

THE CALL OF ABRAM

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Hebrews 11:4–10](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 9–12](#)

[GENESIS 10:1](#)

¹This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

[GENESIS 11:10, 27, 31, 32](#)

¹⁰This is the account of Shem's family line.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad.

²⁷This is the account of Terah's family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot.

³¹Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there.

³²Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

[GENESIS 12:1–4](#)

¹The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

²"I will make you into a great nation,

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.



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KEY VERSES

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”—[Genesis 12:2, 3](#)

GOD’S WORLD AND GOD’S PEOPLE

Unit 2: God Destroys and Re-creates

LESSONS [6–9](#)

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Explain the purpose of the genealogical tables in Genesis.
2. Describe the purpose and terms of Abram’s covenant with God.
3. Describe his or her role in the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abram (Abraham).

LESSON OUTLINE

[Introduction](#)

A. [The Family Tree](#)

B. Lesson Context

I. Legacy (GENESIS 10:1; 11:10, 27)

A. Line of Noah (v. 1)

B. Line of Shem (v. 10)

C. Line of Terah (v. 27)

II. Journey (GENESIS 11:31, 32)

A. Departure from Ur (v. 31a)

B. Sojourn in Harran (v. 31b)

C. Death of Terah (v. 32)

III. Promise (GENESIS 12:1–4)

A. Call to Be Blessed (vv. 1–3)

Searching for Something Better

B. Departure at 75 (v. 4)

Daddy, Are We There Yet?

Conclusion

A. Inheriting a Legacy

B. Leaving a Legacy

C. Prayer

D. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Arphaxad *Ar-fax-add*.

Babel *Bay-bul*.

Chaldeans *Kal-dee-unz*.

Euphrates *You-fray-teez*.

Harran*Hair-un.*

Japheth*Jay-feth.*

Nahor*Nay-hor.*

Nimrod*Nim-rod.*

Sarai*Seh-rye.*

suzerain*soo-zuh-rin.*

Terah*Tair-uh.*

Ur*Er.*

vassal*vas-uhl.*

Introduction

A. The Family Tree

Documenting one's family tree used to involve days of searching through family albums and old courthouse records. Now various websites place historical records at our fingertips. For \$99, one such site promises a personal genetic profile from a saliva sample. The site also promises to help you connect with long-lost relatives whose DNA matches yours in some way. Clearly these services have hit a nerve: one reports 2.5 million monthly subscribers and 3 million total customers!

Our ancestry is interesting to us because our family tree gives us a sense of our roots. Individuals and groups identify themselves and understand how they are like and unlike others by appealing to the past. For example, my mother's parents are Coxes and Wallaces. The former are descendants of horse thieves from the English town of Bath, who were given the choice of going to prison or emigrating to the American colonies. The latter are descendants of the Scottish reformer William Wallace (of *Braveheart* fame), who

fought for the freedom of his people. While these people lived generations ago, knowing who they are and what they did gives our children a sense of where they came from—but that’s a double-edged sword!

B. Lesson Context

Our lessons this quarter focus on the themes of creation, God’s identity as Creator, and the role human beings play in God’s fulfillment of his promises across generations. Last week we looked at God’s covenant with Noah, a person of outstanding faith in an era of wickedness ([Genesis 6:1–6](#)). Because Noah was faithful, he was granted a special role in God’s renewal of the world following the great flood ([6:7](#), [8](#), [18–22](#)).

[Genesis 10](#), a chapter often referred to as the Table of Nations, provides a lineage of Noah’s descendants. The Tower of Babel event caused the various clans to scatter, resulting in social separation and corresponding isolation. As part of this process, Shem’s descendants gradually settled in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and Iran), where Abram (Abraham) was born ([11:27–32](#)).

While passages like [Genesis 10](#) may seem tedious to modern readers, genealogies were extremely significant to ancient people groups. Tribal societies preserve records of ancestors to establish distinct identities for themselves and for the other clans with which they interact. These social identities, in turn, served as the basis for claims to land ownership, political and military alliances, channels of trade, patterns of intermarriage, and common religious observances.

I. Legacy

([GENESIS 10:1](#); [11:10](#), [27](#))

A. Line of Noah (v. [1](#))

1. This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah’s sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

[Genesis 10](#) opens and closes with verses that bracket the genealogies between them and reveal their purpose. Verses [1](#) and [32](#) both refer to the chapter as a record of *Noah’s sons ... after the flood*, and verse [32](#) states that these lines of descent and the geographical distribution of the respective clans ultimately produce “nations” (people groups living in specific territories) that Abram and the patriarchs encounter later. The chapter rehearses the genealogies of Noah’s three sons, beginning with *Japheth*, who seems least influential of the three in history. Next comes *Ham* and then *Shem*, the latter being our next focus.

