

Blessed to Be a Blessing
Genesis 11:27-12:9, part two

[Play video of pat Robertson's comments regarding the Haitian earthquake.](#)

(Transcript) "They were under the heel of the French, you know Napoleon the third and whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said 'We will serve you if you will get us free from the prince.' True story. And so the devil said, 'Ok it's a deal.' And they kicked the French out. The Haitians revolted and got something themselves free. But ever since they have been cursed by one thing after another, desperately poor..."¹

Pat Robertson is taking some hits for this one. Everyone wonders about why these tragedies happen and Robertson just happens to always think out loud when the cameras are rolling. Wednesday morning Chris Eisermann reminded us that Jesus addressed the problem of evil and suffering in Luke 13. Jesus said, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." I explained this in detail after Hurricane Katrina and [the sermon is online](#) if you want to read it.

Not to pick on Pat Robertson this morning, but he made a speech about [why Christians should support the nation of Israel](#) and he presented the following as his primary reason for support. "We believe that God has a plan for this nation which he intends to be a blessing to all nations of the earth."²

Do you recognize where he developed this line of reasoning? It is lifted right off of the pages of Genesis chapter twelve that we began studying last week.

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.

²And 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.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

There are millions of evangelical Christians who hold the same position as Robertson. They believe that the U.S. should support Israel at all costs. They don't believe that any land should be given to the Palestinians. Many of these Christians take a much harder stance than conservative Jews living in Israel would adopt. Last week we focused on the second half of verse three, but the first half is held up as the leading reason for support for modern Israel. *I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse.* In other words, Robertson and others would argue, if the U.S. does not support the modern nation of Israel, God will send a curse down upon us, but if we do support Israel, God will bless us through them. Is this what this passage means? Does the Bible force us to hold to a particular political viewpoint in regard to the present day nation of Israel? If I don't hold to this position, will God curse me?

This is the classical evangelical interpretation of genesis 12. Let's seek to rightly understand this foundational Scripture and make sure that we are not interpreting this passage through the lens of a political party.

The best place to start is verse one. *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.* If Abram decides to follow the Lord's direction, would that be an example of his faith or his obedience? Many of you are likely to say 'both'. Obviously, if Abram does make the journey it would be an act of obedience, but it is obedience which is acting on faith. This is what it means to walk in faith. The object of our faith is God and because we trust his character and we trust his word, we must walk in obedience which is in line with our faith in him.

Take our annual budget for example. Last Sunday the members voted to approve the proposed budget. Some people voted 'no' on the budget and they had every right to do so. But even those who voted yes were not necessarily filled with absolute confidence. If we are to meet our expenses this next year, we need to take in \$18,000 more dollars than we did last year. In other words, the budget requires us to place our faith in the Lord for his provision. We had some healthy discussion among the elders as to whether this was faith or presumption. The problem is that it is not always easy to tell the difference between faith and presumption. Let me define both of them for you. Faith is acting on something that we know to be true and presumption is acting on something we know to be true. Even though we know that these two things are vastly different, on the surface they have the same definition.

So how do you tell the difference between faith and presumption? We had better make sure we get this right because we should want to exercise faith but we do not want to be presumptuous. The difference is not always a matter of size because our capital campaign proved that is true. Before we asked for pledges our annual budget was about \$85,000. The three years worth of pledges came in at \$200,000 which meant that over the following three years, our total giving would have to increase from \$85,000 to over \$150,000. Now if you had pulled me aside four years ago and said, "Rich, I think we should increase our budget from \$85,000 to \$150,000 for the next three years," I would have either made a doctor appointment for you or else tried to cast a demon from you. What would you have done as a congregation if the elders presented a budget like that? I think we would get a new crop of elders pretty fast. Yet here we are over two years into the three year pledges and we are way ahead of schedule. The size of the task is not always the difference between faith and presumption. It is possible that an expenditure of a million dollars would be a genuine act of faith but to spend \$5,000 would be presumptuous.

The reason that these two definitions appear the same is due to the fact that no one ever thinks they are being presumptuous. No one ever says, "I really don't think God wants me to do this, but I am going to do it anyway and call it faith. No one intentionally acts in a presumptuous manner because we think that the thing we are doing is what God wants us to do. Therefore, a complete definition of presumption would be acting on something we know to be true...but end up being wrong.

