



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 11:10 – 12:5

“The Call of Abram: Election, Calling and Perseverance”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading is in the 11th chapter of the Book of Genesis. We are beginning at verse 10 and reading through 12 and verse 5. We come again to one of the genealogical sections, but as you study these genealogies, you gain the impression that the Holy Spirit considers them to be extremely important, and the obvious, first importance of them is to give us a scriptural record of the land from which the seed of our Lord Jesus Christ shall come.

Now, we had in Chapter 10 reference made to Shem and his descendants through Arpachshad, but there the land was stopped with the birth of Peleg and Joktan, and then Joktan's descendants are given and Peleg's are not. And this is reserved for Chapter 11 because now in Chapter 11, we're going to see the lands raised to Abraham, who is the most important man of the series of names that we're going to read now.

The 10 verse of Chapter 11 reads,

“These are the records of the generations of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old and became the father of Arpachshad, two years after the flood; And Shem lived 500 years after he became the father of Arpachshad and he had other sons and daughters. And Arpachshad lived 35 years and became the father of Shelah. And Arpachshad lived

403 years after he became the father of Shelah and he had other sons and daughters. And Shelah lived 30 years and became the father of Eber. (Eber is related to the term Hebrew from. In fact, we get that term from this particular word.) And Shelah lived 403 years after he became the father of Eber and he had other sons and daughters. Eber lived 34 years and became the father of Peleg, and Eber lived 430 years after he became the father of Peleg and he and other sons and daughters. And Peleg lived 30 years and became the father of Reu, and Peleg lived 209 years after he became the father of Reu and he had other sons and daughters. And Reu lived 32 years and became the father of Serug. And Reu lived 207 years after he became the father of Serug and he had other sons and daughters. And Serug lived 30 years and became the father of Nahor. And Serug lived 200 years after he became the father of Nahor and he had other sons and daughters. And Nahor lived 29 years and became the father of Terah.

Incidentally, the term Terah, the name of Abram's father, is related to the word in Hebrew for moon. And it is we know from archaeological discovery, it is the god Nannar or the moon god that Terah and Abram, and others worshiped in Ur of the Chaldeans, and so there is a definite connection between the name reflective of the fact that by this time the line of the seed had become influenced by the Hamites in the southern part of Mesopotamia, and had actually begun to worship other gods.

Now, that is specifically stated in the Book of Joshua, so we are not just simply surmising this from the name Terah. Verse 26,

“And Terah lived 70 years and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot.”

You can notice by the way from that 26 to the 27 verses, in the repetition of names that we have here probably another document that Moses had at his disposal, and which he used to construct the genealogies that we have here. Probably, these genealogies were maintained by the leading characters. Shem, for example, probably kept records, and then also probably Terah is responsible for part of the genealogy as well. Verse 28,

“And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. (Some have thought that, that Iscah is Sarai. But that's unlikely.)

“And Sarai was barren, she had no child. (Now that will become an exceedingly important fact, and it's inserted here in this earlier part in order to lay stress right at the beginning upon that fact.) And Terah took Abram, his son, and Lot, the son of Haran his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan, and they went as far as Haran and settled there.”

Haran was to the north and east of the land of Palestine or the land of Canaan. If Ur of the Chaldeans is the southern Ur located near the Persian Gulf, now probably at one time on the Persian Gulf, then the journey that they took from Ur of the Chaldeans would have been to the north and to the east to Haran, and then down to the south and west into the land of Canaan. Others have thought that perhaps the Ur of the Chaldeans mentioned here since the Chaldeans were located not only in the north, not only in the south, but also on the north may well have been a city by the same name to the east and north of the city of Haran. That would make much more sense for the way they

journeyed rather than to journey out of the way and then down, and furthermore, it would agree with the fact that it is stated that the fathers worshipped other god's beyond the river, beyond the river Euphrates, and that would be beyond the river from a place east and north of Haran, but it would not be beyond the river from the land of Canaan, if they were in southern Ur.

