

REAL PEOPLE, REAL GOD: Abraham's Covenant Calling

REAL PEOPLE Leave their Homeland

To get a good understanding of Abram's story, we actually need to begin with his father, Terah.

“Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there.” **Genesis 11:31**

If we read this Scripture alone, it appears Terah was the one who took his family and all their possessions from their current homeland bound for Canaan. But they settled in Harran, stopping short of the full journey, content with their increasing wealth.

Our REAL GOD Calls Abram...A Second Time

Some time later, our REAL GOD calls to Abram in what we now realize is a SECOND CALL:

“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.’” **Genesis 12:1** (*emphasis* added)

The Lord had already called Abram once (“had said” indicates it was before they settled in Haran), but when He spoke this time, Abram leaves his 145-year-old father and his household behind—knowing they'd likely never see each other again. No email or Skype either! What a tough decision! But Abram obeys.

Our REAL GOD Extends a Blessing to All

While we have previously seen our REAL GOD blessing and cursing, this blessing of Abram is unique. With Adam/Eve and Noah, our REAL GOD blessed the REAL PEOPLE and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” But here we see our REAL GOD taking REAL steps to extend a blessing *through* Abram. Abram himself becomes the instrument of God's blessing. Amazing!

“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*. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” **Genesis 12:2-3** (*emphasis* added)

Not only will God use Abram to bless a few others; God will bless *all peoples on earth* through him. Wow!

Did the REAL PERSON Abram **deserve** this blessing? What have the REAL PEOPLE been doing up to this point (since Noah and his family repopulated the earth)? They've been busy trying to make a name for themselves with the whole Tower of Babel debacle (Gen. 11:1-9)! But even though humankind didn't **deserve** it, our REAL GOD promised blessing simply because He wanted to *reveal Himself and be in relationship with us*.

REAL PEOPLE *Relate* to God

So Abram obeys and sets out for this land God promised. Hooray—obedience! He takes his wife, his nephew Lot, and all of the possessions and people he's accumulated in Harran.

“Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So ***he built an altar there to the Lord***, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There ***he built an altar to the Lord*** and called on the name of the Lord.” **Genesis 12:6-8** (*emphasis* added)

Do we see a pattern of relationship developing? Abram takes initiative to *relate* to God by setting up altars of praise and remembrance. Remember what Noah did the moment they stepped off the ark? He built an altar!

But it's the only altar we read about from Noah. Why? He had REAL opportunities to continue *relating* to our REAL GOD—the same as Abram—but he squandered them. He was more concerned with his circumstances, and it drove him to despair and drunkenness.

Abram, however, uprooted from homeland and father, moving about from place to place in response to God's call...he chooses to turn to God, continue deepening that relationship with the REAL GOD who made the covenant he's believing.

REAL PEOPLE Live REAL Lives

Fleeing a Famine

Unfortunately, once they arrived in Canaan, it didn't seem like much of a blessed promised land — famine struck. So Abram took his whole household down to Egypt to escape the famine. While there, he lied to Pharaoh, saying Sarai was his sister, so Sarai was taken into his palace (where she would presumably become his wife). Pharaoh gave Abram sheep and cattle, male and

female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels. Then our REAL GOD afflicts Egyptians with serious diseases to protect Sarai and somehow reveals Abram's lie to Pharaoh and his household. The king returns Sarai to Abram, and allows him to leave with all the livestock and wealth Pharaoh had given him.

Wow. That's what we call...um...*real* blessing. How does it all fit into God's promise of blessing? On the one hand it sounds like blessing fulfilled — receiving livestock and servants and great wealth. On the other hand, the Egyptians were struck with serious diseases because of Abram. Wasn't Abram supposed to be a blessing to others?

REAL Abram isn't perfect, and his REAL relationship with our REAL GOD continues. He leaves Egypt with all of that wealth, and returns to Bethel/Ai, where he'd built his first altar. When he arrives, he again calls on the name of the Lord.

REAL PEOPLE Quarrel and Divide.

With all his new wealth, Abram's estate—in addition to Lot's holdings—is so large that there isn't enough land to support all of it. Naturally, as happens with REAL PEOPLE, a quarrel breaks out....