What Do You Think?

How will the renewed realization that we all descend from the “sons of Noah” affect your participation in global evangelism?

Digging Deeper

What negative influences from your ancestral heritage and/or cultural traditions will you need to guard against, lest they hinder global evangelism?

B. Line of Shem (v. [10](#))

[10](#). This is the account of Shem's family line.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad.

The Tower of Babel incident of [Genesis 11:1–9](#) is tied to the genealogical table of chapter [10](#) by the reference to Nimrod, a grandson of Noah's son Ham, at [10:8–12](#). The Babel narrative serves to explain what has preceded and what will follow by connecting the development of distinct nations and cultures to the corresponding distribution of languages. Following this story, the author resumes the account of the line of Noah's son Shem.

The list in [Genesis 11](#) shows that God's earlier promise in [3:15](#)—that Eve's offspring would crush the head of the serpent, an allusion to Christ's victory on the cross—ultimately could not be stopped by the chaos following Babel. Even though Noah's descendants are scattered and divided, God's purpose to redeem his creation through a chosen line is not compromised.

C. Line of Terah (v. [27](#))

[27](#). This is the account of Terah's family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot.

Now we see why the author focuses on Shem: it is his line that leads to *Terah*, the *father of Abram*.

II. Journey

([GENESIS 11:31, 32](#))

A. Departure from Ur (v. [31a](#))

[31a](#). Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan.

Terah's clan had settled in the city of *Ur* ([Genesis 11:28](#))—likely located in southern Mesopotamia at the mouth of the Euphrates River by the Persian Gulf (in modern Iraq). Modern archaeological research has revealed that this was among the most advanced civilizations in antiquity, with a well-developed legal and political system and a strong economy. Ur was a major trade center, and its archaeological remains are impressive for the sophistication of its buildings and infrastructure. The city was one of the wealthiest in the world at the time Abram was born there.

Some think that Abram received his initial call from God to leave home while still in Ur. They base their conclusion on [Genesis 15:7](#); [Nehemiah 9:7](#); and especially [Acts 7:2, 3](#).

On the other hand, [Genesis 12:1–4](#) (in the context of [11:31, 32](#)) suggests that God appeared to Abram in the town of Harran. And [12:1](#) refers specifically to Abram's need to leave his "father's household," which he proceeds to do by leaving Harran with only Lot and the respective families. A trip from Ur would not be entirely consistent with this command, since Abram's father, Terah, left Ur with him. Perhaps God had already appeared to Abram in Ur and then came to him again after his father died ([11:32](#)).

A command to depart from Ur would be consistent with the larger story line of God's creation and re-creation that runs through the early chapters of Genesis. After the creation was ruined by sin ([Genesis 6:1–7](#)), God worked through Noah's family to renew the world following the flood. While God had intended for humans to spread out and populate the earth ([1:28](#); [9:1, 7](#)), various clans attempted to stay together and build a large city, including the Tower of Babel ([11:4](#)).

God foiled this plan by scattering them ([Genesis 11:5–9](#)). Generations later, however, major cities like Ur emerged, with advanced political and economic systems and religions with a multitude of deities (see [Joshua 24:2](#)). Another solution to human rebellion was needed.

B. Sojourn in Harran (v. [31b](#))

[31b](#). But when they came to Harran, they settled there.

After leaving Ur, Terah decides to stop in *Harran*, a town that later becomes a major stop on the caravan trade network. Harran is located in what is now southern Turkey, near the border of Syria. While this appears to be an indirect route from Ur to Canaan, it reflects the practice of traveling northwest around the Syrian desert and then southwest near the Mediterranean coast.

C. Death of Terah (v. [32](#))

[32](#). Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

Terah's death leaves Abram, apparently the oldest of his children ([Genesis 11:26, 27](#)), as the head of the clan.

What Do You Think?

What lessons did you learn from a period of life when it seemed that you were just marking time at an in-between "Harran"?

Digging Deeper

How did God use that experience to prepare you for now? What parts of that experience are usable by others? Why?

