

# ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **God Calls Abraham's Family**

September 2022

Fall Quarter

**September 3, 2022**

## **Lesson #1 –The Call of Abram**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Genesis 12:1-5,7;15:1-7

### **ICE BREAKER –**

1. How did you feel when you left home for the first time for an extended period of time?
2. Why is it sometimes hard to trust God?
3. How would you explain righteousness to a person unfamiliar with Scripture?

***Key Verse – “The LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. —Genesis 12:7***

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

The first 11 chapters of Genesis look at humanity broadly—from their creation and fall (Genesis 1–3), to their acts of violence (4:2–12) and wickedness (6:5–6, 11–12), to their judgment and rescue (6:7–9:17). Despite all this, people still made vain attempts to focus attention on themselves (11:1–9).

As Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament, such a broad focus is understandable. This prepares readers of all eras to hear how God worked through humanity generally and specifically through one family.

After the flood narrative (Genesis 6–10), the text lists the descendants of Noah’s son Shem (11:10–25). This genealogy culminated with Terah, the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran (11:26).

Terah outlived Haran, the father of Lot (Genesis 11:27–28). Terah’s other sons, Abram and Nahor, were both married. However, Abram and his wife Sarai were unable to conceive (11:29–30).

The family lived in Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:31). This ancient Mesopotamian city was located on the banks of the Euphrates River. Modern archaeological discoveries have provided insight into the city’s wealth, culture, and pagan religious practices. The family’s connections to the city likely ran deep, and at one time they took part in the city’s pagan religious practices (see Joshua 24:2).

However, the family did not stay in Ur. Terah led Abram, Sarai, and Lot toward Canaan, a land bordering the western edges of the Mediterranean Sea (see Genesis 10:19). But Terah did not complete the journey. He settled and died in Haran (11:31b–32), an important city on a major trade route between Mesopotamia and Canaan.

Today's Scripture text continues narrowing the focus as it highlights the family of Abram. (Note that Abram is the same man who later had his name changed to Abraham; see Genesis 17:5.)

### **LESSON COMMENTARY**

**12:1–3.** This opening paragraph constitutes the first expression of God's great promise to Abraham, what is known as the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant consists of three provisions: (1) **land** (v. 1b), at this point generally identified as "the land of Canaan" (11:31; 12:5), the content and borders of which are increasingly specified throughout the Pentateuch, culminating in the detailed description in Nm 34:1–12; (2) **a great nation** (v. 2a), in which the word translated **nation** (*goy*) is typically applied to the Gentile nations and only rarely to Israel (typically the term *'am* [people] is used for Israel), thus hinting at God's broader, *human-centered* purpose in bestowing this covenant; and (3) **blessing** (vv. 2b–3), given the most space in God's declaration, thereby bearing out its preeminence among the provisions. To emphasize the importance of the blessing, the phrase **And I will bless you** occurs in the exact middle of God's utterance (the 14<sup>th</sup> of 27 words) as well as in the various circumstances in which that blessing will be applied. These circumstances are threefold and increasingly expansive: to Abraham, his descendants (cf. Ps 105:8–10), and **all the families of the earth**. The term **families** generally denotes extended families (a living patriarch and all the members of his household by blood or marriage). God's love is seeking to "push" His blessing as far as His justice will allow.

**12:4–9.** In response (not as a prerequisite) to God's promises **Abram ... departed from Haran** and continued on to Canaan with **Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew**. This statement, together with the reference in 11:32 to their halting in Haran (most likely because of ailment or infirmity on the part of Terah), suggests that the declaration in 12:1–3 was in fact God's second, given to Abram in Haran, and not the first declaration given to him in Mesopotamia (see Ac 7:2–3). The implication for Abram's faith at this point is hardly flattering, for this would suggest that he was contemplating a return to his home city following Terah's death. Thus God repeated His call and exhorted Abram to continue the journey his father had begun. On a theological level, however, this is perfectly consistent with the manner in which the Abrahamic covenant is introduced—as a promise that is actively and sovereignly made by God to a passive and undeserving recipient. At the same time Abram responded to God's promise with commendable obedience, completing the journey to Canaan and building **an altar** to the Lord at **Shechem** (a city in the hill country of Ephraim about 40 miles [65 km] north of Jerusalem).

### **Ratifying the Covenant: God's Compromise with Weak Faith (15:1–21)**

In this chapter God affirmed, clarified, and "ratified" His promise of 12:1–3. The concept of "ratification" is an inherent part of postfall (i.e., depraved) human culture, since by definition it assumes that the word alone of the one(s) making the promise/covenant is insufficient. In ratifying the Abrahamic covenant God is not "activating" it, but rather establishing the certainty of its fulfillment in the mind of

Abram. Moreover, it is designed to give further assurance to those Israelites who originally received the Torah at the end of their wilderness wanderings and were then about to embark on the conquest, that God had surely given them this land. Here, as continually throughout the history of redemption, God condescended to “meet” people in their lack of faith by doing more (or less, depending on one’s perspective) than that required by the ideal since the depraved with whom He interacts are so far from that ideal.

#### **a. Answering Abram’s Doubt about the Son (15:1–5)**

**15:1–5.** As in the initial expression of God’s promise in Gn 12, so too here the scene commenced immediately with God’s active expression of what *He* will do *for* Abram (and his descendants in the line of promise). And so too here, as in the latter part of chap. 12, God’s declaration of promise is followed by a clear expression of doubt on the part of Abram. In the present instance this doubt is represented by Abram’s questioning response, **O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?** By this question, Abram was, *at best*, seeking to “force” God’s “hand” into specifying and fulfilling His previous statement, “I will make you a great nation” (12:2). *At worst* he was denying that God could give him the son that he so desired, since Sarai was barren (11:30) and postmenopausal (18:13). Thus Abram’s statement in 15:2 could be understood as the despondent statement of an old man of little faith anticipating his death: “O Lord GOD, what *can* You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (italics added). As in chap. 12, however, God responded not with judgment, but with patience and grace, thus emphasizing the unconditional nature of His promise. Condescending to meet Abram in his lack of faith, God declared outright what His words in 12:2 logically implied, namely, that **one who will come forth from your own body** [lit., “inner parts”], **he shall be your heir** and thence Abram’s descendants would expand into a mighty nation, which God illustrated by the panoply of stars illuminating the night sky (v. 5).

**LESSON NUGGET** – Faith leads to Obedience – The New Testament states, “By faith Abraham obeyed”. (Hebrews 11:8). “I will show you; I will make you; I will bless you!” were God’s promises, and Abram believed. It has well been said that faith is not believing in spite of evidence: it is obeying in spite of consequences. The proof of faith is obedience, for true faith always leads to works (James 2:14). Hearing leads to heeding.

**Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, Life Application Bible Notes and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary**