is far greater to be a Christian who believes God's covenant than to be a government official or even president.

God's calling itself is the great grace of God. Abram was a useless old man. His name, Abram, meant "noble father." But what meaning could that name have for an old man with no children? God called this useless old man and changed his name to Abraham, which means "father of many nations." How precious it is to be used by God! Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Calling is in itself grace." Some of the world's greatest men have writing on their tombstones words like these: "God used him greatly. " But today men's value system and conception of greatness has deteriorated. A man who receives God's calling and lives a sacrificial life to fulfill that calling becomes an object of ridicule. So even those who receive God's calling and want to live according to that calling find themselves drawn into the ways of the world to become sick with cultural diseases. We cannot live our Christian lives in a vague, directionless way. We must think deeply about God's purpose in calling Abram and each of us must receive God's calling

for himself. Every person has a vague desire for true greatness. But without God's calling, no one can be great.

God who called Abram is a God of hope. In Abram's time, the world was full of sin and there was no hope of salvation. But God called Abram and made a plan to save all the people of the world through him. Abram himself was a hopeless old man; but God had hope for him and called him. Peter was also a man without hope; but God called him and made him a workman of hope. I also lived in a rough world and had no reason for having hope. But God called me and put hope in me. This hope is not just for myself. It is hope for my nation and for all the people of the world. God called the nation Israel and promised to make them a nation of priests for the world. God put his hope in Israel, a nation full of all kinds of weaknesses; God also put his precious hope in American people. God who put hope in Abram puts great and precious hope in each person. I must deeply realize that God has hope for me, and I must discover what that hope is.

II. The beginning of Abraham's life of faith

Abraham is the father of all who have faith. By faith, we are all Abraham's descendants. So it is very important that we see just what kind of faith Abraham had. What was the basis for Abraham's faith? And what were the characteristics of that faith?

First, faith based on God's word (12:4). "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him" (12:4). These words tell us that Abram heard God's word and began his life of faith based on God's word. We too, when we receive God's calling, must take hold of the word God gives us, and begin our Christian lives based on the word of God. The clear word of God must be in every life of faith. If one believes vaguely, just to overcome fear and anxiety, or if his faith is based on his feelings, he will find that such faith doesn't last long. Such faith can never know the deep secrets of faith or taste the life-giving power of faith. Such faith becomes a yoke. Such a religion may give temporary relief from anxiety, like opium, but the results are bad. Faith that begins with only an emotional experience is animistic. This superstitious faith gradually leads its adherent to fall into an abyss of fear. The author of Psalms says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path" (Ps 110:105). Paul said, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col 3:6-8).

Second, obedient faith. Verse 4 says, "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him." These words tell us that he received God's word and obeyed it. He chose the way of obedience to the word of God. He did not have even one child, but God promised him that his sons and daughters would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abram believed God's promise and left his country, his people and his father's household. He received God's word and he gave up his own way of thinking. He followed God's word to begin a life of pilgrimage. Jesus' disciples hoped for an earthly messianic kingdom, but he promised them all authority in heaven and earth, and the heavenly kingdom. We would be satisfied with a sweet home, but our Lord promises us the glory and power of the heavenly kingdom. The things we want are always too small; and the things that God

wants to give us are great beyond our imagination. The things that God wants to give us seem, at first glance, to have no practical value. Following God's word seems a losing business. Acting in obedience to God's word is Bible-centered faith. If we obey even one word because it is the word of God, we will receive a great blessing. Living in the midst of present world realities is not easy. But even so, our Lord tells us to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and all the things we need will be given to us (Mt 6:33). In this competitive society, putting faith first is very hard. But when we do this, God keeps his promises and blesses us with far more than we could ever want or expect. We can learn many things from our ancestor of faith Abraham, but the most important thing to learn is faith that is based on the word of God.

Third, thankful faith (7,8). "There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord" (8). Building an altar means worshiping God, dedicating oneself to God or thanking God. Abraham obeyed God's word and left his country, people and father's house. He left Haran, where he had made his home, and went to the land God showed him, Canaan. But look at verse 6. "At that time the Canaanites were in the land." The Canaanites had already occupied the land God was giving Abraham. But Abraham wasn't at all disturbed. He didn't complain; he built an altar of thanksgiving. We learn here that we must have an altar of thanksgiving in our hearts—thanksgiving for what God is doing. Faith begins when we thank God not only in joyful times but also in adverse circumstances. Those who complain about the world and curse it are complaining about and cursing God and themselves. It is God's will for us to be thankful in all circumstances (1 Th 5:18).

