

What's the Message – Lesson Nine

STANDARD OPENING

New Text

ANNCR: 1. Today's study continues with God's covenant with Abram, as recorded in Genesis, beginning in chapter 12.

Music concludes

NARATR: 2. Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. May the Lord open your hearts through this study to see that His many gifts to us of material possessions are for a purpose . . . that we are to receive them and use them to be a blessing to others, to the glory of God. Amen.

3. Last time, in our initial study of God's covenant with Abram, we emphasized three points: . . . the purpose of selection and separation . . . the complete dedication and trust in God that the covenant demands . . . and man's duty to obey God fully. Today we shall consider two more elements of the covenant, the material aspects contained in the promise of blessing.

4. First, as we read in Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 and 7, there is the material fact of the promised land. The words there tell us: *Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country to the land that I will show you . . .* and this statement is followed by . . . *To your descendants I will give this land.*

5. This is not just a one-time promise, but is repeated to Abram in chapters 13, 15, and 17, and again later to Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

6. The second element is the promise of countless descendants. The initial mention is made in chapter 12, verse 2: *And I will make of you a great nation.* Then in chapter 15, verse 5: *Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them . . . so shall your descendants be.*

7. And this promise of becoming a great nation of many people is repeated later to Jacob and to Joseph. To have land and many descendants was a great thing to be desired, not only in Abram's time, but is still so regarded today. But what is the significance of these elements? What is their purpose? Teacher, what is the message for us today?

TEACHR: 8. First, we must ask ourselves the question, “What was the intended purpose of the land?” Was the ultimate goal to be the possession of the land, or was it to be a steppingstone to something greater?

NARATR: 9. Teacher, you bring to mind the mountain-climber, and the use of a base camp. The camp is not the goal, but is an essential part that enables the climbers to reach the goal . . . the mountain-top. The base camp contains the tools and equipment needed for the last arduous part of the climb. It also provides a place to gather strength and energy for the task ahead.

TEACHR: 10. That is an apt parallel. Now consider your church. Do you see it primarily as a social club where you go to relax and enjoy yourself with your friends, a place where the possession of membership is the goal? Or do you recognize that your church is your base-camp that equips you for your role as one of God’s ambassadors, a starting point for you to reach out to your community? In other words, do you see your church as an end in itself, or a means to an end, a greater goal?

11. There is a great chasm of difference between these two viewpoints, and the one that we choose will define how we act in our role as a disciple of Christ.

NARATR: 12. Now, what is the purpose of having a large family that can become a great nation? As we know, in the case of Israel, the seed of Abram would ultimately produce that One Seed God promised in the Garden of Eden, the Special One who would crush the head of Satan. But the picture of descendants as numerous as the stars . . . what is this all about?

TEACHR: 13. The picture of descendants as numerous as the stars has within it the spiritual implication of “the many arms of God.” That’s what Jesus has called us . . . as His disciples . . . to be the arms of God . . . a branch of The Vine.

NARATR: 14. We know that later on these material blessings became problems that Israel would have to deal with, and later the prophets would have to make it clear to the Israelites that they had twisted things around, and made a means . . . into an end in itself.

TEACHR: 15. Very true. And so it is pertinent that we ask ourselves: “Have we done any better? Have we lost sight of the purpose of God’s material gifts to us?”

16. We can summarize our study on God’s covenant with Abram as follows:

Abram and his descendants were to be a separated people, and that separation was to be three-fold

- FROM: out of Ur into Canaan
- TO: be consecrated, committed to be a servant
- FOR: to be a blessing to all nations

And, they would receive material blessings from God . . .
not for them to hoard . . . but as tools to enable them to
fulfill their mission of being a blessing to others.

Music up, then fade behind . . .

NARATR: 17. Next time we shall see how Abram responded to God's
call and covenant.

STANDARD CLOSE

Study Aids

Discussion Questions and Suggested Readings for “What’s the Message?” Lessons

Lesson Nine

Questions:

In the previous study we emphasized that Abram was to be blessed in order that he might be a blessing to others. In this study we see that God’s blessings include various kinds of material things, things that can lead to wealth. Should we conclude, then, that God desires for us to have wealth?

How are we to use the wealth that God does give us? Is wealth an end in itself, or a means to a greater end?

Luther’s teaching on Vocation may be summarized briefly as: “All work is God’s work, to be done to the glory of God.” In other words, regardless of what your status is in life, and no matter what your vocation may be, everything you do should be done to the glory of God. How does this concept relate to the “Blessed to be a blessing” statement?

How does the covenant given to Abram and his descendants compare to the covenant given to the New Testament church? Look at Matt. 28:19-20 as you develop your answer.

Suggested reading for further study:

God’s Covenant of Blessing, by John P. Milton, from Augustana Press, particularly chapters 2 and 3. This book goes much deeper into the Hebrew concept and interpretation of covenant, and the role it played in the basic theology of Israel.