

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
December 4, 2011

A Blessing for All Nations

Genesis 12:1-9

Key verse: “I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2).

John Warner told the following story: When I was in high school, I had the only air pump on the block, so I pumped up all the basketballs in the neighborhood. One day “Scooter,” who was in elementary school, brought me his basketball. I pumped it up and handed it back to him. He tossed it up and down on his hand and gave me an inquisitive look.

“John,” he said, “why do you spit on the needle?”

“It makes the needle go into the ball a little easier and keeps it from bending,” I replied.

Then Scooter said, “I always spit on the needle too, because you do it, but I always wondered why.”

*His response startled me! What else would he do simply because I did it? (This story originally appeared in *The Upper Room devotional guide*.)*

We all need good examples to follow, and especially when it comes to our spiritual lives. Genesis 12 is part of the story of Abraham (here called Abram), who the Bible presents as a great example for us. In fact, Abraham is mentioned more often than any other “hero of faith” in the Bible’s great Hall of Faith, Hebrews 11.

Here in Genesis 12:1-9, Abraham’s experience provides us with some great examples for our own journeys of faith.

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’” (v.1). Abraham’s response is a great example to us of the *obedience of faith*. God called Abraham to leave all that was safe and familiar to him and trust God to lead him to a place he didn’t yet know! In faith, Abraham obeyed God’s call.

Robert Kupferschmid was an 81-year-old man with no flying experience. Then on June 17, 1998, Robert was flying with his 52-year-old pilot friend, Wesley, when Wesley suddenly slumped over and died at the controls. The Cessna 172 plane began to nose-dive, and Robert grabbed the controls. Desperately, he got on the radio and begged for help.

Two pilots flying nearby heard the call. Step by step, they gave Robert instructions on how to fly the plane. They guided Robert to the nearest airfield. When the time came to land, emergency vehicles were waiting there. Step by step, the two pilots talked Robert down to a landing. Witnesses said the plane's nose nudged the center line and bounced a few times before the tail hit the ground. The plane ended up in a wet patch of grass just off the runway. Amazingly, Robert was unhurt.

Robert listened and followed instructions as if his life depended on it—and it did. Imagine what God could do in our lives if we would listen to and follow His instructions with the same determination to obey!

“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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (vv. 2-3). In his book *Pure Pleasure*, Gary Thomas reminds us that our Heavenly Father loves to bless his children:

Once, while walking through a McDonald's restaurant, I saw eight ten-year-old girls celebrating a birthday. The warmth of sheer, unadulterated happiness permeated the gathering. It was as if a light had been turned on, and I could see God's delight. God felt happy that these girls were happy. Their delight, their joy, even their giddiness, gave God great pleasure.

Have you ever thought about that—that you can give God great pleasure by enjoying yourself? If you are a parent, imagine Christmas morning as your children tear into presents. Does anything make you happier? Don't moments like these break into the dull routines of life and give us a glimpse of heaven?

It is just like our God to give Abraham a promise of great blessing! God does love to bless His children. But notice that God tells Abraham that He will bless him “so that you will be a blessing.” Like Abraham, we are blessed to be a blessing.

Too often, in Israel's history, God's people enjoyed the blessings of being God's chosen people but forgot that they were blessed to be a blessing. It is easy for us to make that same mistake today. God loves to bless us, but He wants us to know that we are blessed to be a blessing.

“So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran” (v. 4). When Abraham started on his great journey of faith, he was the tender age of 75-years-old! We are never too old to hear and obey God's call—to risk, to trust, to change.

“Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord” (vv. 7-8).

Several times, whenever Abraham had an important spiritual experience or encounter with God, he would *build an altar*. What does that example say to us about our walk with God?

Much of life is fairly routine. We get up at the same time most days. We go to work. We come home and have dinner, etc., etc., etc. But if we know the Lord, our daily routines will at times be interrupted by “God encounters”—miraculous answers to prayer, divine healing, God’s guidance, or an outpouring of God’s presence and power. We should be careful to mark and remember these God encounters by “building an altar,” even if it is in our memory or in a spiritual journal.

We should find ways to mark and then remember those divine moments in our lives when God “appeared” to us. Like Abraham, when we have a close encounter with God, we should “build an altar.”

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