

Called to Follow in Faith

Lesson Scripture Text: Genesis 11:27-12:9

Background Scripture: Genesis 11:27-12:9 Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Genesis 11:27-32

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. ²⁸ While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. ³¹ 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. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. ³² Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

Genesis 12:1-9

The 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. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring^[c] I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. ⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

LESSON AIMS

- Describe the historical situations of Abram as he and his family obeyed the call of God to leave Ur and then Haran.
- Evaluate the faith of Abram through his positive responses to God's call to venture into the unknown.
- Make changes personally in order to conform to the call of God as given in His Word.

INTRODUCTION

I have heard the saying before, but most recently I heard it again at the home going service of a close friend's mother. I rehash the adage here, but it goes something like, "It is better to leave behind a legacy of godly living through examples, than it is to leave behind a truck load of material possessions;" leave behind in the sense of bequeathing something of value to an heir.

Each new day brings to us its own challenges that must be dealt with one at a time. Yesterday, it might have been how to get through another meeting at work without bumping heads with an overly zealous (and cutthroat) co-worker. Today, it might be how to meet Wednesday's mortgage payment with next Friday's pay check. Tomorrow, it could be making the decision whether to place an aging parent in a nursing home, or move him/her in with you and your family. No matter how unexpected or difficult the challenge, we must remember that the solution will

always be divinely planned and God-sized... big enough to handle our every concern. Where lies your obedience and faith?

BACKGROUND

Abram was a common man like any other shepherd living during the time of today's lesson--roughly, 2091 B.C. But, as the son of Terah--who once practiced idolatry in Ur, Abram would go on to become one of the most well-recognized persons of the Bible; one of the heroes of faith that is mentioned in Hebrews 11:8--19.

Faith means that we cannot see the outcome; we are not sure what lies ahead. But we are convinced of the reality of God. In other words, "We're not sure what the future holds, but we know who holds the future." Faith means clinging to the hope that God will eventually triumph; He will come back to earth in judgment, to reward those who have sought after Him. And for this reason, we obey. We do God's bidding, even when submission is hard. Abram resolved in his mind to obey God's calling and move himself and his family in faith.

Generations refers to family history, and is significant in these passages of Scripture because this conveys to us that the individuals mentioned are real persons. They are not just names from a book or characters in a story; make believe. We can relate to Abram because we share many of his experiences: the death of a loved one, the reality of being unable to bear children, leaving behind everything that is familiar in a move. And because Abram was like us in so many ways, then we can be like him in return. We can have the same unquestioning obedience and stubborn faith in God.

1: What is the significance of mentioning the "generations" of Terah in Gen. 11:27--30, and Shem's descendants in Gen. 11:10--26? To what does the word "generations" refer?

Terah took with him: Abram, his son; Lot, his grandson by deceased son Haran; and Sarai, Abram's wife. The fact that Terah was in charge of this move indicates that he is still the head of the family. Respect for parental authority is often entwined with a spiritual faith that respects God's authority. As the adage says, "Perfect practice makes perfect!" What is practiced in the home spills over to the school system, the neighborhood, the church, the job, everywhere.

2: Who did Terah take with him from "Ur of the Chaldees" to "the land of Canaan?" (Gen. 11:31a)

God basically told Abram to, "Hit the road, Jack" (Ray Charles song). This instruction by God was given after Abram's father, Terah, died in Haran (the place, not the person). Abram was now the head of the small group, and God continued his purpose through Abram. Abram was 75-years-old at this time, but the Lord's words commanded that he was to leave everything and go to place that God would not even define until Abram got there. What faith on Abram's part!

3: What did God command Abram to do? (Gen. 12:1)

There are seven elements in God's promises to Abram in these two verses. The number seven suggests fullness and completeness. This celebrated passage is a prologue to the set of passages that together make up the Abrahamic covenant; the irrevocable promise of God. 1) God commanded Abram to leave his home and family, promising to create a great nation through him--the people of God. 2) God promised to bless Abram (and Sarai) with a long and healthy life, wealth, and importance. 3) That Abram's name would live on long after he died was a supreme honor. 4) Abram would be a blessing to others. This he did whenever he told about the living God before other nations and peoples. 5) Those who blessed Abram would be blessed themselves. This is a

complement of the previous promise. 6) Those who curse Abram would be cursed themselves. Whereas God would bless the peoples (plural) who blessed Abram or his descendants, His curse came upon the individual (singular) who cursed Abram or his descendants. 7) The final and most significant of the Lord's promises to Abram and his descendants was that all the families of the earth would be blessed through them--the Jewish people who are descended from Abram.

4: What seven promises did God make to Abram? (Gen. 12:2--3)

Again, Abram was 75-years-old when he resumed his journey. The Bible rarely indicates a person's age when events occur, but it does so several times in Abram's case. Abram's advanced age testifies to God's mighty works in his life. We too can continue to be used by God regardless of our seasoned condition. God did not intend for His children to retire from Kingdom business. Retirement is a secular view of resting after completing one's professional career. A child of God is expected to continue to work until called home to be with the Lord.

5: How old was Abram when he resumed his journey--leaving Haran for Canaan after his father's death? (Gen. 12:4)

As Abram crossed over to his destination, he came to Shechem, an ancient site at the center of the land. He also came to a place known as the "tree of Moreh," or "The Teacher." A "terebinth" or ancient oak tree served as a lasting marker for future generations to observe. It was here that Abram began symbolically taking possession of the land that would one day be the territory of the Great Teacher and His instruction. The land was presently occupied, however, by the Canaanites, but by God's promise it would belong to Abram's descendants.

6: Who did Abram and his family find living in Canaan when they arrived? (Gen. 12:6; 13:7)

The word "offspring" reaffirms that Abram will have children, and it is added that his descendants will possess the land. Restrictions on the promised will be given in the future, for the land-promise in view here does not extend to the descendants of Ishmael or Abram's sons by Keturah or the descendants of Abram's grandson, Esau.

7: Who were Abram's "offspring," and what did God promise them? (Gen. 12:7a)

Abram built an altar to God "who had appeared to him." Abram made a bold statement by building an altar to the Lord when pagan altars were already in existence in this place. But, he was not going to compromise his faith in God.

8: To whom did Abram build an altar in Canaan and why? (Gen. 12:7b)

Abram continued south in his journey and set up another altar as a place of worship to the One true God. He "called on the name of the Lord" in a public way--preaching to or telling others about the Lord. Abram was fulfilling God's command to be a blessing to the nations. In this way, Abram sets an example for anyone who moves from location to location but ignores or defers the spiritual aspects of life.

9: What did Abram do between Beth-el and Hai--south of Canaan? (Gen. 12:8)

The "Negev" means south. Abram continued his journey in obedience to God. Also very likely, the population of Canaan, along with their flocks and herds, kept Abram from finding a location for his own herds and flocks. He kept wandering further south, into the Negev, until he had room for them.

10: Where did Abram continue to move? (Gen. 12:9)

CONCLUSION

When people view a drama, there is a tendency to identify with the leading characters rather than the members of

the supporting cast. Without the latter, however, the fame that is achieved by the heroes would never become a reality.

Most of those studying this lesson today will never see their "names in lights" like Abram. What is important is that they faithfully fulfill whatever God has called them to do by the precepts and principles of His Word. In the end, having your name in the Lamb's book of life means much more than having it "in lights."

PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for the example of Abram, who waited, struggled, and slowly matured in his faith. Like him, we sometimes fail, but we give thanks that You never do. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Expect stages and crises in your growth of faith.