

ABRAM'S CALL AND MIGRATION

Genesis 11,27-12,9

PRAYER

Jeremiah 1,4-10 The word of the LORD came to me thus: ⁵ Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. ⁶ "Ah, Lord GOD!" I said, "I know not how to speak; I am too young." ⁷ But the LORD answered me, Say not, "I am too young." To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD. ⁹ Then the LORD extended his hand and touched my mouth, saying, See, I place my words in your mouth! ¹⁰ This day I set you over nations and over kingdoms, To root up and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant.

INTRODUCTION

Every person comes from some kind of environment, is inserted into his/her family and formed by several factors (education, friends, religion...). One of the most decisive and fascinating moments in human life is when a person makes a whole life decision, or decides about his/her vocation. Sensitivity to God's voice can help to discern his plan. Readiness to answer puts one on this way. Vocation stories belong to the most beautiful parts of the Bible: where God's call and human freedom meet! Today we will discuss Abram, his origin, early life and the way he followed God's voice. We will read the text from Genesis (Gn) 11,27-12,9.

TEXT

This is the record of the descendants of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸ Haran died before his father Terah, in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Sarai was barren; she had no child. ³¹ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and brought them out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of Canaan. But when they reached Haran, they settled there. ³² The lifetime of Terah was two hundred and five years; then Terah died in Haran.

The LORD said to Abram: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. ² "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you."

⁴ Abram went as the LORD directed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ⁵ Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot, all the possessions that they had accumulated, and the persons they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land as far as the sacred place at Shechem, by the terebinth of Moreh. (The Canaanites were then in the land.) ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So Abram built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel, pitching his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name. ⁹ Then Abram journeyed on by stages to the Negeb.

STRUCTURE AND SETTING

Several elements of the text provide a connection with the primeval story (Gn 1-11). Here belong the motives of land (God creates earth in Gn 1-2; gives portion of it to people), descendants (genealogies of Noah in Gn 5), nation (Table of the Nations in Gn 10), name (Adam

giving names to the animals in Gn 2), greatness, curse (3,14.17; 4,11; 5,29; 9,25), blessing (God blesses Noah after the flood; 1,28; 5,2; 9,1).

Other expressions and motives link this text with the successive patriarch stories: promise of land will be fulfilled (when Israel will gain possession of the Land); descendants will continue the family-line (Isaac, Jacob and their descendants); covenant and blessings will be carried out. Thus is our text well inserted into the biblical narration of Genesis and is even one of its fundamental portions.

Our text can be divided fairly easily in two major parts.

A. 11,27-32 family background

B. 12,1-9 divine promises

Abram's call (12,1-4a)

Call and promise (12,1-3)

Fulfillment (12,4a)

Abram's wandering (12,4b-9)

Departure from Haran (12,4b-6)

Promise (12,7)

Wandering in the Promised Land (12,8-9)

Section A is more transitional, providing a connection with the primeval story in Gn 1-11. It gives background information for Abram's family origin and is presented in a purely narrative form. Section B contains more storylines and dialogues and is focused on the divine promises to Abram, as well as his early activity.

Though the emphases of the two units differ, there are some notable parallels between them: "they left Ur ... to go to the land of Canaan ... They came to Haran and stayed there" (11,31) "they left to go to the land of Canaan ... they came to the land of Canaan" (12,5)

Both sections subdivide into two parts:

11,27-32: two death reports (11,28, 32),

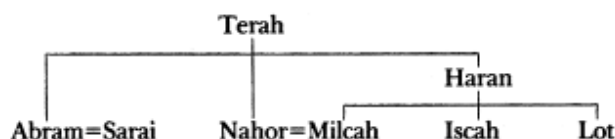
12,1-9: two divine revelations followed by two journeys by Abram

ANALYSIS

Section A provides a connection with the previous narration and inserts our text into a larger context of Genesis. It can be considered a transition between universal world-history in Gn 1-11 and a particular family-history in Gn 12-50.

Verse 27 The literal means used here are common for the whole book of Genesis when speaking about origin. The Hebrew word "origin" is used 10 times in Gn. It is derived from the root "deliver, give birth" and it is mostly translated as "origin, record, story, family history of." We can provide several examples: "Such is the *story* of the heavens and the earth at their creation" (2,4); "This is the *record* of the descendants of Adam" (5,1); "These are the *descendants* of Noah" (6,9); "These are the *descendants* of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (10,1) "This is the *record* of the descendants of Shem" (11,10); "These are the *descendants* of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave, bore to Abraham" (25,12); "This is the *family* history of Isaac, son of Abraham" (25,19). Every time this expression occurs, it indicates a new beginning.