Now, these are questions that do not affect the truthfulness of the narrative and are mentioned only because later on certain statements and Scripture would lend support to that latter hypothesis which has not yet been proven. Verse 31,

“Aand Terah took Abram, his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan, and they went as far as Haran and settled there. And the days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

There is also a little bit of dispute over that particular text and again it's not relevant for the exposition this morning, and so we will not go into it. Chapter 12, Verse 1,

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’

“So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions, which they had accumulated,

and the persons, which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.

I like the way the Authorized Version renders this a little better, because stress is made up has given to the fact that they set out for Canaan, and it was to Canaan that they came. They set out for the land of Canaan and to the land of Canaan, they came. May God bless this reading of his word.

Our topic for today in the continued exposition of the Book of Genesis is the call of Abram or election, effectual calling and final perseverance. It is difficult to find a merely human character who plays a more important part in the Bible than Abram, the patriarch. In the New Testament, Abram is the great example of faith. In the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews when we have that long string of names who are designed to exemplify faith, the greatest space is devoted to the life of Abram. It would seem as if the author of that epistle regarded him as the extreme example of faith.

When the Apostle Paul discusses the doctrine of justification by faith in the Epistle to the Romans, and in Epistle to the Hebrews, and illustrating that we are justified not by works of righteousness, which we have done but by faith, he calls upon Abraham as an illustration of the means of or method by which we come to the knowledge of our great God in heaven. So it would appear that for Paul, the clearest illustration of how a man becomes just before God is found in the life of Abram, who was called by God to look up and observe the stars of the heavens and who believed and whom it was said that, he believed in the Lord and it was imputed to him for righteousness, justification.

And furthermore, in the Epistle to the Galatians in Chapter 3, Verse 7 and in Chapter 3, Verse 29, it is stated that all believers in the present age are sons of Abraham. So it's a pleasure to address so many of you this morning who are sons of Abraham. You probably won't be surprised if I were to look at you and say that you are a son of Abraham, because we're not used to thinking of ourselves in that way.

The Bible, however, does not call us sons of Jacob or sons of Isaac. But it does call us sons of Abraham, for Abraham was a Gentile, called from the Gentile land and through him there developed Israel. Of course, with Jacob, his grandson, being the great exemplar of Israel. The man who led me to the Lord used to like to speak about Abram as being the greatest human character in the Bible. And he would frequently say that when we turned to the New Testament, it's remarkable how many times Abraham's name occurs there.

For example, probably, if you will count this out for yourself, you probably find it to be true, he used to say that Abram's name in the New Testament stands fourth behind Paul, behind Peter, and behind John, the Baptist. In other words, the number of the apostles who names do not occur nearly so many times as the names of Abraham. Our Lord Jesus himself has about a dozen references to Abraham in the things that he said that are recorded in our gospels.

So Abram is obviously an extremely important character. If every man qualified to be a saint of the Church, it would seem to be Abraham. If we could ever think of a person who is canonized as a saint, well, Abraham should stand right there as one of the saints. And in the light of that, it becomes a rather interesting thing to notice that on the only occasion we know of, when Abraham might have made an impression by reason of his good works for someone in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, then Abraham informs the Rich Man that he can do nothing for him. But if he does not pay attention to Moses, then there is nothing that can be done for him, which is rather interesting and hardly suggests sainthood. Well, I think of course that the true thing that we should derive from that is that there is no such thing as a saint of the church canonized by a religious organization. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are called, in the Bible, saints.

Abraham was an unusual character and an extremely important character. You notice also, if you have been following along in the exposition of the Book of Genesis that when we reach chapter 12, the tone of the narrative changes. Up to this time, we've

been dealing with cosmic interests. We have been talking about the creation. We have been talking about the fall, the fall of all men. We have been talking about the flood where all men, but eight souls, perished. And then we have spoken about the Tower of Babel, which became the center of the population of the earth at that time. But now, God's interest turns from the cosmic interest to a particular interest.

