

God's Call to Abram
Genesis 12:1-20
Key Verse: 12:2

"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."

Hello! My name is M. John Peace from Kiev, Ukraine. In the summer of 2003 my family was sent out from Chicago as the first permanent missionary family to the CIS. Before that my wife, M. Maria and I, served UIC ministry for more than 20 years. So how did we get from UIC to Kiev? This is what I would like to share with you today. When Pastor Ron asked me what passage in the Bible would be most befitting to our missionary life, it was an easy choice- Genesis 12, "The Call of Abram." God also called Abram to leave his country and go to the land God would show. So, in fact, Abram was the first missionary. What does God's calling mean? Does it mean that one day God will call on our cell phones and tell us what to do? Let's study today why God called Abram and how Abram responded to God's calling. God promised to make him a source of blessing for all peoples of all nations. May God help us learn what our response should be towards God's calling.

I. God calls Abram (12:1-3)

Let's read verses 1-3. "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. 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.'" This call contains a command and a promise. The command is, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." God's call to Abram was specific. Abram was already 75 years old. That's the time most people have already retired, settled down and moved to Florida to enjoy their last remaining years on earth in comfort and ease. Why did God ask him to leave? First of all, God wanted Abram to leave the idolatrous environment he lived in. He lived in ancient Mesopotamia which was known to have more than 3,000 idols. God wanted Abram to worship him, the one and only living God, and the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

When we begin the life of faith, we must break away from our past lives. At that time to leave one's country was extremely difficult for it meant leaving one's tribe, culture, community and source of support and protection. It also entailed difficult traveling, possible danger from hostile people, and future insecurity. In short, it was a great risk. Abram was not even really sure where he was going since he was going to a new land. He didn't even have a GPS which he could put on his camel and punch in, "The Promised Land." But to God it was absolutely necessary for Abram to leave his life of sin behind and learn to trust and obey God at the outset of his life of faith.

When did God call me? Well, in 2002 I was invited to attend the Easter Bible Conference in Kiev, Ukraine. I was blessed to give the message, "God's Call to Abram" based on this same passage. While writing the message God moved my heart. Especially through God's word, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you," I heard God's calling to go to the land of Ukraine as my mission field. So at the conclusion of my message I made a decision to go as a missionary to Ukraine the following year. One Ukrainian shepherd laughed when he read my message because he could not believe an America shepherd would go to Ukraine, a majority-world-nation, to be a missionary. When M. Maria told her father about our plans to move to Ukraine he said, "You guys are stupid! Ukrainians want to live in America, but you want to live in Ukraine." But through personal Bible study and prayer God convicted my heart that Kiev, Ukraine was my mission field, regardless of what anyone else said.

To hear God's calling was the first step of faith. My family also needed faith and obedience to God's command. My wife didn't even know where Ukraine was located. At first I thought the initials for Ukraine was UK, but later I found that was the United Kingdom. It is actually UA, but don't get it confused with EU which is the European Union or UAE which is United Arab Emirates. My children were also not so happy initially to go because their relatives and friends were in Chicago. Abram had no child, but I had to take four little Peace's with me. My eldest daughter Maria Joy was starting her freshmen year at Whitney Young. They didn't mind if their dad went out as a missionary but why did they have to come along they thought. M. Maria and I had good jobs in Chicago as a nurse and teacher. We were living by downtown Chicago and owned a home. But we decided to obey God's calling to be a

missionary family by faith. At that time we were praying to send missionaries to the former Soviet Union. I also wanted to go to Kiev to support Dr. Peter Kim whose family was serving Kiev ministry all by themselves. So "to go or not to go" that was the question.

Let's go back to Abram's story. Before God's calling Abram was spiritually dead because of his sins, his fatalism and hopelessness. But God's calling gave him a new lease on life. This was the reason God called a 75 year-old man to show that God can give new life even to an old man. In UBF someone came up with the term, "silver missionary," but in the sight of God if they are less than 75 years old they are still a young man or young woman in their life of faith. However, there are many young people who act, think, talk and even look like old people. They have a fatalistic view about their lives and future. So many have a mid-life crisis. Even many Hollywood stars like to date people 20 or 30 years younger than them to make themselves feel younger. But spiritual revitalization comes from obeying God's word. So we need to hear and accept God's calling, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you," and begin a new life of faith. In this way we can have a new lease in life and be truly young in Jesus-who gives us eternal life. When my family decided to obey the world mission command my wife said she felt like a teenager even though she was in her forties.

