

July 9, 2006 AM

**THE GOSPEL OF ABRAM (PART 3):
THE BLESSING
GENESIS 12.1-5A**

B. “I will bless you” (2-3)

Built around the four (4) “blessing” statements in this text: “I will bless you,” “so that you will be” or “be a blessing,” “I will bless those who bless you and dishonor/curse those who curse you,” and “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

1. BLESSING IS LIFE - “I WILL BLESS YOU.”

Blessing as progeny and wealth: many point out that *blessing* has to do primarily with two things in Genesis and specifically in this word to Abram: (a) progeny (i.e., children) and (b) wealth.

Cf. Gen 26.12; also 26.29; Isaac is prosperous and this is “the blessing of the Lord.” (cf. also Prov 10.22)

As the history of Abram’s seed continues and expands into the nation of Israel, we continue to see blessing linked with material prosperity and progeny. E.g., Deut 7.13-14; also 28.1-14 (opposite of the curse).

Blessing in the big picture: Blessing = life lived as the image of God.

So, “I will bless you,” would mean something like “I will cause you to live as I intended man to live, namely as my image-bearer.”

Three aspects of bearing God’s image properly are (1) community, (2) fruitfulness, and (3) dominion. All of these begin and culminate in worship, indicated, not so incidentally, by the fact that God *blesses* the Sabbath day.

(1) *community* - it is not good for man to be alone (Gen 2.18); “Let us create man in *our* image” (Ge 1.26). God is a community.

Wrapped up in what it means for God to bless Abram—or what it means to live as God intends man to live—is for there to be a community. A multitude of people who live together as one, joined to the divine community.

(2) *fruitfulness* - Gen 1.28: God *blesses* the man and the woman and says to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ...” Blessing is associated with life being reproduced. cf. also Gen 9.1.

As God created and *filled* an unfilled world, so man is to reflect his God–image God—and fill the world. Life begets life in the image of God.

(3) *dominion* - God not only fills an unfilled world, he forms an unformed world. So man is to do the same thing by taking dominion over all the earth, something also connected to the blessing in Gen 1.28, “... and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Dominion presupposes fruitfulness. That is, in order for dominion to be taken, the man and the woman must be fruitful, spreading out to develop the earth.

This dominion aspect of the blessing encompasses prosperity in material things. That is, as man goes to develop the earth, the earth, by God’s blessing, will give “fruit” back to the man in many different forms.

All of this begins and ends in worship. This is evident from the fact that God *blesses* the Sabbath day. This does not mean that this is merely a good day. It brings in the *life* factor. Life will be found in the worship of God.

True life, therefore, is to live life in the way your Creator and Redeemer created and redeemed you to be. You are created and redeemed to live as the image of God. That is, as we will see, your purpose in life.

Blessed Abram?: remember that Sarai is barren (11.30). How will God accomplish this blessing through this man? How is Abram going to develop into a *community*, *be fruitful*, and *take dominion* if, as it appears, his line will end with him?

The important thing to see at this point is that the word of God is that God *will bless* Abram. It is his promise for the future, and Abram must live according to that promise; i.e., by faith.

2. BLESSING IS VOCATION - "BE A BLESSING"

For the life of the world: stands at the center of the seven-fold blessing. This is the focus.

Command or purpose? I am not certain that we need to make a hard-and-fast choice between command or purpose. Both are intimately related in the big scheme of things. Commands are always part of the purpose of our living life, and God's purposes for us are always imperatives. Both are so that we may live; i.e., real life, life as God intends it.

The purpose for which God blesses Abram is so that he might be a blessing. That is, Abram is given life so that he might bring life to the world. As we bear the image of God, life produces life. Life is fruitful.

Blessing, therefore, is not something that is simply consumed upon oneself. When it is (and Israel later learned this all too well) the blessing becomes a curse; i.e., it produces death.

The patriarchal blessing: This blessing that they pass on is the blessing of Abram. This is not merely a "good word" to the children; a kind of "I hope you do well." The fathers are passing on the privilege of being *the seed* through whom life would come to the world. The children are being given the privilege and the concomitant vocation of being a blessing.

3. BLESSING IS RELATIONAL - "I WILL BLESS THOSE WHO BLESS YOU AND DISHONOR/CURSE THOSE WHO CURSE YOU."

God will treat others with whom Abram comes in contact in accord with the way they treat Abram.

cf. e.g., Gen 12.10ff.; also Lot

God will give life to those who "bless" Abram; i.e., agree with him and not fight against him.

God will "pronounce curse" upon those who curse Abram; i.e., he will cut them off from life. God will destroy their community, cause them to be fruitless, and make their inhabited places a wasteland.

What is important to note at this point is that *the whole world will be shaped by how it relates to Abram and his seed. He and his seed will be the means of life and death for the world.*

4. BLESSING IS RESTORATIVE - "IN YOU ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED."

This is about restoring/re-creating humanity. And this concluding statement states it succinctly.

(a) *The exclusivity of Abram's seed - 'in you':* This privilege and vocation is given *only* to Abram's seed. The blessing will be found exclusively in and through Abram's seed.

(b) *The restoration of all humanity as humanity - "all the families of the earth/ground":* "families," God will work according to his created order. God will restore families as families in order to accomplish his larger purposes in the world. God has not abandoned the family the way he has created it. Sin has distorted it and brought it under the curse of death.

"Earth" = "ground" (*'adamah*) - Adam was created from the dust of *the ground*. This will be the restoration of humanity *as* humanity; it will not be "unearthly."

This does not mean that everyone, head-for-head, will participate in this restoration. Remember there are those will curse Abram and, thus, be cursed. Gordon Wenham: "Not every individual is promised blessing in Abram but every major group in the world will be blessed."

(c) *God will bring in nations as nations - families to nations:* Cf. 18.18; 22.18; 26.4; Mt 28.19

(d) *The vocation of Abram's seed - be a blessing:* cf. Gal 3.1ff.; blessing = life = Spirit

Applications: (1) Real life is only found in conformity to God's word.

Application: (2) Life is only found in Christ, Abraham's seed.

Application: (3) We have the Spirit.

Application: (4) Being blessed is a vocation.