Two centuries have passed since the time of the Tower of Babel. Now, God's plans are still on schedule. He has not changed his plans at all, but his plans now focus on a man, and a nation that shall arise from this man. So, from this time on, the emphasis of the Bible will move from the cosmic to the particular, and we shall see the Lord dealing with humanity through the Nation Israel and right here of course, he is interested in the head of Abram. The characteristic words that become important from Genesis Chapter 12 on though they have been mentioned previously are the words, covenant. We will deal with the covenant given to Abraham in our next study in Genesis, “Seed and Land.”

And I must confess I've been looking forward to the study of these 12 or so chapters of the Book of Genesis that have to do with the life of Abraham, partially because he is the great example of faith. And so, in the lessons that will be given, you will notice that our attention will be directed to some of the principles that have to do with our own spiritual life, because these all occur in the life of Abram and we will find some of the important principles that we as believers today need to learn. They would be manifested in the life of Abram and we will give attention to them.

I think that these chapters are some of the most suspense filled narratives and Scripture to use an expression that another commentator has used. There is romance, there is political intrigue, there is war, there is spiritual defeat and there is spiritual victory. And they are before us in these chapters, which are in some ways very simple chapters and yet they contain also some rather complex theological questions.

Let's look now for a few moments at the background of Abram's call, because this morning we wanted to deal with the theology of the call of Abraham primarily. Just a few

minor points to be noticed. In the 11th chapter, Moses is interested in tracing the line of Shem through Arpachshad, Eber, Peleg, Terah in order to come to Abraham, and you've noticed, no doubt as you read these names in chapter 11, that the ages of the individuals are now decreasing. They're not living to be 800 years old or 900 years old as we saw in the fifth chapter of the Book of Genesis and in the genealogy layer. But now, we are seeing that as the years of generations pass, the ages continued to decrease until finally Abram's life, which seems to us rather long is only 175 years. And soon men will be living to be the same approximate age that we ourselves live today.

We have often wondered about that no doubt. It's really not too important since our information is so skimpy over that particular scientific fact, but some who believe that there was a vapor canopy over the earth before the flood, which was not there after the flood have suggested that the radiation filtering vapor canopy had dissipated and therefore, the effects of the radiation are seen in the decreasing of the ages of the men on the earth. Genetic and somatic mutations were increasing significantly and the somatic mutations increased the aging process. There may have also been other influences such as environment, the ruggedness of the environment outside the Garden of Eden was now making itself manifest and the total effect is our decreasing age. You notice that as you read along.

I need to say just a word about the city of Ur because there is some, I think, misunderstanding about the nature of the place from which Abram came. If Abram was called from Ur of the Chaldeans and southern Mesopotamia, and near the Persian Gulf, many archaeologists believe that one time Ur was actually on the Persian Gulf. But if Abram came from that place, then he came from a highly civilized place. That city was an extremely highly civilized city. It had a great library, there are things that have been discovered by the archaeologists that puzzles some of the finest minds for a considerable time. Some of the mathematical problems on which they were working were a puzzle to mathematical minds since the time when they were discovered. So, we are not to think of

Abram as having come out of a hick town and having been called to this wild place to the north to Canaan.

But he came from a very civilized place where they have evidently a very developed version. They worshiped Nannar, the Moon God. And in fact, Terah's name was related to it, maybe his name was something like "moony." I don't know. But at any rate, there is a relationship there and Joshua what tells us in chapter 24 and Verse 2 that their father, he was speaking to the Hebrews, their fathers lived on the other side of the river, the river Euphrates and they worshiped other gods.

And then in the Book of Isaiah, it is said that Abram was called from the hole of the pit. So, the picture that we are to get of Abram then, is of a person who lived in a very highly civilized community, but at the same time, under the influence of the Hamites, the Shemite family or Semitic family had become influenced by them and had apparently fallen prey to their gods. It's a warning to us as Christians, that if we spend all of our time in the company of the unbelievers, it is inevitable that sooner or where do we shall be influenced by them. It is true that the snare of the world is something that may catch all of us.