Fourth, faith that includes others (4). When Abraham began his life of faith, he took his nephew Lot with him. He took care of him (14:16), and prayed for him (18:22-32; 19:29) all his life. Our faith always has in it a cross. My relationship with God must be established in God's word. My relationships with others must also be established in the word of God. Three times Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Each time he responded to Peter's affirmative answer, "Feed my sheep" (Un 21:15-17). From the very beginning of our lives of faith we must show our faith in Jesus by making a relationship of love through the word of God with those around us. To think that I can follow God in isolation is not to know the heart of God. If I believe in God, I must be concerned about others.

III. Abraham's material life (12:10-14:24)

The basis of a Christian's life is the word of God. His hope is in God. But Christians live in a real world; they cannot avoid material or human problems. God gave us stewardship over material things, and we must rule over them wisely. When we live by faith, one of the first problems we encounter is the material problem. We must learn about Abraham's material life and see how we, as Christians, should overcome material problems. When we can control material things, we can rule over other things as well.

First, Abraham's failure with material things (12:10-20). As Christians, we cannot escape God's creation order: God, man and material things. God's chosen man, Abraham, also could not avoid the material problem, for he needed materials for practical

livelihood. When he began his life of faith, he encountered a material problem and he failed miserably. Because of a famine in the land, he went down to Egypt. He did not depend on God to solve his material problem; he depended on himself and on his own clever plans. He deceived the Egyptians by saying that Sarah (Sarai) his wife was really his sister. He told a lie to these unbelievers, and caused them much trouble (12:17). He was rebuked by the heathen king Pharaoh (12:18). He wanted to get money by his own means, so he used his wife (almost losing her), and caused unbelievers much trouble. And even more, he made God very sorry.

Second, Abraham rules over material things (13:1-13; 14: 13-24; 23:12). Abraham had failed in his first encounter with a material problem, but later he became a mature man of faith who could rule over material things. In chapter 13 Abraham and his nephew Lot had a problem about grazing land. Abraham, however, did not fight with Lot over material things that is, he did not fight over the land. Instead, he gave up the best land to Lot (13:6-9). In chapter 14 is the story of how Lot, who had become a city dweller in Sodom, got involved in the war in which the king of Sodom was fighting, and wound up a prisoner of the enemy. Lot was greedy and had wanted the best land for himself. So as soon as he could, he left Abraham. But when Sodom and Gomorrah were defeated in the war, Lot was taken away into captivity. What did Abraham do when he heard about it? He took the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit to rescue Lot. This event shows that Abraham regarded one man's life as more precious than many material things. His faith had grown to a higher level. After winning the war, he gave a tithe of his possessions to the priest of God Most High, Melchizedek. He served God with material things (14: 20). More than this, he refused to take any of the spoils of war from the king of Sodom, saying, "I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich'" (23). These words show us that because Abraham believed God's blessing in his life, he did not want anyone even to hint that he had become wealthy because of the king of Sodom. He solved his material problem by believing in God's blessing. It is important to believe that if we have faith in God and serve him with material things, he will surely give us material blessings. When a Christian can solve his material problem with faith, then he is prepared to face and solve the more difficult human problems by faith.

In chapter 23 we can see an event in which Abraham shows a clear attitude in his personal relations toward material things. When his wife Sarah died, Abraham did not own even a foot of land on which to bury her. Abraham went to the Hittites to buy a plot of ground to use as a burial site. Abraham was on very good terms with the Hittites and they offered to give him the land he asked, receiving no money in exchange. Though Abraham was grieving over his wife and was tired, he insisted on paying for the land (23:12,13). Abraham did not depend on good will or on friendly relations to obtain material things. He made a business-like contractual arrangement. So there was no danger of a problem about the ownership of the land arising later. Many ancestors of faith were later buried on this spot. Abraham refused material assistance from unbelievers and insisted on paying an honest and reasonable price for what he received. Though God had promised all the land to Abraham, he had not given him even enough land on which to bury his beloved wife. But when we see how Abraham refused to receive even one piece

of land through the good will of unbelievers, we realize that he really believed God's promise and was willing to wait on him.