Now back to the budget—was asking for an increase of \$18,000 and act of faith or presumption? First, let's remember why the budget was increased. Except for a very small amount of wiggle

room, the budget was increased to pay for the building—the mortgage, utilities and maintenance. These are fixed costs over which we have little control. So the next question is this: was it God's will that we have this building? At every step in the process I believe that this was confirmed to be the will of God. The \$200,000 in pledges, the hundreds of volunteers from around the state, the unity that was expressed throughout the project—all of these things, despite our many challenges, all demonstrated that this project, by all appearances, was the will of God. Taking it one step further—if it was God's will that we build this facility, if he asked us to step out in faith, if he asked us to commit copious amounts of blood, sweat and tears—literally—then don't you think he will provide for us when it comes time to pay the bills? To conclude that the budget was presumptuous would mean that the building itself was presumptuous and outside the will of God. I don't mean to direct this only at the people who voted 'no' on the budget because everyone was challenged by the increase and many who are not members or who didn't vote may have thought that this was an act of presumption.

From a human perspective, as far as we can tell, when we built this facility it was an act of faith within the will of God. As it were, God asked us to leave our home, step out and faith and believe that he would provide what he said that he would provide. I certainly don't mean to claim that this is the Promised Land, but like Abram, it was an act of obedience based on faith in the Lord.

As a result of the budget discussion, a few people asked or implied that perhaps it was time to preach on money again. I have found that people who give like to hear sermons on giving and people who don't give don't like to hear them. Let me give you a few principles from 2 Corinthians 8-9.

1. Salvation Grace— precedes giving. We give as a response to saving faith in Christ, in response to his perfect gift of grace.
2. Storytelling—Corinth inspired Macedonia; Macedonia inspired Corinth
3. Pledge—Corinthians pledged before they gave. This doesn't mean that we must always use pledges, but that they are an acceptable means of encouraging giving.
4. Jesus—Supreme Example. This goes along with the first principle. Paul wrote in 2 Cor 8:9, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich*
5. Spiritual Principles
 - Extreme poverty overflows into rich generosity. The Macedonians were extremely poor believers, but nevertheless, “their extreme poverty welled up into rich generosity.”
 - Giving increases your faith. Many might claim that they don't have enough faith to give and they wished that they had more. That is missing the point. We don't only give out of faith, but when we give, it increases our faith.
 - Giving is a direct measure of your love.
 - You reap what you sow.

- Cheerful giving
 - Promise of blessing and rewards
 - Thanksgiving and Praise to God
6. Humiliation & Guilt—*“you would be ashamed”* This is the motivation that we tend to run away from when it comes to giving, yet Paul used this principle of shame and guilt to motivate his readers. Again, it should not be the primary motivator, but it is acceptable.
 7. Practical Benefits—*“service to the saints”*
 8. Written Reminders—a good portion of the letter of 2 Corinthians was written for the express purpose of reminding the believers to fulfill their prior pledges.
 9. Personal Reminders—Paul sent Titus and 2 brothers to collect the money that was pledged.
 10. Offering Collected—finally the offering was collected and delivered by Paul to Jerusalem

Let me make a few clarifications regarding giving. If you are not yet a Christian, then you are not under any obligation to give. Second, if you are new to Grace Church, then you also are under no obligation to give to our ministries. You may not know us well enough yet, you may not have developed trust in us, therefore, please don't feel obligated to give. As a means of discipleship, you should be giving generously to the Lord in some fashion, but it does not have to be our church. To the rest of the folks here this morning, you should be giving generously for all of the reasons I just briefly mentioned. If you are not giving generously and regularly, then that is an indication that there is something seriously wrong with your spiritual life.

Let's look again at what was promised to Abram.

²*And 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.

³*I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

⁷*“To your offspring I will give this land.*

When Abram left, he didn't have any of what was promised to him. In verse two he was promised a great name and a great nation and in verse seven he was promised a great land. It is common to point out that Abram did not have any of these three promises as God laid them out, but he wasn't exactly empty handed. First, Abram already had a land, the land of Ur of the Chaldeans in Babylon. He had a people back in the land. In fact, that is what God told him to leave—both his land and his people. He may not have had a “great name” at that point in time, but he was already becoming a wealthy man. Look at verse five. *And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan.* Abram had acquired people and he had accumulated possessions.