Now, of course we are called to be in the world, we are not called to be completely out of the world, but we are called to be in the world and yet at the same time, not of the world. Evidently Abram's ancestors had fallen prey to the influence of the world. The ancestry of Abram is mentioned in Joshua 24, in verse 2 and you see from this that the powers of sin affect even the elect learn, for here is Abram and Terah serving other gods. The Call of Abraham introduces us to some interesting questions. Now, I'm going to assume for the sake of this exposition, but Abram did go up in southern Ur in Mesopotamia. We do not have definite information of another Ur to the north, so we will say that he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans in southern Mesopotamia. It was there that God spoke to Abram. We read of this in the Book of Acts through the speech that Stephen delivered to the Counsel.

In Acts, chapter 7 and verse 2 through verse 4, Stephen standing before the council reminds them of the way in which the history of the nation began. He said, "Hear me brethren and fathers," the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran and said to him, 'Depart from your country and from your relatives and come into the land that I will show you.' So, Abram's experience of the Lord God began in the midst of the adultery, in the midst of the service of other Gods and Ur of the Chaldeans. And it came through the appearance of God.

And whether God spoke audibly to Abram, whether he spoke to both Abram and Terah, these are questions that are of minor importance. He did appear and he appeared to Terah and Abraham or to Abram and at least it is clear from the narrative, but he primarily had in mind Abram and he gave them a specific message, which they understood and that message was that they were to leave their family, they were to leave their place of domicile and they were to go out to a land of that the Lord God would show them.

The writer of the epistle of the Hebrews says they obeyed and they went out, Abram and those with him, not knowing where they were going. This is the same kind of call that in essence comes to every Christian believer, it's the same call that came to Elijah separated him from the little place of Tishbe for the work that God had called him to do, and Elijah the Tishbite was a man who had experienced the call of God. It's the same call that came to Amos in Tekoa and called him from that in order to minister to his people. It's the same call that came to the Apostle Peter in the midst of his fishing nets and called him for the worldwide ministry, which the Lord gave him. It's the same call that came to Mathew and separated him from his tables at which he was collecting taxes from his people. And it's the same call that came to the Augustinian monk in the Erfurt, Martin Luther, and called him to the ministry of the Reformation.

And let me also say this, my dear Christian friends, it is the same call in essence that comes to every Christian believer. Every single believer who has come to faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ has a similar call by which God has spoken immediately through the Holy Spirit to his inmost being revealed to him, his lost condition revealed to him, the saving work of Christ brought him to put his trust and the Lord Jesus transformed him by giving him new life and has called him to the service of the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And from that moment on, every believer is different, he has a new life implanted within him and there is an unbreakable wall that now separates him from the world in which he lives as a witness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you have that assurance of the call of the Holy Spirit to you, to Christian disciples here? If you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you know precisely what I'm speaking about. You have come to know him and you have been transformed by the new birth and you are different, and will be different throughout the ages of eternity. Abram obeyed, that was the product of the saving work of God in him.

There some evidence of some incomplete obedience. We shall speak about this in the some of the later messages, but he did obey and left Ur of the Chaldeans on the way to the land that God had called him to. Now, I think the full significance of what happened to Abram is not given to us in detail in the Old Testament. It's really in the New Testament that we learn the full significance of the call of Abraham and I want to speak to you in the remaining part of our time on things that were true of Abram and which find their full exposition in the New Testament. And the first is the call of Abraham and divine election.

It is fundamental to me to an understanding of the meaning of Abraham's life and also fundamental to the understanding of the meaning of Israel and fundamental through the understanding of the meaning of our lives to understand the major of the divine election, because Abram was the product of divine election. The Scriptures say that he -- it was from the hole of the pit that Abram came. The Scriptures say that our forefathers, that is Terah and his family, including Abraham lived and ruled the Chaldeans and

worshipped other gods. So, the family of Abram were not a faithful family. They were not believers, they were worshiping other gods, they were literally in the hole of the pit and Scriptures say that the God of Glory appeared to Abram when he was in the hole of the pit serving other Gods in southern Mesopotamia.