Because of these events in Abraham's early life of faith, he had experience with material things. This experience kept him from depending on his own strength and ability to gain wealth. He believed that God would give him material blessing someday. So Abraham was not ruled by material things; instead, by faith he ruled over material things. One who is ruled by material things does not have right faith. He is not prepared to receive material blessing from God. From the beginning of our Christian lives we must be trained to rule material things by faith.

This is the first step in the life of faith. If a Christian doesn't believe that God will help him in his material life, then he really doesn't believe anything. God will surely give material blessings to the one who believes in God and lives by that faith, believing that God will supply all his needs.

IV. Final scenes from the lives of Abraham and Lot (18:1-19:38; 21:1-7)

The writer of Genesis draws a contrast between the lives of Abraham and Lot. He describes a final scene at the end of each of their lives.

First, Lot's end. Lot was Haran's son and Abraham's nephew (11:27). He began his life of faith with his uncle Abraham (12: 4). They began together. They received the same promise of blessing. Lot strived to live by faith and he suffered much in the unbelieving world (19:6-8; 2 Pe 2:7). But though he lived as a man of faith, he failed to solve his material problem by faith. He believed in God, but tried to solve his material problem by his own ability. Abraham and Lot were both blessed with material abundance as they lived by faith. Because of this material blessing, the problem of grazing land for their flocks and herds became urgent. Obviously one of them would have to give up his claim to the best grazing land. Abraham lost the best land (13:6-9). Although Lot was a believer in God, when it came to material possessions, he would not give in. To live a more comfortable life, he moved to Sodom and became a city dweller. This was just before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness (18:20,21). Lot was not so rich in his inner life. When he showed hospitality to visiting angels, he only offered them unleavened bread (19:3). Though he was materially wealthy, he never overcame his poverty of heart and soul. When Abraham welcomed the angel guests, he killed a fattened calf for them and prepared an abundant feast. Abraham was short on worldly ambition, but his mind and heart were very rich. Lot could not solve his material problem by faith, so he could not solve his human problem by faith either. His two daughters became engaged to very worldly men of Sodom (19: 14). When burning sulfur rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife could not help but turn back in her flight to look at her burning home and worldly possessions. So she turned into a pillar of salt (19:26). What can we say about Lot's faith? He believed in God, but he did not lay aside his worldly ambition or his greed.

The question is, did he really live well and enjoy the material wealth he had obtained to satisfy his greed? Once he lost in a war everything he had worked so hard to acquire, and he himself became a prisoner of the invading king. Later, when Sodom and Gomorrah were burned, everything he owned turned to ashes. He worked hard and tried to make a good living, but without God's blessing in his life, he had no happiness. He tried to satisfy his ambition, but things didn't work out the way he had planned. He was left with only sin and curse. He tried to get everything, and he lost everything. In the end, he became a cave man who lived in such fear that he had to drink at night to get to sleep. His life ended in failure. But this was not the end! How unfortunate he would have been if his life had ended there, for his life did not end with his personal anguish. It is difficult even to speak of the shameful event that is the concluding chapter of his life. His daughters, while they had lived in Sodom, had evidently enjoyed the feelings of being in love. Their fiancés had regarded Lot's warning about the impending destruction of Sodom as a joke, and they had perished with Sodom. Lot's godless daughters gave him wine, and he drank until he became senseless. They used their poor father incestuously to conceive and give birth to the children of sin (19:30-38). Lot's life ended in shame, agony and curse.

The problem here is not so much Lot's sorrowful end, but the fact that a man chosen and called by God did not live like a man with God's calling. Even more than this is the fact that he made God very sorry.

Here we must stop and consider what kind of Christian we are. Most college students are very sincere, so when they study the Bible they try to live according to God's word. When they do this, they often run in to problems with their families. So called Christian parents are a greater problem than out-and-out non-Christians. Such parents say to their children, "It's good to be a Christian, but don't go overboard." When their children don't compromise with the world, but try to live lives of simple faith, they say, "You're a fool" or "You're crazy." When young Christians are so ridiculed, they begin to think that it might be wiser to live compromised Christian lives like that of Lot.