Abram is a beginning of something new. At the same time, he also has ancestors. Connection with the previous times goes through Terah: he is a descendant of Shem—one of the Noah’s sons. Through him a direct line is traced back to the prehistoric times and narrations about the origins. Origin of the world is transformed into the beginning of a family. Adam, Noah and Terah: each of them had three sons and each of them has been a turning point in the history of mankind (creation of mankind, spread of people after the flood, and beginning of the family to give origin to the elected nation).



The main character in the story becomes Abram. The name “Abram” is well attested to as a personal name in both the second and first millennia B.C. The name is composed of two elements, *Ab* “father” and a verb “rum” which means “be high, exalted”. *Ab-ram* may mean “he is exalted as to his father,” i.e., he is of noble birth, or, more probably, “the father [i.e., God] is exalted”.

Verse 28 gives details about the death of Haran to his father. The present phrase may have a quasi-legal significance suggesting that Lot was now regarded as Terah’s son, in place of Haran. At any rate, the death of Haran explains Lot’s subsequent adoption by Abram.

The location of the story is Ur of the Chaldeans. It is a locality in southern Iraq. Ur was already an important political and religious center in the early third millennium B.C., reaching its highlight in 21-20th century B.C. But the epithet “of the Chaldeans” is probably anachronistic in Abram’s day, since the Chaldeans did not penetrate Babylonia till about 1000 B.C. It therefore most likely represents a gloss on the old tradition.

Ur was a commercial and economic centre located on an important trade route. Polytheism flourished there and the city was known for its worship of the moon-goddess **Sharratu**, wife of the moon god Sin. Their daughter was **Malkatu**.

Ur is called “his homeland” (literally, “land of his family”). The family home was in Ur when Haran (Abram’s brother) died (v. 28). The names of Terah and his family suggest they were western Semites. It is known that many Amorites settled in Mesopotamia both before and after 2000 B.C., and Terah’s family could well have been among them. However, Abram’s journey from Ur to Harran and later to Canaan took him against the mainstream of Amorite migration.

Verse 29 develops the storyline further. Abram marries Sarai (according to 20,12, his half-sister; i.e., she had the same father, Terah, as Abram, but a different mother) and Nahor marries Milcah, his niece. Marrying a half-sister is forbidden by Lev 18,9 “You shall not have intercourse with your sister”; 20,17; Deut 27,22, but not one’s niece. Bigamy with two sisters is also forbidden (Lev 18,18 “While your wife is still living you shall not marry her sister as her rival”), but a contrast case is in Gen 29, where Jacob marries Leah and Rachel. This suggests that Leviticus is introducing rules against incest that were unknown in patriarchal times. That the patriarchs are portrayed as breaking later legal norms argues for the antiquity of the tradition here.

Sarai’s name was later changed to Sarah (Gn 17,15). Both forms are probably from Sarah, “princess,” while “Milcah” comes from Malkah “queen.” **Sharratu** was the wife of the moon god Sin, and Malkatu was his daughter. Both Ur and Haran were important centers of moon

worship. It may be that Terah's family was once involved in such worship (cf. Josh 24,2, 15 "Joshua addressed all the people: "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: In times past your fathers, down to Terah, father of Abraham and Nahor, dwelt beyond the River and served other gods"), though there is no trace of it in the following stories.

Verse 30 is considered a digression that has a special significance: "Sarai was barren; she had no child". The whole Abraham cycle is an eloquent witness to the desperate desire for children in primitive society (cf. Ps 127, 128). Without children the man had no one to perpetuate his name and the wife enjoyed little prestige and much frustration, for she had no alternative career to motherhood. Further, in old age, childless couples had no children to care for them, and after death, none to carry out the funerary rites regarded as vital to the soul's well-being in the afterlife. This traditional motif is given a peculiar importance in the Abraham stories in that this barren couple is repeatedly promised a child by God, but there is great delay in the fulfillment of that promise. Also, children and descendants fulfill the command from the creation account: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth" (1,28).

This verse serves not only as information about the family situation, but the promise of descendants as a result of God's blessing is already in mind: a son will be born after Sarai's name is changed to Sarah: "As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai; her name shall be Sarah" (17,15).

Verse 31 attests to the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the family, a settled way of life for longer periods with occasional change of territory.