That means that it's quite clear from the Bible and this is stressed over and over and over again, that Abram and Jacob and Isaac and Israel were all the products of the election of God. Let us say the word. It is a good biblical word, "The Election of God." I know only three alternatives, if we are to think about the ground upon which God elects. I know this is a very, very difficult doctrine for some. I know also it is a very, very displeasing doctrine to some who say and who really perhaps believe that they are Christians.

It's not very easy to speak about the doctrine of election because, in an audience such as this, I am sure that there are some of you that really deep down within are repelled by the idea of an election of God. In fact, you are so repelled by it that you seek to find some explanation of it that may recover for you some shred of self-righteousness upon which God has based his election. So, I realize that and I realize that there are some that probably this morning will be repelled by what I say.

I want to appeal to you, I want to appeal to you to study the Scriptures, I want to appeal to you to read them, I want you to say, "Well, Dr. Johnson, I don't agree with what he says, but I am going home to study the Bible." If you would do that it wouldn't be long before you be coming and saying Dr. Johnson, you are right." Because it is there, it is there, election by the sovereign grace of God is there. And if you're under the divine revelation, you must come to that view, you must. It is there and it is not only there, it is there throughout the Bible. From the beginning on through to the end.

Now, I say there are only three grounds upon which God may elect. First, he may elect those that are a good. And there are some who have thought that it is surely in harmony with the God that we would know that he would elect the good and reject the

bad. Now, of course you don't have to be much of a student of the Bible to know that, that is not what the Bible says.

For the Bible says with reference to your salvation and those that are saved are the products of election. The Bible says, "For by Grace, are you saved through faith." And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man boast." If it were true that God elected the good and rejected the bad, then all of us who are elect would be the good people, and the others would be the bad and we would have reason for boasting before God. But that is thoroughly -- that is thoroughly opposed to the teaching of the word of God. So I think, in a company like this in which I am sure that probably the majority of you are believers, you reject that out of hand because you've studied the Bible enough to know that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done that he has saved us, but according to his mercy. So, we reject that.

And let's talk now for a moment about our view that prevails among many Christians. And this view is that God elects those whom he foresees, will believe in Jesus Christ. And so, we have a picture of God who looks down through the centuries and he foresees before it comes to pass in time that certain people will believe in the Lord Jesus and so, he chooses them.

Now, that is the Armenian view of election, election according to foreseen faith. It is very popular in evangelicalism. I would say that just as a guess that 90% of evangelicals accept that doctrine of election. Maybe my percentages are wrong but, nevertheless, it is the generally -- it is the view that prevails in evangelicalism. Now, evangelicalism today, it did not prevail in evangelicalism earlier, it did not prevail in the days of the Reformation, but it does prevail now, as a result of the Arminian influence which arose in the 17th Century. Well, let's analyze that for a moment. If God did look down through the years and we are accepting the doctrine that men are under sinned and that they are depraved in the totality of their being, what would God see as he looked down through

the centuries that were to come? Would he see men believing in Jesus Christ? No. He wouldn't see men believing in Jesus Christ.

If men are lost and if men are sinners, and if men are depraved, and if every thought of their minds, and every action that they perform is contrary to the word of God, what he would see down through the ages is, men rejecting Jesus Christ. That would be what he would see. He would never see belief because the Scriptures say, "They that are in the flesh, cannot please God," the Bible says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." So you see, if God looked down through the years, he would never see anybody believe, apart from divine enablement and influence.

Furthermore, let's suppose that God does look down through the years and he sees that some people believe. Let's say, that he looked down through the years and he saw that Lewis Johnson would believe. Well, I can imagine him saying, "Goody, goody, he will believe, I will elect him." But now, wait a minute. We read in the Bible that the God of the Bible knows everything. He is omniscient. But if the God of the Bible is omniscient, how can he learn by looking down through the years that I'll believe. He would be increasing in knowledge. Before he looked, he would not have the information that he has after he has looked. He would not be the sovereign, omniscient God, if he is able to learn by looking down through the years that I would believe. It's obvious that, that view is dishonoring to the omniscience of God.

