

Advent Sermon Series: “A Brief History of Salvation”
“An Unlikely Father”
Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.
Sunday, November 29, 2020

It is always important to know the history of something, because if you know the history of something you know significant things about it. We happen to live in one of most fascinating cities in the United States, so it is important to know its roots. Here are a few questions to help us with this. First, who is the founder of New Orleans? (1) De Soto; (2) Columbus; (3) Bienville? Second, in what year was New Orleans founded? (1) 1703; (2) 1718; (3) 1767, 200 years before the New Orleans Saints were founded? Third, The Battle of New Orleans took place in which year: (1) 1812; (2) 1815; (3) 1820? Fourth, the capital of Louisiana was first which city before it was New Orleans: (1) Biloxi; (2) Baton Rouge; (3) Arabi. Well, we can see as we get to know the history of New Orleans we can appreciate better our beloved city. Today we are starting an Advent sermon series on “A Brief History of Salvation” so that we can appreciate not only our faith, but also the day God’s relationship with His people took a dramatic turn— Christmas Day.

READ Genesis 12:1-4 (p. 10)

CONTEXT: “At this point in Israel’s history one has learned of creation, the fall, the murder of Abel, the genealogies, the flood, and the Tower of Babel. Thus one could say there has been the height of good and the depth of bad.” One is reminded of Charles Dickens *Tale of Two Cities*: ‘It was the best of times, the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity’. One can think of different years like that— it was the best of times, it was the worst of times— in past history— perhaps 1861 when the Civil War started— think of the movie *Gone with the Wind* with the partying and socialite scenes at the beginning and the high view of war and then the devastation which followed— or 1941 when the U.S. entered World War II after Pearl Harbor when everything seemed peaceful beforehand. Perhaps we will look at 2020 in years ahead and think it was the best of years and the worst of years— at least perhaps I will when I think it began with Norwood and Tiffany’s wedding and the U.S. economy doing wonderfully and LSU winning the NCAA football championship, and then came the big health issue in our family and then COVID 19. That must have been the feeling in heaven about planet earth— some great things happened in creation, but then came the Fall and its horrific aftermath that even needed the Flood of Noah’s time. Now God has decided is the time to act and to address the aftermath of the Fall. He does so by addressing Abram, who becomes an unlikely father in at least two respects.

READ vv 1-3. “Abram is an unlikely father in that from a ‘no-name’ nomad God would make a great nation and name, bless friends and curse foes, and cause all the nations/tribes/races on earth to be blessed. Cf. Psalm 72:17; Galatians 3:6-9. Sirach 17:21a states, ‘Therefore the Lord assured him [Abraham] with an oath that the nations would be blessed through his offspring. . .’ (ca. 200 BC).” Have you ever seen a no-name make it big? In our nation’s history we are

full of such stories. It's part of the American dream! E.g., we think of Elvis Presley, Loretta Lynn, Al Copeland. E.g., Ben Carson, the famous neuro-surgeon who was brought up by a single mother in Boston and then Detroit, his parents separating when he was eight after the news came out that his father had another family, and his mother made him and his brother read two books a week and write book reports on them, and later he became an extremely successful surgeon, and just recently got over a tough experience with COVID-19. E.g., I also think of a young man named Jamie, who had his Dad in prison when he was in the first grade, and when Christmas came he received Christmas gifts from his Dad through the Angel Tree ministry, and this touched him deeply, and helped him to stay bonded to his Dad; Jamie has said in an Angel Tree letter written on November 23, 2020 by Charles Rock (National Director of Angel Tree Program), "I guarantee you I would not have made it past ninth grade in school if my dad dand't signed us up for Angel Tree that year. I probably would have been doing drugs just to feel better, and I could havve been a terrible kid. But God came into the picture and made me feel special, feel loved, which is what we needed at that time."

READ v 4. "Abram is also an unlikely father because of his advanced years. No one could accuse God of ageism!" God took this older man, 75-years-old, with no children, and whose wife was past the age of childbearing, and made all these amazing promises to him. God has a purpose for people, no matter what their age, as long as they make themselves available to Him. E.g., I recall when I was in seminary and would come home for the summers, there was a gentleman in our church who was about 90 years old, Mr. Wilcox, and he invited me to lunch at his house, where he lived alone. And I would pick up some Popeyes and we would eat on tray tables in his living room, or he would make me "ruscompia" and we would talk. And he was a great blessing to me and encouragement to me in the ministry. E.g., I recall hearing about an elderly woman who would see a high

school near her house, and she felt the Lord calling her to pray for them, and she did, over and over, and out from that high school came someone who started a ministry to the world in missions— Operation Mobilization. E.g., I think also of a gentleman I knew who was a physician and retired early, and God called him into the ministry of Young Life, and the youth really liked him despite the age difference. God is not bound by our age— He can use us if we are available for His purposes! Please notice that Abraham did not actually see everything God promised come to pass. He and Sarah did have a son— Isaac. But he did not see his descendants become a great name or a great nation. That’s how God often works— we plant seeds, and God grows them later. Who had an influence on you being here today? E.g., I recall the story I have heard from my family of Rev. Noel Norwood who was a traveling Methodist minister and came down to Buras, LA in the late 1800’s and preached the gospel, and my great-grandfather, who was an alcoholic, became a Christian and gave up drinking, and he named his next child Norwood, and the rest is history, a history that has touched me and my children.

“What does God’s work in Abram’s life mean for you and me?” What is the dream God has put before you? Ask Him for what He would have you do for eternal things. God is not bound by our circumstance, but by His faithfulness.