This autonomous decision to leave Ur and go to Canaan is not successful (for unknown reasons). Canaan will later become the country of promises but it will be reached only by following God's command. All the main characters are already on the way (Abram, Sarai and Lot).

Their inter-stay is in **Haran** (Assyrian "main road"), often mentioned in Mari texts as a center of Amorite activity, which lies on the river Balih, twenty miles southeast of Urfa (Edessa).

Verse 32 is typical of concluding statements in genealogies. In fact, Terah dies in Haran before reaching Canaan. True life is only in the Promised Land.

Section B is directly connected with the previous one. The knowledge of **Abram** and his identity is presupposed and the command to leave his country makes sense only if there is a basic familiarity with the geography of **Abram's** story. We are not in a new narrative; the same story continues.

The call from **v. 1** is answered in **v. 4**: "Abram went as the LORD had told him". The command itself contains an implied promise of the land. These verses are of fundamental importance for the theology of Genesis: they serve to bind together the narrations about origin and the later patriarchal history. They also look beyond this history to the subsequent history of the nation.

Verse 1 briefly introduces a direct discourse under the heading of God's message: "The LORD said to Abram...". The command is quite sharp and uncompromising: "go forth...!". We don't know how God spoke with Abram, or how Abram understood or how he knew he had to follow/how he knew God. His previous religion may have been under the influence of local practices and worship (cf. Ur and Haran with the worship of the moon-god). On the other hand his departure from Ur could suggest he might have been in dissent from the local worship

practices. Departure and leaving means starting a new life. In order to do that Abram must leave certain secure points.

What is commanded is a threefold separation: “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house” (12,1b). Country – kinsfolk – family: these were the very important links for ancient people that gave them identity and helped them to survive. Without land, one is an outcast. Without kinsfolk, one has no protection. Without family one has no past and no future. Abram probably felt more attached to his family than to Haran, a place that had been his home for a short time only. The passage from country to folk and family shows the cost of this separation. Leaving family was equal to leaving all social securities provided there (not like today where security is provided by the state!).

This divine imperative can be regarded as a test of faith: Abram is to give up all he holds and considers dearest for an unknown land promised by God. This is confirmed by 22,2 (Then God said: “Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you), where a very similar command to Abraham is explicitly prefaced by the comment that God tested Abraham (22,1).

Some scholars argue that for a nomad it was easy to leave land and family. There is nothing in the text to support this suggestion. The fact that Terah stayed in Haran (11,31–32), whereas only Abram went on to Canaan (12,4), suggests that the traditional interpretation is preferable. This view is further supported by the policy of sending Isaac, and later, Jacob, back to Haran to find wives: the family base was in northern Mesopotamia. Most of the patriarchs are uprooted from their native land and their family for a while (cf. Jacob and Joseph). The phrasing of 15,7 “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession” in particular suggests that Abram’s migration prefigures Israel’s exodus from Egypt.

Abram’s new destination is “a land that I will show you”. Contrary to the original intention of the family to go to Canaan in 11,31, now it is God’s command and commission. Only the main characters remain on the scene now, after this separation.

Verses 2-3 As a recompense for the threefold separation, God gives promises of country, large family and personal descendants: The promises to Abram fall in seven clauses (12,2-3) which in biblical language means fullness. Maybe too the fivefold use of the root “bless” in vv 2–3 consciously negates the five curses on man and his world pronounced in the preceding chapters (3,14.17; 4,11; 5,29; 9,25).

All the verbs in this section (making [great], blessing and cursing...) are subordinate to the imperative “go!” in v. 1. The divine intentionality could also be expressed by translating these verses “Go ... *so that I may* make you ... bless you ... etc.”

Blessing: God’s blessing is manifested most obviously in human prosperity and well-being; long life, wealth, peace, good harvests, and children are the items that figure most frequently in lists of blessing (24,35–36; Lv 26,4–13; Dt 28,3–15). What modern secular man calls “luck” or “success” the Old Testament calls “blessing,” for it insists that God alone is the source of all good fortune. Indeed, the presence of God walking among his people is the highest of his blessings (Lv 26,11–12). Material blessings are in themselves tangible expressions of divine benevolence. Blessing not only connects the patriarchal narratives with each other (cf. 24,1; 26,3; 35,9; 39,5), it also links them with the primeval history (cf. 1,28; 5,2; 9,1). The promises of blessing to the patriarchs are thus a reassertion of God’s original intentions for man.

The **fourfold promise** of nationhood, a great name, divine protection, and mediation of blessing in v. 2-3 might be a hint on the royal ideology: A “nation” is a political unit with a

common land, language, and government. The promise of great nationhood and name are one of the clearest links between the story of the patriarchs and the history of Israel.