There are two primary things which will keep a person from trusting and following Christ. The first is that they don't feel they deserve forgiveness. This person has done things that they know were wrong and their shame keeps them from throwing themselves at the mercy of God. The second major barrier to faith is feeling that you don't need the Lord and the accumulation of possessions insulates a person from their need. We talked about this in the Wednesday morning men's study. If you have a freezer and cupboard full of food, why do you need the Lord? If you have a job that pays the bills, in what sense is God all that necessary? We don't need to have accumulated possessions to have no need of the Lord, we only need a full stomach and clothes on our back. We fail to see that it was God who provided the job so that you could work and earn money. It was the Lord who gave you the car so you could drive to work. God watered the crops so you could eat. He designed your body so that you could eat and breathe and he gave you every crumb of food and every last breath. There is nothing you have that did not come from the direct hand of the sovereign Lord of the universe. You can't blink your eyes, you can't stand up and sing, you can't walk out of here after the service. Without the preserving grace of God, you and I don't get one half of a heartbeat more in this life.

So it doesn't matter what Abram brought to the table, land, possessions and people, because everything he had was from the hand of the Lord and God was about to give him something much greater.

The Lord said to Abram: *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 him who dishonors you I will curse "To your offspring I will give this land.* The faith of Abraham is on display, but more than that, we see the sovereign choice and free mercy of God on display. Abram is no puppet. His choices are real choices, but God is calling the shots. People read the Bible and call it religion, but this is no man-centered religion. This story is not about what Abram did for God, but what God did for Abram.

Last week I showed you how the blessings given to Abram were the very gospel itself. In Galatians three, Paul wrote the God preached the gospel in advance to Abraham. But the gift of the gospel goes even deeper in this blessing to Abram. I will show you what Paul wrote later in Galatians chapter three, but first let me remind you of verse seven.

7 "To your offspring I will give this land. The fighting in the Middle east is all about the land, is it not? The Hebrew phrase for the land is "Haaretz." This happens to be the name of the leading newspaper in Israel—Haaretz. It's all about the land.

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HAARETZ

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Senior minister to Haaretz: Chances for renewing talks with PA are slim
 Analysis / Akiva Eklar



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu looking over Gaza's border with Egypt yesterday.

Less than a year after announcing the appointment of former Israeli Defense Minister George Mitchell as the special envoy to the Middle East, the government's stance on the Palestinian Authority remains unchanged, according to a senior Israeli official. Mitchell's presence in the region is seen as a sign of the government's commitment to the peace process, but the official said the chances of a breakthrough in the negotiations are slim. In an interview with "The Magnifier" magazine, the official said that the government is not willing to make the concessions necessary to renew the peace process. A senior minister told "The Magnifier" that the chances of a breakthrough are slim. According to the minister, Mitchell's presence in the region is seen as a sign of the government's commitment to the peace process, but the chances of a breakthrough are slim. Mitchell's presence in the region is seen as a sign of the government's commitment to the peace process, but the chances of a breakthrough are slim.

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offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

Let's stop and make sure we understand this verse. The land was promised to Abram's offspring, his future descendants. The land was given to them by divine fiat. It belonged to the people, yet here is Paul saying that the offspring of Abram was Jesus Christ. Is Paul claiming that the land never belonged to the Israelites? Does this somehow invalidate the promise to Abram and the conquest under Joshua and the kingdom under David and the return to the land under Zerubbabel? This does not invalidate any of those promises but it does fulfill them in a greater way. Just as the blessing given to them was the gift of the gospel, so their inheritance was ultimately the person of Jesus Christ. Salvation comes by faith in Christ alone, through "the seed". In other words, these blessings given to Abram was another way of Jesus words, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Now, if we go back to the speech by Pat Robertson, we hear his unilateral support for Israel. "If a Palestinian state is created in the heart of Israel...the ability of the state of Israel to defend itself will be fatally compromised." And a little later in the speech: "For you are the living witnesses that the promises of the Sovereign Lord are true. He will be with you and so will your evangelical friends." Robertson only believes what millions of evangelicals believe—Israel must stay in the land because God promised it to them. But ultimately, it's not about the land—it's about Christ. Moreover, will God bless a nation of secular, unbelieving Jews just because they are occupying the land? More importantly, Robertson missed a perfect opportunity to witness to the people of Israel in regard to their true need for Christ. Their true inheritance is not the land itself, the "offspring," the "seed" who is Christ. They must turn to Christ if they want blessings from God and not his wrath.

It's not the material blessings. Israel was blessed with the gospel so that we could believe the gospel. And we are given the gospel so that we can give it to others.

Rich Maurer
January 24, 2009

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2010/01/13/crimesider/entry6092717.shtml>

² <http://www.patrobertson.com/Speeches/IsraelLauder.asp>