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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Bible Stories for Adults, Part 8 – The Call of Abraham**  
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Our title today is *The Call of Abraham*. It's the eighth in our series called *Bible Stores for Adults*. This story is not at the top of the list of children's stories, though I have seen it in formats for children. And yet, hidden from the eyes of most, this story is a vital step in God's salvation plan – what God is doing down here on the earth. There's certainly plenty of confusion about that. And, if people just understood this story, they'd know a lot more. It show us a lot about how God thinks and operates as well. That's always helpful to know, too, isn't it? People always ask me, "Why did God do that? Why does God allow this?" – and so on and so forth. Well, this is part of the picture. So we can pick this story up in Genesis 12. In verse 1, it says:

**Genesis 12:1** – *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you.*

Why did God do this? Well, He's moving to the next step of His salvation plan and He selects this *one* man to begin building something amazing. Paul says, in Romans 4, about this:

**Romans 4:16** – *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring – not only to the adherents of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*

So Paul is here talking to the church, which, by that time, was made up of not only the physical descendants of Abraham – the Jews and Israelites – but also *all* peoples of *all* races, cultures and nations that God calls. And God tells *all* those He is calling that they are children of Abraham. Now that doesn't mean that they are genetically the children of Abraham, but *spiritually*.

So why does He do this? What's the point? Well, remember the question that we *always* ask when we read one of God's Bible stories is: What's the point? Don't bog down in the details so much, but what is God communicating?

So let's read on. "Abram, if you'll move with your family to a place where I tell you, I will make it worth your while." Let's see what He says. What's He going to promise him? Well, in verse 2 of Genesis 12, God says:

**Genesis 12:2-3** – *I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

So here He tells Abram that he will be protected and that *everyone* will be blessed because of him. How has that happened? Well, in Romans 4:20, Paul explains it.

**Romans 4:20-25** – *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness," Paul tells us. But the words, "it was counted to him," were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us, who believe in Him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Now Jesus was a direct descendent of Abraham. And in this way, through Abraham, everybody would be blessed. Every last person who has, and who yet will accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, will be counted a descendent of Abraham – again, not physically, but spiritually. So, it starts with Jesus Christ, but along the way, God picked one man to start the show – about Christ, and about salvation, and about faith, and about justification. Why? Well, notice why God chose this man. This is big!

We can read in, Genesis 12:4, that when Abram arrived in the land he was promised, he built an altar to honor God and mark the place from where he had come. Abram lived in the Ur of the Chaldees. And historians call that part of the Middle East the cradle of civilization. It's much to the east – probably not far from where the Garden of Eden had been. And the land God guided him into was what is roughly modern Israel today. Now, between Ur of the Chaldees and Israel is a great, fierce desert. The Bible account names a few places Abram went on his way to The Promised Land. And it shows us that he first went north into the mountains, and then west around the desert, and then south into The Promised Land. They took this big huge detour to the north and then to the west to get around the desert, and then drop down into the land that we call Israel today. And that detour made it a long, long journey. And remember, he had herds, and household items, and a large troop of family members, servants and herders. So this was a big deal! It was a lot of effort. Still, he did as he agreed to do. He wanted God's blessing. And he forsook everything and went for it! He was full out! And his example shows us what God wants from us. He wants us to trust in Him – *to believe* in Him.

So God tested Abram in this way. And from this, we can think about what life is like. It's a test for everyone. And for some people, the benefit of the test isn't going to come until much later. But for those God is calling, the difficulties of this life serve a purpose. All of life is a test. It's

not supposed to be easy. Trials are *not* proof that God doesn't love us, or that God doesn't exist. They prove just the opposite. God tests all of those He calls.

I was talking to a man recently, who spent some time in Turkey. And he had talked to some Christians there. And they told him that they suffer because of their faith in this predominantly Muslim nation. And my friend said to me, "If you want to be a Christian in Turkey, you have to *want* it." Well, we live in a nation that has a Christian heritage – a nation where it's much easier to be a Christian than in Turkey – God will not leave anybody out. One way or another, we *all* have to want it. And trial is what causes us to want it the most. So, when that time comes for us, whining and wishing for softness isn't going to cut it. Thinking that we don't deserve it isn't going to cut it. God is going to find out, as He did with Abraham, if we're all in or not.