III. Promise

([GENESIS 12:1–4](#))

A. Call to Be Blessed (vv. [1–3](#))

[1](#). The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

As in the days of Noah, God chooses to break the cycle of rebellion by working through an individual: *Abram*. He is to leave the post-Babel population centers and journey to a new land of promise.

As with Noah following the flood ([Genesis 9:8–17](#)), Abram’s commission emphasizes God’s ongoing plan to re-create people as a way of preserving a faithful offspring that will undo the work of Satan ([3:15](#)). Also as with Noah, God accomplishes this purpose by entering into a covenant, or contract, with an individual of outstanding faithfulness, someone who will pass the promise through the line of his descendants.

God’s covenant with Abram is patterned after ancient suzerain-vassal treaties. In these arrangements, a great king declared sovereignty over a weaker subject king and demanded absolute loyalty in exchange for military protection and overall security. The terms of these agreements could be extended across generations, provided that the vassal king’s heirs agreed to fulfill the conditions of obedience. Covenants of this kind were typical of ancient empires such as Egypt and Assyria, which ruled vast regions through local client kings.

In the present case, the supreme sovereign, God, offers a local tribal leader, Abram, blessings in exchange for obedience to God’s unilateral terms. These terms in the verse before us are that Abram must leave everything—including his *country*, his *people* (ethnic/tribal group), and even some of his more immediate relatives (his *father’s household*)—and undertake a journey to an unspecified location. God’s terms suggest that this is a permanent migration; there is no indication that Abram will ever return to his homeland.

2. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

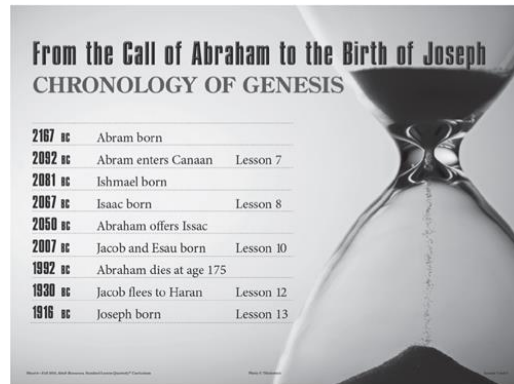
God continues by stating the benefits of the covenant. First, the promise that God will produce through Abram *a great nation* means that Abram will have many descendants. Moreover, they will form a distinct and influential people group (see also [Genesis 15:5](#); [17:2–4](#)). This aspect of God’s promise is notable in that Abram’s wife, Sarai, has been unable to conceive children to this point in time ([11:30](#)). This problem will become a driving theme in Abram’s story ([15:1–8](#); [16:1–6](#); [17:15–18](#); [18:9–15](#)).

The benefits of the covenant require supernatural intervention, a reality that will further demonstrate God’s power to fulfill his plans and purposes. The term *great nation* further implies what will be stated explicitly later: Abram is leaving his current homeland to occupy a new territory, Canaan, which will belong to his descendants ([Genesis 12:7](#); [13:14–17](#); [15:7](#); [17:8](#)).

The remaining benefits to Abram emerge from the first. *I will bless you* stresses the divine protection Abram will enjoy as he travels and as his influence expands. Further, even though he has no children as of yet, the size of Abram’s clan will expand his reputation and renown dramatically (*I will make your name great*).

Abram and his descendants will also bless others, not only in the political and economic sense but also, and more particularly, through their witness to the faithfulness of the one true God.

3. “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”



Visual for Lesson [7](#) & [9](#). Display this chart for the remainder of the quarter to provide a timeframe for significant events covered in the lessons.

More benefits that will proceed from God's covenant are revealed. The first implies that God will relate to other nations as those nations choose to relate to the nation that is to come from Abram. Those who ally themselves with God's people will be rewarded for doing so, but those who stand in opposition will be fighting against God. Such language is again typical of suzerain treaties, where the great king pledges to send aid and military support to defend the vassal king's homeland.

Another benefit reflects God's ultimate purpose: all people groups will ultimately *be blessed* somehow. What is unknown to Abram is known to us: that blessing is Christ (see [Acts 3:25, 26](#); [Galatians 3:8](#)). Abram's descendants will thus serve to fulfill God's original plan to create a world that Satan cannot destroy ([Genesis 3:15](#); [6:18](#); [9:1, 9](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what specific ways can you help your church be a blessing to those outside its walls?

Digging Deeper

What does the connection between Abram's (Abraham's) obedience and his being a blessing have to say about your obligations?

SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING BETTER

In search of a better life, my ancestors made their way from the British Isles to the Appalachian Mountains and then to southwestern Missouri. Several generations lived there before my grandfather and his growing family moved, first to Idaho and then to California. So I like to joke about descending from a long line of very distinguished hillbillies!

My family was simply part of a population shift that had begun more than a century earlier. America's great western migration began in earnest in the nineteenth century. In 1800, 10 percent of Americans lived west of the Appalachians; by 1825, 30 percent did!

The impetus for migration was varied: for some, it was escape from the crowded cities of the East; for others, it was commerce, land for homesteading, and the prospect of a better life—enhanced by the

discovery of gold in the West. What Theodore Roosevelt called “the great leap Westward” continued into the twentieth century, as Americans collectively and individually sought to implement the “manifest destiny” mantra of the nineteenth century regarding that westward expansion.

It may be that some of those same interests caused Abram to perk up his ears when God called him to move west from Ur and then Harran. But for Abram, there was more. That something more was faith—faith that God would deliver on a glorious promise. And because of Abram’s faith, we all are beneficiaries! Who will your faith benefit today?

—C. R. B.

B. Departure at 75 (v. 4)

4. So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Apparently without hesitation, *Abram* sets out for Canaan ([Genesis 12:5](#)). This trip is the start of a nomadic existence, with Abram moving his family members, servants, and livestock from place to place while receiving no specific indication from God that the land through which he travels will belong to him in his own lifetime.

The author of Hebrews refers to Abraham (Abram’s later name) as a model of faithfulness because he departed without knowing where he was going and lived as an alien in a land not his own ([Hebrews 11:8–10](#)).

What Do You Think?

How should the factor of Abraham’s age when called affect your reaction to modern culture’s view of “retirement age,” if at all? Why?

Digging Deeper

Explain which elements of these passages are relevant and irrelevant to your answer: [Exodus 4:13](#) (relating to [Deuteronomy 29:5](#); [34:7](#)); [Numbers 8:23–26](#); [2 Samuel 19:32](#); [1 Kings 11:4](#); [Psalms 71:18](#); [92:14](#); [Luke 13:6–9](#)

DADDY, ARE WE THERE YET?

It’s the beginning of a long-anticipated vacation trip. Weeks of planning have gone into the coming excursion. Finally, the day has come for the journey to begin. The bags are packed and loaded into the family’s SUV. The smaller children are strapped into their car seats. Dad, Mom, and the older children are buckled in, and the vacation starts. An hour later, teenaged Sally is totally engrossed in social media on her smartphone. Already bored, 5-year-old Johnny asks, “Daddy, are we there yet?” What parent hasn’t heard this question?

On Abram’s journey from Harran to Canaan, he didn’t have to deal with teenagers isolating themselves from the family adventure or with bored little ones wishing the destination had been reached.

He was not troubled by holiday traffic at favorite tourist spots. However, he also did not have the advantages we modern travelers have. Unlike us, he had no maps, paper or electronic. He had neither campgrounds with civilized amenities nor roadside motels offering “all the comforts of home, including Wi-Fi.” In fact, he didn’t even know where he was going!

All Abram knew was that God was calling him on the trip of a lifetime. It required that he set aside his fears of the unknown and trust in the wisdom and power of God to lead and protect him and his family. Does that sound like God’s call for our lives?

—C. R. B.

Conclusion

A. Inheriting a Legacy

For Christians, the Old Testament genealogies are significant because they demonstrate how Jesus fits into God’s grand plan of salvation. The detailed records of Christ’s lineage in [Matthew 1:1–17](#) and [Luke 3:23–38](#) demonstrate his connection with David, Abraham, Noah, and Adam. [Genesis 11:10–26](#) is summarized in [Luke 3:34–36](#); [Genesis 11:31–12:1](#) is cited in Stephen’s speech in [Acts 7:2–4](#); [Genesis 12:3](#) is quoted by Paul in [Galatians 3:8](#); [Genesis 12:1–15](#) is alluded to in [Hebrews 11:8–10](#) to portray Abraham as a model of faithfulness.

As we modern readers struggle to pronounce the ancient Hebrew names in these passages, let us not overlook what the Bible authors strive to show. They show us how God’s purposes are fulfilled from creation through the flood through Abraham and Israel and, ultimately, in Christ. That’s the legacy Christians inherit. It is a legacy pointing to eternal life.