Everyone who is really a Christian wants to live a genuine, committed Christian life. (The alternative is the agony of a compromised life.) If there is a reason one can't live such a wholehearted life of faith, it is that he doesn't believe God is a God of blessing. One who does not believe in God's blessing will become a man full of the greedy desires which give birth to sin and death (J a 1:15). Lot seemed wise, but he was the most foolish man in the world. He did not know the universal truth expressed in the proverb, "We came into the world empty-handed; empty-handed we will leave." He believed in God, but he did not believe God's blessing. So he lived without the blessing of God. Those without God's blessing live under curse.

Second. Abraham's finale. From a worldly point of view, Abraham seems foolish. These days, those who are only forty act old and want to retire; but God called a 75-year-old man and told him to leave his country, his people and his father's household. He packed up and left and became a wandering pilgrim. When the problem of grazing land arose, he didn't ask anything, but he gave everything to his younger nephew Lot. Not

only this, but when Lot was captured and carried off as a prisoner of war, Abraham risked all his hard-earned wealth to go and rescue him (14:14). Later, when unexpected visitors came to see him, he held nothing back, but diligently prepared the best he had (18:6,7). He continued to be concerned about Lot, and he prayed earnestly for him (18:22,23; 19:29) until God answered and rescued Lot. When Abraham's wife died, he didn't even own enough land to prepare a burial plot for her (23:13). Though he had believed in God for a long time, he did not have even one child. But he lived by faith in God's promise. Because he believed in God's blessing, each time a material problem arose, he could give in generously to others. What words are more glorious for a Christian to hear than the words, "He lives like a Christian"? When Christians fight about money and material things, God is not pleased. When we really believe God's promise of blessing, we can give in to others and not fight about material things. We must know how to take a loss, as Abraham did-not just once, but every time. It is hard, but if we live by faith in God's promised blessing, we can please God. God does not abandon such people, but surely keeps his promise to bless them. Abraham believed God's promise and lived by that faith, and in the end, God gave him Isaac, the seed of the covenant, as a gift. It took a long time to receive that blessed gift from God. Sometimes Abraham got tired of believing and waiting (15:2). But he did not abandon God's covenant promise. When God finally told him clearly that he would give him a son, Isaac, Sarah was in the kitchen listening. She had to laugh (18:12). Abraham was 99 years old, and when he heard that he would have a son, he didn't know what to do, so he laughed too (17: 17). Living only by faith in God's promises sometimes seems ridiculous to Abraham and to Sarah, too. How much more so to worldly people around them! How foolish they looked to worldly people! Indeed, from a human point of view they may have been very foolish people. Though it looked as if Abraham were suffering loss all the time, this was not true at all. He seemed to have nothing, but he was rich (cf 2 Co 6:8-10). It seemed as if he could do nothing but despair, but he believed God's promise and did not doubt (Ro 4:19,20). He looked as if he didn't know where he was going, but he was following God's leading. He seemed to do nothing, but he prayed, showed hospitality to the guests, and built altars. He looked lonely, but he had a wife, Sarah, who understood his heart. God was with him and God took care of him. Abraham lived by faith in God's promise, and God made him a source of blessing for all people; all families of all nations on earth were blessed through him. He lived to a victorious finale.

V. The God who called Abraham

God called Abraham to make him a source of blessing. Through him, God planned to save all people of the earth. We cannot begin to understand the depth of God's will nor can we measure his boundless love. We want to be strengthened by contemplating how God helped the man that he called Abraham. The Bible says that Abraham was a friend of God (2 Ch 20:7; Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23). To train Abraham in faith, God became his friend. In what respect was God Abraham's friend?

First, God made him wealthy (12:10-20). Abraham believed God's promise and left his country, his people and his father's household. He left on a holy pilgrimage. His early life of faith was fraught with difficulties. He believed God's promise and went to

the land God showed him, but instead of receiving a blessing, he fell into a difficult financial situation. The land to which God had brought him was stricken with a severe famine. He could not make a living there. So he immigrated to Egypt. When he lied to Pharaoh, saying that his wife was his sister, she wound up in Pharaoh's harem. Abraham had believed God's promise and begun a life of faith, but the remnants of his old life and his old ways of thinking were left in him. As a result, he sullied the name of God before unbelievers, because of his material problem. But God did not rebuke him. Instead, because of Sarah, God poured out terrible plagues on the house of Pharaoh. Pharaoh could not come near Sarah. Finally, Pharaoh sent Abraham out of Egypt with great material wealth (12:20). This is God's amazing grace. Most executives who pick a man to train will work with him for a while, but if the man does even a small thing that displeases his boss, he gets rid of him right away. Abraham, however, made a big mistake. It would have been easy for God to give up on him and break the relationship. But God didn't even rebuke Abraham for his mistake. Instead, he covered the mistake and punished Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And God gave Abraham all necessary material things. What a gracious God! How broad-minded he is! To plant confidence in Abraham, a man who believed God's promise, God covered Abraham's failure.

