

Understanding God's Sovereign Purpose

Genesis 11:27-32

Text Intro: “toledot” formula; meaning of “patriarch” and “patriarchal”

Sermon Intro: Maps and the way we use them. Maps vs. directions; I really dislike being given directions as I drive; I like knowing where I'm going and how to get there.

God has a purpose!

I. God has a purpose so look to him (11:27a; cf. Josh 24:2).

Explanation: Terah's name may be derived from the word meaning “moon.” Sarai's and Milcah's names, “princess” and “queen,” (in v. 29) refer to the daughter and wife, respectively, of the moon god. These facts coupled with their residence in Ur and later resettlement to Haran, both centers of the moon-god cult, imply that they were worshippers of the moon-god, Sin.

Application: God's sovereign purpose overrules religious and family ties. Abram's family is only one of tens of thousands of the world at that time, and yet God finds him and extends his gracious promise to him. Terah's family was steeped in pagan idolatry, but God's sovereign purpose finds Abram and God reveals himself to Abram. Later evidence from the Abraham narrative point out Abram's abandonment of the religious upbringing and outlook of his family, and devotion to God alone.

Josh. 24:2ff. explains that Abram's father and family worshipped other gods, but God “took” him (the same word used here in vv. 29, 31) and led him into a land of promise. This involved abandoning those things that he not only found comfort in, but that he held dear. This forced Abram to trust in God's purpose.

II. God has a purpose so hope in him (11:27b-30).

Explanation: Nahor marries his deceased brother's wife, Milcah, who bears him eight sons, one of whom is Bethuel, the father of Laban and Rebekah. Sarai was actually Abram's half-sister (they had the same father, Terah, but different mothers); there was no law or taboo against this in patriarchal times. Sarai is “barren,” which signifies the hopelessness of their future (childlessness had practical ramifications that would impact a person's future survival).

Application: God's sovereign purpose gives hope. Hopelessness is evident in several aspect of this story: the orphans (11:29), the barrenness of Sarai; Terah dies in a strange land, neither his birth-land nor the land of Abram's promise. God's call gives hope. Sarai's infertility emphasizes the fact of God's sovereignty and grace as beyond human imagination and conception. Sarah will bear children by supernatural means through faith.

III. God has a purpose so wait for him (11:30; John 1:13).

Explanation: That Sarai was “barren” is to signify the hopelessness of their future (childlessness had practical ramifications that would impact a person's future survival). This also is what tests their faith and drives the narrative. This theme of God's purpose overcoming barrenness is a prominent recurring theme (cf. Isa. 54:1) in the OT, played out in the lives of Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah, and foreshadows the virgin birth (Lk. 1:26-38). Each of these women must actively commit themselves to God's purpose of grace.

Application: God's sovereign purpose brings life. Out of this hopelessness and barrenness, God will bring new life that is not of the will of man but of the will of God (cf. John 1:13). This must come, however, in God's time. God's time is always the right time because he has a purpose for his children. It seems we often grow quickly only in times of great adversity, often renewal and growth takes a long time. We must wait for god to do his work and pray and remain faithful while waiting for him. He will do as he has promised, but he does not promise to do it when we demand it.

IV. God has a purpose so trust in him (11:31; Heb. 11:8-10; cf. Acts 7:2-5).

Explanation: Since the word translated “country” in 12:1 is the same word translated “native land” or “land of his nativity” in 11:28, the call apparently came to Abram while still in Ur (cf. 15:7; Neh.9:7; Acts 7:2-4) but when Abram leaves Ur, it is the result of a family decision rather than a direct response to God's call. This foreshadows the departure of God's people in Israel's history who longed to travel to the Promised Land from the land of the Chaldeans.

Abram also does not leave for Canaan until after his father's death. Haran is 550 NW of Ur, close to the modern border of Syria and Turkey. It, too, was an important center of moon worship.

Application: God's sovereign purpose demands faith. It would be nice to know right up front where God is going and what his plans are, but he doesn't tell us in advance, he asks us to trust him. In this we are to be like our father Abraham. In Acts 7:5, Stephen preaches and mentions the uncertainty of Abraham's possession of the Land of Promise, "...God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him." The writer of Hebrews says that Abraham's faithfulness despite not possessing the Land Promised to him was a sign of great faith (11:8-10) "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God."

Conclusion: Some today think that the focus on the Judeo-Christian history of the western world is a result of the winners writing history and they think we are arrogant for focusing on the history of Israel and God's people. But this focus is not the result of arrogance on our part, it a response to the purpose and plan of God who chose Abraham and made his descendants the ones through whom the blessing of God would come upon all humanity.