Verse 3 is expressed in the form of a parallelism: “I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you”. It is a literal and traditional form attested to in the Bible: 27,29 “Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you”; Num 24,9 “Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you!” and in extra biblical literature. That’s why it can be considered a literary reworking of an older saying.

In 12,3, however, we have the 1st person singular (instead of impersonal formulae in other biblical instances) which serves to stress God’s direct concern and involvement.

The formula of blessing contains a certain progression:

1. Abram alone is blessed (v. 2a “I will bless you”)
2. Abram’s name is used as a blessing (v. 2b “I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing”)
3. those who bless Abram are blessed (v. 3a “I will bless those who bless you”)
4. all families find blessing in Abram (v. 3b “All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you”)

The successive stories in Genesis will prove this fact: those who are close to Abram are blessed and prosper (Melchizedech Gn 14; Abimelech Gn 20). Those who leave him have bad luck and ill fortune (Lot, who separates himself from Abram in Gn 13,11, will almost die in Sodom Gn 19).

Verse 4 begins the fulfillment of God’s command from v. 1: Abram goes as God commanded him. (The motive of obedience is quite frequent in Gn: 6,22; 7,5; 17,23; 24,51). Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. The chronology would show that this was 60 years before his father died, stressing once again the aspect of separation from his family.

Verse 5 describes some more details: “Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother’s son Lot”. Both Lot and Sarai are not suitable bearers of the promises: Sarai is barren and Lot is single which means he has no prospect of descendants in a foreign land. They had to separate from the rest of the family which could have given them a hope. Now only God will work and carry out his promises.

Verse 6 Abram reaches Canaan and his concrete destination is a place called Schechem. Schechem (30 miles north of Jerusalem) was a very important center in the second millennium B.C. and is often mentioned in the OT (Gn 33,18; 35,4; 37,12–13; Josh 24,1; Judg 9,6; 1 Kgs 12,1). Josh 20,7 indicates that it was regarded as situated in the center of the land, even though in Abram’s story this is the most northern place in Canaan he has reached.

Further specification provides a name “terebinth of Moreh”. Moreh is literally “teacher,” which suggests it was a place where divine oracles could be obtained; cf. “the palm of Deborah” (Judg 4,5). Sacred trees are still known today in the Near East.

The remark that “The Canaanites were then in the land” (12,6) might be a historical reference, contrasting the situation in the author’s day with that of the patriarchal age (they are not there any more at the time of writing down the present text). But the primary concern is to explain why Abram could not take immediate possession of the land: it was already occupied.

Verse 7: “The LORD appeared to Abram and said” gives a closer specification as to how Abram knew God’s will: after the question is left open in v. 1, now we know: God appears to Abram.

Also, this is the first time that God appears to the patriarchs and this event is foreshadowing the later revelations (at Sinai and in the tabernacle).

The promise of land and descendants are fundamental for Genesis and here they are introduced for the first time explicitly, coming from God in the form of direct speech.

As answer to God's revelation "Abram built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him". Building an altar at particular places or in particular moments was an ancient praxis. Most likely an offering on the altar followed like in the case of Noah who built an altar after the flood and offered a sacrifice (8,20). The meaning of such an action was to express gratitude to the deity but was also a symbolic claim of the territory: the portion of land carrying the altar of a particular god belongs to that god. Subsequently Abram built several altars at Bethel, Hebron, and Mount Moriah (12,8; 13,18; 22,9); Isaac at Beersheba (26,25); Jacob at Luz (35,7); and Moses at Rephidim and Sinai.

Verses 8-9 mention several stations on Abram's journey through the land: "pitching his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name.⁹ Then Abram journeyed on by stages to the Negeb" (12,8-9). We can assume that Abram pitched his tent many times on his journey. The fact that Bethel is mentioned explicitly suggests his staying there for a longer time. Also his invoking the Lord by name would point to more regular and formal worship.

Bethel is the place of Jacob's dream (Gn 28) and his fight with the angel (Gn 35) and later became an important religious and civic centre of the Northern kingdom.

These stops serve to indicate covering of the territory / significant / strategic places: from north (Schechem) through the centre (Bethel) to the south (Negeb). The Negeb (literally, "the dry land") is the area lying between the hills of Judah and Kadesh-Barnea. Its rainfall is generally too low for normal agriculture, and in consequence it has always been sparsely populated except for a period in the early Middle Bronze Age ca. 2000 B.C. It roughly marks the southern border of Canaan (Num 34,3-5), so in traversing it Abram found himself at the border of the Promised Land.