God knew Abram's struggle to make the first step of faith. So God promised Abram some fringe benefits if he obeyed. God did not call Abram in order to make life miserable for him; rather, God called him to bless his life and make him a blessing. Let's read verses 2,3 again. "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." God called Abram to bless him.

First, God promised to make him into a great nation. Abram didn't even have one son at that time but God promised that through him a great nation would be formed. What is a great nation? Is it the one with the most nuclear weapons? No! It is a nation that fears God and obeys his commandments. As the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 33:12a, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD."

Second, God promised to make Abram's name great. This was a promise to train him until he could become a truly great man. His name Abram meant, a noble father, but later God changed his name to Abraham, the father of many nations. Abram really wanted to be a good father and a good husband to his wife. But whenever he looked at her flat belly he despaired and could not recognize himself as a great man. But when he heard God's promise "I will make your name great and you will be a blessing" his desire to be a great man of God was rekindled. God would make him a great historical figure. He would become world famous. And his name would be honored by all people.

Third, all peoples on earth would be blessed through him. God blesses us in many ways including materially, good health, educationally, as well as physical and spiritual children. However, the greatest blessing that God can give a man is to make him a source of blessing to many people. God promised Abram that he would be a blessing--that all peoples on earth would be blessed because of him. Abram was only one man; how could he be a blessing to all peoples of all nations? God made it clearer to Abraham when he told him in chapter 22:18, "...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." God fulfilled this promise by sending Abram's offspring, Jesus Christ, through his line. Jesus is the source of blessing to all peoples of all nations because he died on the cross for the sin of the world. Through Jesus' death and resurrection salvation has come to all peoples of all nations. And whoever believes in Jesus "shall not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16)

II. Abram's response to God's calling (12:4-9)

Let's read verse 4a. "So Abram left as the Lord had told him..." Abram showed his belief by obeying God's command. His response was amazing in the light of his human situation at that time. But he caught a glimpse of God's hope and vision for world salvation. For this he was willing to sacrifice everything that he had for future rewards. By obeying God's calling Abram stepped into the spiritual world. Though it looked like a small step, but to God it was the beginning of his world salvation plan.

When did I respond to God's calling? In the summer of 2003 I packed up my bags and headed to Kiev. At that time I had no job in Kiev but only God's promise in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." Since I worked as a teacher I had contacted the director of Kiev International School, who told me to see him for an interview. But at the interview he told me that his staff was full

and the only possible way he could hire me was if the enrollment increased. I was disheartened and wondered what I would do in Kiev without a job. Also, one night while walking to the center two Ukrainian men jumped me and hit me from the back. At that time Satan filled my mind and heart with doubts. Was Ukraine really my mission land? Did I make a mistake to come here? But through struggling in prayer I made a resolution in my heart that Ukraine was my promise land and I could also forgive the two men who jumped me when I remembered Jesus' word on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Then a miracle happened. After two weeks the director called me and said that the enrollment increased and that he wanted to hire me as a teacher. I immediately called my wife and told her the good news. Then I got down on my knees and thanked God for keeping his promise to bless us.

However, it was not easy for my family, especially my children, to make the transition to a new country. My eldest daughter became sad and depressed because she had just enrolled in high school and began to make new friends. But she had to leave everything behind in an instant. When my children first attended the SWS in Kiev they couldn't understand anything since Dr. Peter gave the message in Russian. At times, my son Johnny didn't want to go to church saying, "I can't understand a word." He also had difficulty adjusting to his new school. One day he forgot his lunch at home which contained his favorite chocolate pudding. So he wanted to leave school to get his chocolate pudding. When the director of the school tried to stop him he called him, "monster face." It took some time for my children to adjust to their new environment. But as God promised he blessed my descendants as well. My children began to participate in the work of God. Christy and Sarah joined the orchestra and began to invite their friends from school to a Christian meeting. Maria Joy and Sarah began to have Bible study in Russian with their shepherds. At home, Johnny served M. Maria and I and our sheep with his homemade delicious deserts and hot tea. Now they joyfully attend the SWS and even understand the messages.

At the Purdue conference my eldest daughter, Maria Joy, went to the stage during the missionary calling. Missionary Maria Peace thought that she had already made a decision to be a missionary to Turkey. But she told her mom, "That was your decision for me at first, but now I want to make my own decision before God to be a missionary to Turkey." It is also interesting that before the conference the Turkish Embassy in Chicago gave her a hard time and she could not obtain a student visa to Bosphoros University. But after the conference and her decision of faith before God she could obtain a student visa easily-with the help of her counselor in Istanbul. I also thank God for my other children: Christy, Sarah and Johnny who also accepted God's missionary calling at the conference. When we accept God's calling, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you," God will open the doors widely to China, North Korea and all Muslim countries. Amen.