B. Leaving a Legacy

The decisions of parents can dramatically affect their descendants, sometimes for generations. These impacts are sometimes referred to as “generational curses.” A more biblically accurate term might be “generational consequences.”

This principle is reflected most explicitly in [Exodus 20:5](#), which states that God visits the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation of their descendants. Later generations used this to blame their ancestors for the suffering of descendants ([Ezekiel 18:2](#)). But God does not punish the innocent ([Jeremiah 31:29, 30](#); [Ezekiel 18:4](#)). Even so, children and grandchildren suffer natural consequences of ancestral sins. They also are likely to imitate the sinful behaviors of older family members. When people worship idols, no one can be surprised when their children and grandchildren grow up to do the same.

One is reminded of the scene from the movie *A Christmas Story*, in which 9-year-old Ralpie utters a bad word and his mother demands to know who taught him to say such a thing. Ralpie blames one of the neighbor kids, when in fact he actually learned it from his father.

The world portrayed in the early chapters of Genesis is one in which parents trained their children to be experts in evil. But just as parents can leave a legacy of sinfulness for their children, they can also leave a legacy of faith that will last through the generations.

God planned for people to teach their children to love him. The lineage of Noah to Shem to Abraham shows this system working at its best: faithful people passing truth down through generations in the midst of a dark world. Their commitment has become our blessing in Christ.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to ensure the legacy of Christ in your family?

Digging Deeper

Considering passages such as [Matthew 3:9, 10](#); [1 Timothy 1:3, 4](#); and [Titus 3:9](#), what guardrails should you put in place to prevent legacy-building from taking a wrong turn?

C. Prayer

Lord, help us find our place in your plan to save the world, being faithful in the legacy we leave. We pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

“Every man is a quotation from all his ancestors.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student

Into the Lesson

Write the following on the board:

Our ancestors are totally essential to our every waking moment, although most of us don't even have the faintest idea about their lives, their trials, their hardships or challenges.

—A. Lennox

Ask students to volunteer stories about their ancestors. See who can go back the furthest in their family tree. Make a transition by saying, “Today’s lesson takes us to the family tree of Abram (Abraham). We know the stories of some people listed, but nothing about others. This much is true: every name listed in any biblical genealogy represents a story as rich and complex as our own.” Encourage students to elaborate on how the values of their ancestors may have influenced them.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Famous Ancestors” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work in pairs, trying to match celebrities with their famous ancestors. Ask, “From what you know about [pick a name], how may this person have been influenced by knowing about his [or her] famous ancestor?”

Into the Word

Before class, write the 11 names from [Genesis 10:1](#); [11:10](#), [27](#), [31](#) on slips of paper, one each. Distribute the slips randomly, making sure that each learner has at least one. (If you have more than 11 learners, include also the 7 additional names of [Genesis 10:2](#).)

After allowing a quick glance at today’s text, have everyone attempt to arrange the names in their correct genealogical order on a table. When they are done, make any needed corrections. Ask for volunteers to tell what they know about those people. When the stories are exhausted, call out the remaining names, the ones about whom little or nothing was said. Ask why God may have chosen to list people in genealogies but not give us further information about them.

Divide the class in half and distribute the following assignments. *Abraham’s Responsibility Group:* Read [Genesis 12:1–4](#) and identify Abraham’s responsibility in the covenant described. *God’s Responsibility Group:* Read [Genesis 12:1–4](#) and identify God’s responsibility in the covenant described. After group discussions, pose these questions: 1–How did the successful completion of this covenant depend on Abraham’s obedience? 2–What was God’s promised response to Abraham’s obedience? 3–What promises of God are conditioned on our obedience?

Into Life

Read the following promise made by a famous world leader.

We choose to go to the moon in this decade ... not because [it will be] easy, but because [it will be] hard; ... because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.

Ask, “Which world leader made this promise?” (*John F. Kennedy*) Ask, “Was this promise fulfilled?” (Yes) Continue: “The promise God gave to Abraham in [Genesis 12:3](#) is of eternally greater importance than going to the moon. As spiritual descendants of Abraham, we all have roles in the fulfillment of that promise. What words would you use to describe your role in the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham?”

Pause for a time of whole-class discussion. (*Possible responses: hard, time-consuming, challenging, surprising, etc.*) Push deeper by inviting specifics, but don’t put anyone on the spot.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Promise Search” activity from the reproducible page as a take-home. Encourage students to use it to consider the impact of God’s promises on their lives.