Thus the brief itinerary of Abram described in vv 5-9 takes him from the northern to the southern border of the land. He not only sees what has been promised to him; he walks through it, and he lives and worships in it. Symbolically he has taken possession of it. However, the end of his journey in the Negeb at the southern boundary prepares for the next episode, which takes place in Egypt (12,10-20).

His conquering of the land was very symbolic only – at the end of his life he will end up with a small portion of land for his burial in Hebron.

ORATIO

1. **Blessing**: Within the book of Genesis no section is more significant than 11,27-12,9. It serves both as an introduction to and summary of Abraham's career. It looks ahead to the later patriarchs and beyond them to the nation of Israel and the Davidic monarchy, the great nation that will inherit the land of Canaan. It also looks back to the primeval history, announcing the divine intervention that will bring blessing to all the families of the world, whose history has been overshadowed by divine judgments from Eden to the flood to Babel. But in Abram all the nations of the world will find blessing. This reminds us of the first great blessing of mankind at creation (1,28) and its renewal after the flood (9,1).

How much and how urgently does our world, our nations and our families need God's blessing?! In fact, the same patterns as in the primeval history are so often repeated: Transgressing God's commandments as in Eden, human wickedness as before the flood, pride and self-exalting as in Babel is not uncommon. That's why this story speaks to our world too. God's answer is not a judgment and condemnation, but a promise of blessing, according to Paul's words: "where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (Rom 5,20). In this sense, the story reaches into the future, announcing not only themes from the Israel national history, but rather something that will be constantly significant and will be touching the lives of faithful people in many generations.

Abram's God-given success will be so evident to others that he will become "a blessing," that is, men will invoke blessings on themselves: "May the LORD bless me as he blessed Abram." Those who so invoke God's aid are assured by him: "I will bless those who bless you." So Abram will become a source of blessing to all who seek it. Indeed, in him "all the families of the world will find blessing." However, the few who disdain to acknowledge God's working in Abram are warned: "He who disdains you [Abram] I shall curse."

Blessing used to be understood in material and tangible form in the past. For us it has more non-material and spiritual form. Whatever form it might have, blessings received by people are not intended for themselves only. Abram became a mediator: through him God was blessing others. We should live such a life, such that meeting us other people can say we are a source of blessing transmitting and bringing God's blessing.

2. **Example of answer:** Abram's obedience to the divine call, forsaking his homeland and family for the worship of the LORD in the land of promise stands as an example and a spur to all his descendants to follow. This will bring blessings on themselves and to the world.

In order to bring blessing to the world, God has chosen Abram and his descendants: they serve as mediators of blessing. God constantly chooses and calls people to enter his service in order to bring blessing to the world. Abram's example impels us to answer with generosity and readiness. This makes us his children and his spiritual descendants in line with Jesus' words: "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham" John 8,39.

3. **Ordinary life:** There are several biographical details in our text that may seem minor and unimportant. They serve to introduce us to Abram and his family, so that we know who we are meeting in the following chapters, in particular Sarah, Lot, Nahor and Milcah. It highlights the central concerns of the patriarchal stories: Sarai's childlessness and Abram's willingness to leave home and family in response to God's call. The life of the patriarchs wasn't always spectacular or extraordinary. Most probably they weren't aware at all about the fact that they were "writing history". They were simply living all their small moments and meetings, struggling for survival and searching for God's will.

This is very similar to our everyday life. We are hardly aware of writing history and in most cases we are effectively not doing that. Our vocation, whatever it is, is normally lived in ordinary life. However, it is there that we struggle and search for God's will. Whenever we lose this perspective from our minds, we are lost in the course of history. We may pray with the psalmist: "LORD, my heart is not proud; nor are my eyes haughty. I do not busy myself with great matters, with things too sublime for me" Psalm 131,1.

4. **Insignificant life:** The first unit of our text is the last element in the genealogy of Shem. Abram is not merely the father of the faithful, but a son of Shem, who was in turn a son of Adam.

This passage, then, by linking the patriarchs with the primeval history, gives the call of Abram a cosmic setting: the LORD who summoned him to leave Ur of the Chaldeans is also the creator and judge of the universe revealed in the opening chapters of Genesis. The promise of universal blessing to the nations is given by the sovereign LORD who had determined their times and their habitations (Acts 17,26; cf. Gen 10). In this way the theological significance of Abram is emphasized. If to human eyes he appears only as a landless wanderer, the divine call and his obedient response gives his life story an extraordinary importance that surpasses even the imagination of the author of Genesis.