In 1 Samuel 2:30, there's a scripture that says:

**1 Samuel 2:30** – *Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel* – and it's interesting there – He is the God of Israel – *I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before Me forever, but now the LORD declares, "Far be it from Me, for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.* So God is going to find out if we're going to honor Him or not, one way or another, in this life.

We can read something vital in Genesis 12:10. As Abram navigated his way toward the Negev – he was coming to the south – there was a famine. So he went down to Egypt to find food. Once he was there, he realized that his beautiful wife, Sarai, would attract the attention of the Egyptians. And he thought it possible they would kill him and take her, so he told Sarai that she was to pose as his sister, which she did for a while. Pharaoh heard about her beauty, and thinking she was single, took her to wife. They also gave Abram a lot of animals and servants and money, and honored him in that way – made him even richer than he was before. Nothing is said here about what Sarai wanted to do or thought about. She probably feared she would die if she didn't go along. But God had other plans – other ideas – for this couple. He caused Pharaoh to be curse. And Pharaoh – even though he was pagan, certainly was not anybody's fool. He put two and two together, and when he figured out what had happened, he was really angry with Abram, and probably, Sarai too, for lying to him. And he sent Sarai back to Abram, told them to "Get out!" which they did. We might think, "Great! The father and mother of the faithful are liars." And that may be the biggest part of this whole story. Pleasing God is not so much about living His law perfectly as it is about believing in Him. There are lots of other things in here in this story about Abram that let us know that he wasn't perfect. He had his faults, just like you and I, but God extended grace to him to cover his weaknesses, because he believed God enough to get up and follow Him to a completely new land and to *believe* that He would take care of him.

Paul had this discussion with those who were all about the law in his day. Let's read about that again in 4:20.

**Romans 4:20** – *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in the faith, as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”* What is righteousness? Well, righteousness is obeying the law. And Abram didn’t keep the law perfectly. He lied – we saw that in the account. But his *belief in God* was counted to him as righteousness. And then Paul said: *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us, who believe in Him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

So he’s using the faith that Abraham had in God and the weakness that Abraham exhibited, to explain how salvation works to these people, who had been of the Jewish religion, and thought that their salvation came from obedience to God. It’s hard for some people to understand, but we’re all required to obey God, but we’re not saved by it. And that’s what the Jews thought – that they would be saved by obeying God. We *can’t* obey God. So Paul is here helping some people, who all their lives had tried to attain eternal life by obeying God’s law, to wrap their heads around a better way to approach God. And what is that exactly? Well, instead of thinking that we can be saved by obeying God’s law, we see that it is a way to show love to God and His children – a way to follow Christ’s example. And at the same time, we realize it’s impossible to obey the law perfectly, bringing upon ourselves the death penalty. And we see Jesus’ sacrifice as paying for our past sins. He paid for it with *His* death. And while all this became possible – because God sent Jesus to die for us – to receive it, we must become the children of Abraham, because he is now the father of the faithful.

So think about what He’s doing here – what *God* is doing here. Abraham was one man, and he started out with a family, but somehow this is all getting transferred to anybody that wants to obey God. So to track God’s plan through the Bible, we have to know something about his early descendants. Let’s look in Genesis 17:1.

**Genesis 17:1-5** – *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him – the name Abram, by the way, means exalted father – and said to him, “I am God Almighty. Walk before Me and be blameless, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” And Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, “Behold, My covenant is with you. And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham – which means father of a multitude – for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*

Without going to each scripture, but just to leave a bread crumb trail, Abram had a son from Sarah, his wife, named Isaac. You may remember the story. Sarah was not able to have children. They were old. You know, they were seventy-five years old when they left to go from Ur of the Chaldees. So they were old people by that time. And she wasn’t able to have children. She knew the promise that Abraham was supposed to have a multitude of children, so she tried to make God’s plan work. She gave her handmaiden, Hagar, to Abraham, so he could have a child that

way. And he did. And they named that son Ishmael. He was Abraham's firstborn. Now, technically, the blessing was supposed to go to him, because he was the firstborn. But Sarah had a son named Isaac, and God passed the birthright to him.

Well, Isaac married Rebekah. She had twins – Esau, the first born, and Jacob, the second born. And Esau later gave up his birthright, because he was hungry and Jacob had a pot of beans, and he traded him – he traded his birthright. So again, the birthright gets passed down not by custom, but by God's design. He allowed all this stuff to happen. So it was tweaked and changed a second time.