“So Abram said to Lot, ‘Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.’” **Genesis 13:8-9**

Our REAL GOD *Relates and Reveals.*

Lot, given first choice, chooses the best land. But our REAL GOD, sensing Abram's disappointment, reaffirms His covenant.

“Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever...So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There ***he built an altar to the LORD.***” **Gen. 13:14-15, 18** (*emphasis added*)

Our REAL GOD, who longs to *reveal* Himself to us and *relate* to us, reminds Abram that He is still with him and His promise still holds, even in the midst of more unfortunate circumstances. Abram responds, yet again, with his own form of *relating* — he moves his camp to Hebron, and there he builds *another* altar to the Lord!

TRUE Blessing

That nephew Lot starts to become a REAL pain for Abram. Once Lot gets settled in the best land, he gets himself taken prisoner when Sodom goes to war, and Abram has to rescue him.

Two kings in the area seek to show Abram their gratitude with gifts. The first king, Melchizedek, the king of Salem (later to become Jeru-salem) is a priest of “The Most High God.” Abram receives bread and wine from him and in return gives him a tenth of all his wealth.

On the other hand, the second king, the King of Sodom, offers Abram lavish food and gifts, but Abram categorically refuses to take *any* gifts from him, not even food. It appears our Abram has learned to discern the difference between earthly blessing and spiritual blessing. And he’s learning to receive God’s blessed and to bestow it on others!

A REAL Covenant

Initiation

Being keen on relationship, and knowing us so well, our REAL GOD then takes initiative to meet Abram where he is. So He appears to Abram in a dream...

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield. Your very great reward.” **Genesis 15:1**

Doubt

But Abram, our totally REAL dude, has some concerns. So he pushes back. Unlike Cain, who was given an opportunity to *relate* with our REAL GOD in a conversation but remained silent, Abram actually engages God here. He lifts up a REAL question.

“But Abram said, ‘Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.’ Then the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.’ He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” **Genesis 15:2-5**

Promise, Belief, and Proof

Because of their cultivated relationship, Abram BELIEVES God’s promise, but because he is created from dust and lives in this sensory world of the here and now, he asks His REAL God for REAL proof:

“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. He also said to him, ‘***I am the LORD***, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it. Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?’ **Genesis 15:6-8** (*emphasis* added)

Because our REAL GOD seeks to *relate* and *reveal Himself* to Abram in ways he can see, feel, taste, touch, and smell, He offers him a sign Abram will readily understand.

The Sign

In the ancient culture in which Abram lived, men didn’t write out a contract and sign it on paper or parchment. They “CUT A COVENANT” by having two individuals bring animals to sacrifice.

“So the Lord said to him, ‘Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.’ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.”

Genesis 15:9-11

In a normal covenant, the two men cut the animals in half and arrange them opposite each other, letting the blood soak the ground in the corridor between the animals. Then the men would walk between the corridor of blood (getting blood on their feet—bloody footprints), sealing their vow unto death. If either party broke the covenant, he would forfeit his life. Abram cuts the animals in half (except for the birds), creating this corridor of blood and then waits on the Lord. Finally, Abram falls asleep, and while he can contribute *nothing*, the Lord makes these specific promises as His portion of the covenant:

1. For 400 years your descendants will be enslaved in a country not their own.
2. I will punish the nation they serve as slaves
3. Afterward they’ll come out of that country with great possessions.
4. You, Abram, will go to your ancestors in peace at a good old age.
5. In the fourth generation of slaves, your descendants will return to Canaan. (Gen. 15:13-16)

And when the sun had set and Abram was in a deep sleep, God alone walked through that corridor of blood:

“A smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.’” **Genesis 15:13-18**

This smoking firepot and blazing torch represented ONLY GOD walking through the corridor of blood, making it an ***unconditional Covenant*** — meaning no matter WHICH PARTY broke the Covenant, God must pay with His blood. Let that sink in a moment.

Didn't God know that Abram and his descendants would break their covenant of loyalty with their God? Of course He did. In essence, at this moment, with this covenant, God sealed Jesus's death on the cross. We saw Jesus' death in the Garden of Eden, when God said to the serpent, "The woman's offspring will crush your head" (Gen. 3:15), and we see it even more clearly here with Abram's covenant.

Our REAL GOD has pursued a loving relationship with us from the very beginning. He is determined to love us.

Originally posted by Mesu Andrews on Jun 10th, 2016