There is another great thing we can see in Abraham here. Though he made God very sorry because of his weakness in dealing with material things, he learned his lesson. Later, when again confronted with material problems, he pleased God very much by the way he dealt with them.

Second, God gave him new vision (13:14-18). By faith, Abraham had yielded the best land to Lot. Later, he began to think about his own future security; his vision became small and narrow. God came to Abraham and said, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you" (13:14-17). Because of present realities Abraham's heart had become narrow and he was caught by the anxieties of the world. Then, God visited him and helped him to look forward into the distant future and widen his heart. Here we see one man's weakness and how God became his friend and helped him.

One brother whose wife was a UBF member was moved by the depth of her faith. He decided to receive missionary training in UBE. He received training for three years. He was in the army, and about a year and a half before his discharge, he was so lonely that it was hard for him to endure. UBF brothers visited him and encouraged him and loved him with Jesus' love. After his discharge, he went to a seminary on a UBF scholarship. Through missionary training he overcame his fear. He was as skinny as a dried flea, but he became very healthy. His vision grew and he made a decision to go as a missionary. But these days, because of some small thing that hurt his feelings, his vision has narrowed and he has returned to his old life, and is satisfied with it. Of course, this is because he is a weak human being; like Abraham, his vision shortened and his heart

became narrow. I understand him. His problem is a narrow heart; he needs a visit from God, the One who can expand and renew his vision.

Though a man has a great purpose for his life, when he meets a small problem, it is easy to forget that purpose and become tied up in the problem. Men despise those who abandon their purpose in life. But God helped Abraham. We learn here that we must shut our eyes to the faults of those we are seeking to train in faith, and find a way to help one person who has closed his heart because of some problem.

God led Abraham to look to the north and south, east and west, and to look up at the countless stars. In a word, he renewed his vision. When a man has a problem, it is the right time to help him. We must not despise those whose hearts have become narrow. Instead, we must plant great ambition and hope in their hearts. We must plant a great hope that God will help such a man overcome the small problems that have arisen because of greed. We must help him see God's great purpose.

God also helped Abraham with the words of the covenant. To childless Abraham, God said, "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth" (13:16). "Look at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be" (15:5). If he had thought about these words from a human point of view, it would have been hard for Abraham to understand them. But these words are God's covenant promise. They express God's redemptive purpose to be worked out through Abraham. Abraham received that purpose of God and opened his heart. He built an altar of thanksgiving (13:18). When we help a friend with a problem, we must teach him God's great will and purpose for his life rather than just give him a little human comfort or kind words. God made Abraham his friend so that he could help him believe the covenant promises and live by that faith. We can't help people if we only try to teach them. We must become their friends (Jn 15:15).

Third, God made Abraham a source of blessing. God called Abraham to be a source of blessing. In his covenant with him, God promised to bless him and make his name great, to make him a source of blessing, and through him, bless all the people on earth. When God became Abraham's friend and helped him, he repeatedly talked about "your descendants" and "your children" (13:16; 15:5; 17:7). God changed his name from Abram, "noble father," to Abraham, "father of many nations." He changed Sarai's name to Sarah, the mother of nations and kings. Our God is the Lord of all the earth. When we believe in God, we can't just believe for our own sakes. Our God wants us boldly to leave our home country, our father's house and walk the holy pilgrimage, not just for ourselves, but-from the very beginning-for the sake of God's blessing to our children and our descendants. Many people think they become Christians to be noble fathers. But the God of Abraham, from the very beginning, did not bless Abraham just for himself; he blessed him and made him a source of blessing for countless descendants. From the beginning of our Christian life, we too must have desire to be a blessing to all people. And when we help new Christians, we must help them to become, by faith, sources of blessing for the world. God who called 75-year-old Abraham and made him a source of blessing for all people is still living. He is the living God.