Furthermore, if this faith arises out of myself and I am able to produce something in myself that pleases God, for faith pleases God. Well, that is dishonoring to the Grace of God. It says in effect that God and I are the product of saving process. It is God who saves, it is I who believe. And so, he and I shake hands together, we have done a good job, the two of us.

As a matter of fact, that election is not the election of God at all. That's the election of man. He only ratifies my election of him. Election is no longer the election of

God; it's the election of the man who out of his own free will at a point in time responds to the gospel message of his own free will. So, there is something within me that is pleasing to God. And yet the Bible says, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." So, it is clear that the doctrine that God elects by foreseen faith is dishonoring to the grace of God and it is dishonoring also to what the Bible says about the nature of man.

What does the Bible say? Well, I think the Bible says that, "God elects those whom he has purposed to save through faith." Whom he has purposed to save through faith. God elects men according to his good pleasure. You know the words the reason for election is not in man. The reason for our election is in God, it is grounded in God. Now, in order to talk about the negative, for just a moment or two. The Bible specifically says that the election of God is not grounded in man's will. That is what our Arminian friends say. It is grounded in the activity of the human will.

But listen to the Apostle Paul. We don't have the time to talk about all of the mass of Scripture that has to do with this point, if we did, we would be here until the second coming. There is literally that much in the Bible. Even such simple statements as, "No man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Spirit." It is an acknowledgement of the fact that man cannot of his free will respond. No man calls Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. What does the Bible say, I will give you one text. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." "It is not of him that willeth." Our election is not based upon the exercise of our will.

Now, we're not saying we don't have a will and we're not saying that we don't exercise our wills, we are just saying that when we exercise our wills, it is because God has jiggled our will ahead of time, that's what we're seeing. That's what the Bible says. That's what the Bible says about the Christian life. Listen to what Scripture says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is God who works in our wills to do off his good pleasure.

Now, the Bible also says, not only is our election not grounded in man's will, it is not grounded in human works. In 2 Timothy, chapter 1 and verse 9, the apostle says, "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our words but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted to us *when we believed*." No, not when we believed. There are some who believe that we are elect when we believe. No, no. No, no, we are elect from ages past and we believe because we weren't elect from ages past. Paul says, "According to his own purpose in Grace, which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, from ages past." The Bible also says that the choice is God's choice of us and not our choice of him. We love him because he first loved us. So, the election of God is grounded in the good pleasure of God, as Paul says in Ephesians, chapter 1 in verse 5.

Faith, my dear Christian friend is not the ground of our election, it is the effect, it is the fruit of our election. We do not -- we are not elected because we believe, we believe because we have been elected. Please get that in your minds. We do not -- we are not elected because we believed. We believed because we have been elected. God thinks us to faith, we could not come were it not for that. One final text, that I could talk forever on this, I enjoy this. "No man can come to me," Jesus said, "except the Father which has sent me draw him" No man can come to me of his own free will. "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And that's what we mean when we say, election is unconditional. It is grounded in the good pleasure of God.

I don't know why Lewis Johnson is chosen and why Bill Duke, the son of Mishite, of the Mishites was rejected -- I don't know Bill Duke, the son of Mishites, I just made that up -- but I don't know why I am elected and Bill Duke is not. That's something I cannot understand, that's something that stands in the sovereign good purpose of God. I do not understand how I love and why I love and I'm sure that if you have loved, you do not understand the rational basis of your love. Love is sovereign in its very nature. The

stanza is true, "Never had he felt the guilt of sin, nor the sweets of pardoning love, unless your worthless names had been enrolled to life above."