Now here's an interesting story. It's the story about how it got passed to Jacob. In Genesis 32:22, it says:

**Genesis 22:22** – *The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And the man said to Jacob, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob," which means supplanter. And he certainly was that. He tricked Esau out of his blessing. Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel – and that means strive with God – for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."*

So here we find out why God wanted Jacob, rather than Esau. Esau gave up his blessing easily. And Jacob *wanted* it. He was willing to fight all night with God to get it. So, is there a lesson for us from the ancient pages? Well, Paul lays it out for us – “who are now Abraham's spiritual children.” It's in Hebrews 12:14.

**Hebrew 12:14** – *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God – that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many be defiled, that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

He wanted it, but he wanted it too late. He didn't value it when it was time to value it. And he failed the test. So, the question is – since we're all children of Israel now, if we're in God's Church – “Will we do it now, or will we hear those two terrible words later – “It's too late?” Jacob grasped his brother's heel in the womb. And later he grabbed a hold of God and would not let go – a lesson for us. Something about the characteristic of being a child of Abraham, and of

Israel, is that we go for it. We're all in. And we are willing to struggle, and not complain, not whine, not wish for something easy, but to go for it!

Now after his name was changed to Israel, he had twelve sons. The firstborn son was Reuben. Judah – the father of the Jews – was one also. His descendants – of all those twelve sons – are the only ones who remember where they came from today. All the rest have been scattered through the pages of history. But can rest assured that they're still out there, and God knows every last one of them, even if they don't.

So that's how the family was formed. Notice something that Paul says here. This is big, too. This is in Galatians 6:16.

**Galatians 6:16** – *And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God.*

So he's talking to the church, and he calls the church the Israel of God. The entire family of God – the church, the saints – we're all now called the Israel of God. Even though we're not genetically related to him, we're still part of Israel. Paul talked of how Israel was grafted in. Now, you know, if you have an apple tree, and you graft a pear branch into it, it still produces pears - it's still recognized as pears – but it's part of the apple tree. And so, people that were not genetically of Israel can still be recognized as what their nationality is, but they're now called the Israel of God. They've been grafted in.

So the entire family of God – the church, the saints – are all now called the Israel of God, no matter where we came from. Even more astounding and revelatory is this scripture – in Isaiah 49:1 through 3.

**Isaiah 49:1-3** – *Listen to Me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb. From the body of My mother, He named My name. Well, who's speaking here? Who is this talking about? We'll let's read verse 2: He made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of His hand, He hid me. He made me a polished arrow. In His quiver He hid me away. So who is it in revelation who has a sharp sword coming from His mouth? Well, it's Jesus. So He's the One who is talking here. He's the One that was taken from the womb by the Father, and He had the sharp sword from His mouth. And in verse 3, it says: And He said to Me, "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."*

So Israel is one of Jesus' names. And this tells us that God, through Jesus, is creating a family. And that family is called Israel, after the one who made them. And it also tells us something else. It's telling us the He's doing it the way God like to work. He likes to start small and grow bigger. In Matthew 13, Jesus told a parable.

**Matthew 13:31** – *He put another parable before them, saying – in verse 31 – “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.* Or, it’s like Jerusalem – just a tiny outpost at first, but eventually, it becomes the New Jerusalem – the heavenly city, brought down to us, wherein all God’s children dwell – the seat of God’s power for all eternity.

See how God likes to do things? You know, human beings like to start big, but God starts small with things. In the same way, God called *one* man, and from him, is growing the whole family of heaven and earth – the Israel of God, founded on Israel, the creator of a multitude, who all become eternal members of God’s family.

What can we learn from this? Well, we can learn that we’re all weak and small, but we do not have to despair. As the prophet Zechariah said, “Do not despair the day of small things.” Do you ever feel that what you do doesn’t make a difference, or there’s no way that you can do what you think you need to do to help God, or advance the work of God, or even live your own life properly? Well, God has a plan for our weakness. And that plan is Jesus Christ. And we can have it. But we have to *want* it. We have to *contend* for it. We have to *work* for it. We have to be willing to be *tried* for it. And like Abraham, perhaps most of all, we have to *believe* it. We have to believe that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And if we do, then we, too, can be part of the Israel of God.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs, for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.