Living in the mission land my family also experienced God's hand of blessings in many practical matters. For example, it was not possible for us to own land according to Ukrainian law because we were foreigners. But through M. Point's mother, Stanislava, God made it possible not only to buy land but also build a three story home using the money we received from selling our home and retirement funds. We thanked God that we could live in our own home. But it did not come without problems. One winter we didn't have gas and our radiators didn't work properly. Frost began to build up in our living room. My family of six ended up sleeping in one room with a propane gas heater and electric heater. We literally became closer that winter as a family than ever before. We became like the Waltons, "Goodnight Maria Joy, goodnight Christine Good, goodnight Johnny boy." But now God has blessed our home with gas and we could even rent our third floor for sisters in our church. Currently we are remodeling the first floor so that we can invite another family to live with us. We even tried our hand in a little farming. One summer all my children worked hard to clear a field, plow the land, plant potatoes and get rid of potato bugs. But at the harvest time we found that the potatoes we collected were smaller and about the same number of potatoes that we planted. So we decided to stop planting potatoes and just go to the market and buy them. God wanted us to rely on his abundant provision instead of our poor farming skills.

God also helped my family to be a source of blessing for our church. In this year God blessed Kiev UBF to finish our new center with the help and support of many coworkers around the world. But it was not easy for us because of building expenses and loans. In the fall, the roof of the center was not completed. Rain began to damage the inside of the church and cold weather was soon approaching. So M. Maria and I decided to sell our van and use the money to finish the roof. While driving on the highway one man pulled us over and immediately bought our car. We offered the money to the church and in this way we could finish the roof of our church. But my family faced some hardships because we had no car. My family had to take public transportation to work and wherever we went. It was especially difficult during very cold days. Also, it was not possible for us to get a loan from a bank since we were

foreigners. But again God performed a miracle. The director of our school decided to go back to America and left his car in Kiev. No one wanted to buy his car, but we had no money to buy it. Then the head of our organization approved our car loan and we could buy a car without paying any interest. God even gave us a better car than we had before-a Mercedes Benz.

Most of all, God blessed M. Maria and I to be a source of blessing to Ukrainian students as one-to-one Bible teachers. Ukrainian students despaired and became fatalistic due to 70 years of atheistic communism. But through one-to-one English Bible study they are coming back to God. M. Maria's sheep, Olena, lived like a Samaritan woman, but through Bible study she met Jesus personally as her Savior. Now she serves God's work as a full time intern shepherdess. Her life testimony at the conference was a source of blessing to many people. In the past, my sheep Maxcim lived a self-centered life due to his only son mentality. But through Bible study he began to practice the love of God for others. While he stayed in Chicago he was like a shepherd for his roommate. In the past, his dream was to live in America, but after staying here a few weeks he came to the realization that it was better to live in Ukraine. We pray to raise our sheep as missionaries so that we can be a source of blessing to all peoples of all nations.

We have studied about God's call to Abram. Abram's life of faith is a source of inspiration for us. His obedience to God's command, "leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" exemplifies his simple but absolute faith in God's promises. He could not make such a decision by his own effort or clever planning. Instead he took a leap of faith into the horizon and paved the way for us to follow in his footsteps. Romans 4:12a says, "And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had..." To make this leap of faith we must remember the motto of the men in the US Coast Guard who risk their lives everyday to save people lost at sea, "What's important is not whether we come back, but that we go out." This was also Abraham's motto. May God help us to hear God's calling and respond to God's calling as Abram did and be a source of blessing.

I thank God for the blessing to share a message on this passage. God's promises in Genesis 12:1-3 has been the foundation of my life of faith the last 25 years. I learned through my missionary life that when God commands us, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you," God does not abandon us or leave us stranded somewhere. Instead, by leaving our past sinful life we are making a new and more personal relationship with God. We learn to depend on him alone. I was only a selfish sinner--full of human ambition. But I repented and decided to believe God's promise in verse 2, "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." God's promise captivated me to live as a faithful shepherd for God's sheep. In the course of living a shepherd life God began to broaden my heart and vision for world mission. Verse 3b, "...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." I thank God that he has shown my family that he faithfully keeps his promises. God made us a blessing to Ukrainian students as English Bible teachers. We are blessed to share the gospel of salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ through one-to-one Bible study. We thank God that we can live as missionaries. May God bless us to believe his promises so that through us God will raise America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Amen.