Now, election is a thrilling doctrine. If you have been repelled by what the Bible teaches, about election, you're missing one of the great things in the word of God. And it is our Lord Jesus Christ who calls upon us to rejoice in election. He said, "Rejoice, that your names are written above." Rejoice, rejoice in the divine election. That's enough to make a Presbyterian shout, "Hallelujah," outside of this congregation of course. [Laughter]

Now, I call upon you for one more thing. I have not tried to offend you, I just cannot help but tell you what I love because this doctrine means a great deal to me. It's actually the ground upon which I stand before you today, as a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not because of anything in me, but it is because of the sovereign good pleasure of God, and why he should stoop and save me is a constant puzzlement to me. And as the years and generations go by, I must confess my puzzlement increases.

But I do love this doctrine and I just suggest to you this one thing that you go to the Bible. Don't believe anything in the Bible because I tell you and if you believe in something that I have taught you, it is because the Holy Spirit has brought it home to your heart, I hope. But study the Scriptures and see if what I have said is there, that I do believe if you will study and see what is there, you will come and you will say, "Dr. Johnson, you and Paul were right."

There is a story which I may conclude this section with. Charles II, had some philosophers around him once. This illustrates the importance of knowing facts. He said now, "I want to put before your minds two pails of water." He said, "Why is it that when you put a fish in this pail of water, the pail of water weighs the same thing as the other pail?" Well, the philosophers puzzled for a few moments and then they started giving theories. Why it was that this pail of water with the fish in it weighed the same as this pail of water that did not have the fish in it? And after they had given a number of their philosophical explanations of why this may be true, he then said, "It's not true." This pail

weighs more than this pail and the exact amount of weight, is the weight of that fish which we have put in it. Well, it illustrates the important point of asking, is it a fact, before asking why. And so, I just ask you to go to the Bible and look and see if election is not unconditional, grounded in a sovereign God whose will determines what is right.

Now, I know that there are some in the audience, it has to be, I don't know you, but I just know it has to be because it is apostolic that when this kind of doctrine is spoken about, there has to be of objection to it. The Apostle Paul preached and when he preached his doctrine of election, he received certain types of objections. He had them so often he could anticipate them. So, when he said, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated," citing Scripture, he then said, "What shall we say. There is no injustice with God, is there?" Because you see when we read in the Bible, "Jacob, have I loved, Esau have I hated," they would say God is unjust. There is something within the old man that rises up and says, "God is unjust." And there are people who wonder, "How is it that God could hate Esau?"

Really what they ought to wonder about is, how he could love Jacob? He could hate both of them, that would make sense, but he has loved Jacob. That's the problem, but the man who is objecting, he is looking at the wrong problem. And after the apostle answers the question, then they say, he says, "You will say to me then, why does he still find fault for who has resisted his will." There will be people who'll say, "Well, that means we don't have any responsibility before God, if he has elected sovereignly." You see the kind of doctrine, the apostle preached is the kind of doctrine that raised those objections by the natural man. And he went on to point out that it is the will of God that is the standard of what is right and the standard of what is wrong. And it is his will that we must follow as set forth in the word of God. We cannot resist the will of God, that is true. And what he wills is right. You see he is the final standard of what is right and

wrong and his will is the expression of it. And if he wills to do this to elect on the basis of sovereign grace, it is right. It is right.

Oh, maybe we will not find out all the angles that come into our minds affected Noahetically by sin, because we cannot reason yet as we show reason in heaven, but it is nevertheless right. He laid his hand upon Abram, he did not lay his hand upon Joktan, he did not lay his hand upon Esau, he did not lay his hand upon Ishmael, he laid his hand upon Abram, upon Isaac, upon Jacob, and Sovereign Grace and it was right. And he has laid his hand upon you, and he has laid his hand upon me, and so rejoice in what he has done.

Now, Abraham's call also illustrates effectual grace, there is no need for my expanding this. You can read this in the lesson study that I have given. This is not something unique. I am not giving you a doctrine that is new. I am giving you the doctrine of the reformers. I am giving you the doctrine of those who have been the blessing of the Christian church down through the centuries. The trouble is that the evangelical church has strayed in these matters. It is not that we're giving you unique doctrine, this is the doctrine of Calvin, it is the doctrine of Luther, he believed in unconditional election. The Lutheran Reformation and the Calvinist rReformation voted the same way in this particular thing. So, this is the doctrine of the reformers, it was the doctrine of Augustine and of course, it was the doctrine of Paul.

