

CALLED IN GRACE, SENT IN FAITH

A Devotional Meditation on Lech Lecha (Go Forth)

Genesis 12:1-17:27; Isaiah 40:27-41:16;
Luke 22:23-27; Romans 12:14-20; James 2:21-24

Albert J. McCarn
November 5, 2022



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There was a time I came under the influence of a man whose spiritual gifts and abilities were just what we needed. He helped me overcome a stronghold in my life, and helped my family into greater intimacy with our Redeemer. However, we noticed inconsistencies in his personal life that didn't fit what we understood about the character and conduct of a righteous man. My misgivings escalated when I realized he did not consider me a friend and colleague, but a servant who would faithfully do his bidding. At the same time, I began to question my own calling from the Lord.

My wife and I talked about this with growing alarm, and realized we had to do something to change the downward trend of our relationship with this man. The break came suddenly. During a ministry event, his attitude and actions prompted me to blurt out, "You have been called by God, but you haven't been sent by the church."

I cannot say if my words were inspired more by the Holy Spirit, or by my own resentment, but they led to the end of our association. Ever since, I have prayerfully pondered what that episode was all about. Much good came of it, not only in the personal ministry this man did for my family, but in the wisdom and discernment our Heavenly Father taught us. We are now more aware of wolves among the sheep, and of shiny distractions that woo us away from the path our Creator called us to walk.

It was a sermon about Abraham that contributed to my confrontation with this man. The sermon was taken from Genesis 15, which begins:

After these things the word of *ADONAI* came to Abram in a vision saying, "Do not fear, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

But Abram said, "My Lord *ADONAI*, what will You give me, since I am living without children, and the heir of my household is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look! You have given me no seed, so a house-born servant is my heir."

Then behold, the word of *ADONAI* came to him saying, "This one will not be your heir, but in fact, one who will come from your own body will be your heir. He took him outside and said, "Look up now, at the sky, and count the stars—if you are able to count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your seed be."

Then he believed in *ADONAI* and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-6 TLV

The pastor who delivered that sermon explained how Abraham was wondering whether the calling and promise of God were still in effect. He had faithfully obeyed God's call to leave his father's house and journey to a strange land, but the discouraging events after that left him wondering whether he had somehow disqualified himself from God's promises. After all, he and Sarah had shamed and angered Egypt's Pharaoh. Then they had resolved a family dispute by sending away Lot, their nephew and closest relative. Then came that strange war in which Abraham and his Hittite allies simultaneously humiliated the kings of the east and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah.

All those powerful individuals had their own motives for seeking to coopt Abraham's destiny – a destiny that the Almighty revealed in His first recorded words to Abraham:

Then *ADONAI* said to Abram, "Get going out from your land, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. My heart's desire is to make you into a great nation, to bless you, to make your name great so that you may be a blessing. My desire is to bless those who bless you, but whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Genesis 12:1-3 TLV

That was a call for Abraham to separate himself from everything and everyone that defined the meanings of *normal*, *home*, and *sensible*. He was to be a man called and devoted entirely to the Creator, pursuing purposes that often made no sense to others, and were opposed to the realities of his day. Anyone and anything that might coerce, entice, or deceive him into a reality and purpose other than the Creator's was to be resisted, refused, and overcome.

Canaan's famine and Egypt's Pharaoh were the first of those opposing realities. Not knowing how else to survive, Abraham and Sarah tried to combine God's calling and provision with the evidence of their eyes. Their solution was deception, calling Sarah Abraham's sister so that, should she come to Pharaoh's attention, he might bring her into his household and leave Abraham unharmed. They may not have expected Pharaoh to "buy" Sarah with livestock and servants, but that's what happened. It took God's intervention to rescue them from their shortsighted scheme, and the rescue came with a price. Not only were they unwelcome in Pharaoh's realm, but the slaves they acquired in Egypt included Hagar, the woman who became mother of Abraham's first son, Ishmael. Still, our God goes to great lengths to teach wisdom to His people.

It was wisdom that prompted Abraham to offer Lot the option to separate and make a life for himself wherever he chose. Lot's decision to go to Sodom initiated a process that ended in his own family's tragedy, indicating that, however righteous he was, he had not acquired the measure of wisdom his uncle was acquiring. Instead, he attached his fate to Sodom's, and when Sodom was conquered, he was taken captive.

Chederlaomer of Elam, the conqueror of Sodom, led an alliance that ruled over the lands Abraham had left. Abraham's love for his nephew motivated him to risk everything to rescue Lot, and in doing so he also fought against the worldly and religious powers out of which God had called him. He might have been able to negotiate Lot's release, but that would have placed him back under obligation to those powers. In the same way, after he and his allies defeated the invaders, Abraham resisted the offer from Sodom's king to take all the wealth in exchange for the people. He couldn't risk being tainted by Sodom,

which would have happened had he allowed himself to be bought off by worldly goods. His allies were under no such obligation. They could take their fair share, being people still encumbered in the world system.

Here is another example of Abraham's wisdom: whenever possible, as far as it depended on him, he lived at peace with all people, and even cooperated with them on mutually beneficial enterprises. However, he would not cross the line to allow peaceful coexistence and mutual respect compromise his calling. The only person worthy of Abraham's respectful submission was Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness. That earthly king must have had a reputation not merely as a good king, but a righteous king whose calling coincided with Abraham's. That explains why, of all the powerful people Abraham encountered, he was the only one to whom he gave tithes. Melchizedek's blessing indicates they shared a special connection with the One True God:

Blessed be Abram by *EI Elyon*,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and blessed be *EI Elyon*,
Who gave over your enemies into your hand.

Genesis 14:19-20 TLV

It was after that when the Creator renewed his call and promise to Abraham. After all those frustrating years, seemingly with nothing to show for their efforts, Abraham and Sarah were understandably discouraged. Yet, the One Who Called them was pleased enough with their progress that He transformed their calling into an irrevocable Covenant. The hard knocks of life, the difficult, hair-splitting decisions, and the pain they had suffered and caused had taught them wisdom, humility, compassion, and perseverance. They were no longer people who lorded over others, as the Gentiles do, but people who walked faithfully what they had been called and sent to do. That is why Abraham is the father of our faith. If, like him, we would be called the friends of God, then let us do likewise.