Our life too might appear just as a drop of water in the surrounding ocean. What gives us importance is neither our impression nor our performance. We might be like a “landless wanderer” and still precious: God’s call and our human response give our life true value. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” Jer 1,5.

5. **Obedience: response to revelation** The divine call and Abram’s response are nicely summarized in 12,1–9. Briefly and simply, these paragraphs tell of the LORD’S command to Abram to leave home, the journey that Abram undertook in obedient faith, and the acts of worship that followed his later experiences. He is portrayed as traversing the land of promise from end to end. Symbolically taking possession of it, staying at the holy places, he has time to build altars and pitch his tent, and to call on the name of the LORD.

These words of promise and acts of faith set the tone for the whole Abraham story: they are at once programmatically and typological, that is, they reveal the divine plan for Abram. He has a program to fulfill: he is to father children, inherit a land, enjoy divine protection, and be a source of blessing to the world. This story is also typological in that it is the first in a series of episodes in which God speaks and the patriarch usually responds in faithful obedience, a pattern repeated many times in Genesis, not just in the Abram cycle but also in the Isaac and Jacob cycles as well.

This story has been typological for many generations of people who followed God’s call in obedience. The same pattern might be repeated and discovered in the lives of saints, but also in the lives of those who have never been canonized. This is the basic pattern of our religion: experience with God who reveals himself and people who answer in obedience. On a much more personal and individual level, we try to recognize God’s will and his plan with my life. Our discernment, shorter or longer, means already following this plan. God wants us to understand first what to do. Only then can true obedience follow. “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; ² in these last days, he spoke to us through a son” Hebr 1,1-2

6. **Leaving** The divine word begins with a summons to Abram to leave his family for an unspecified land: “Go by yourself ... to the country I shall show you.” Here as in 22,2, “Go to ... one of the mountains of which I shall tell you,” Abram is bidden to do something of which God is the sole guarantor of its successful outcome. Like his grandson Jacob and great-grandson Joseph, he had to leave his home to find God’s blessing in a foreign land.

Leaving our small or big position, property, state of life...is challenging, especially when future is promised only. The more we have, the more we are reluctant to leave. A positive answer to this challenge, however, helps us to see clearly who is really in charge and where is the source of prosperity and happiness. It is not in what we already have! God is the true source of blessing that will be spread over his faithful and through them over all people.

7. **Possession of Land** The LORD appears to Abram at Shechem and this is the first time in Scripture the LORD is said to have appeared to anyone. He promises Abram: “To your descendants I shall give this land.” Abram’s response is immediate: he builds an altar. He moves on to another important holy site near Bethel, and there he stays, pitching his tent, building an altar, and worshipping the LORD. The scene closes with him moving towards the southern border of Canaan, the Negeb. His actions are an acted prophecy. They foreshadow the day when Israel will take possession of the whole land and worship the LORD there. This narrative looks ahead to the conquest of the land, and beyond that, to the establishment of the Davidic empire. David himself was promised “a great name” (2 Sam 7,9), and he made Israel “a great nation.”

But the scope of these promises is not just to sketch a political, national, or regional setting of Israel among the nations of the Near East. Establishing of the nation and taking possession of the country invites surrounding nations to acknowledge the God of Abram (Ps 47,10). The prophets, of course, look ahead to a day when all men will recognize God’s presence in Israel (Isa 2,2–4).

This is what so often lacks in our world – acknowledgment of God! Focused on their own performance and success, people fail to see the need for God and his blessing. God doesn’t deny success: he himself gives the promise of conquering the country and having a new home; he himself will help to carry this promise out! God wants us too to have a nice life, to afford the necessary and justified means and property, vacation and relaxation. All these things should lead to such an attitude that we will be showing him as the source of our blessing. That will result in the fact that other people too will acknowledge his greatness and recognize God’s presence among his people.

The NT looks on the advent of Christ as introducing in the age in which all the nations will be blessed through Abraham: “You are the children of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors when he said to Abraham, “In your offspring all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Acts 3,25).

CONCLUSION

Creator God, Life is your gift to me. Through Baptism you invite me to share the gift of my life in service to others. Be with me as I choose each day to show Your presence in our world. Give me the courage and generosity to respond to Your love and to Your call. Open the minds and hearts of all men and women that they may accept Your challenge to build your Kingdom. Amen.