The Westminster Larger Catechism says concerning effectual calling, "Effectual calling is the work of Gods almighty power and grace whereby out of his free and a special love to his elect and from nothing in them moving him thereunto, he doth in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ by his word, and spirit, savingly enlightening their minds, renewingly and powerfully determining their wills, so that they although in themselves dead in sin are hereby made willing and able (he jiggled their willer, see) freely to answer this call and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed there in."

That is what happened to Abram. That's exactly what happened to Abram. God spoke to him. He divinely applied and enforced the message that he had for Abram, he consummated his purpose when he spoke to this man in the hole of the pit and brought him out of it and set him up on the solid rock. He spoke to him personally through the word and through the spirit. He brought him to the fruit by the fact that he led Abram into faith and obedience and Abram responded. He separated him from the Hamites in the south and ultimately separated him from the unbelievers and made him a beautiful illustration of every Christian who lives a separated life, separated from the world. In the world, not of the world, we shall never be.

We are different and that is essentially the Christians position. And every one of us who has been brought the faith in Christ, we may be brought kicking and screaming into the knowledge of the grace of God but nevertheless, we have been the results of the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, the drawing of the father.

About seven or eight years ago, I was standing right down here teaching the doctrine of effectual grace for two weeks, an hour each night in the systematic theology series. We had one young lady, a married young lady in the congregation who was struggling and kind of resisting this teaching. And we had an animated conversation after the first lecture and then after the second lecture, she rushed up again and this time she was much friendlier and she said, "I still puzzle over this." [She] said, "My boss has everything going for him. He is a religious man, he is a good man. He just has everything going for him." She said, "It would take a bolt from the blue to move him." I said, "Ah, that's effectual grace, right there." The bolt from the blue. That is precisely what we are talking about; it is the work of God in bringing a person to faith in Jesus Christ.

And isn't it interesting too, it says here in verse 5, and with this time going to close, it says, "They set out for the land of Canaan and to the land of Canaan they came." Now that doesn't teach the perseverance of the believer, but it illustrates it. That is, that

God does bring us to the place to which he calls us and he will not let us go. It is a miserable teaching and thoroughly contrary to the word of God to be taught or to say that a man having come to faith in the Lord Jesus shall not persevere. He shall persevere and he shall persevere because God preserves him in the faith, which he has given him in sovereign grace through election and effectual calling. Abram's call gives hope for the world.

If he could call a man from the pit who was worshipping other Gods, if he can call a monk, an Augustinian monk from the cloister in Erfurt, if he can call a man like George Whitefield from an apostate Protestant assembly of saints, he can lay his hand upon all whom he desires to bring into the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and my dear unsaved or lost friend in this audience, he can call you. And if you are the object of his saving grace, you will come to the knowledge of him.

May God help us to do that as our Lord said that we should do: rejoice that our names are written in heaven. And the kind of response I think that we should have is reflected in the hymn that we have sung. The God of Abram praise at whose supreme command from earth I arise and seek the joys at his right hand. All on earth forsake, its wisdom fame and power and him my only portion make my shield and tower." May that be true of us, for his namesake. Let's bow together in prayer. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are thankful to Thee Lord for these wonderful illustrations of the truth that are eternal. We acknowledge Lord that we are finite. There are still the effects of sin in our minds and in our wills, but we know the meaning of words and Thou hast said that we have been chosen in him before the foundation of the world. And we know that we have been chosen according to Thy good pleasure. We rejoice. We thank Thee Lord. We pray that as little children, Thou wilt instruct us, in the faith that Thou hast brought to us.

For his names' sake. Amen.

“The Call of Abram: Election, Calling and Perseverance” by S. Lewis Johnson
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