

Genesis 11:27-12:3
The Call of God to Abram

When was the last big decision you had to make?

- No doubt you spent a good amount of time praying about how to make the best possible decision
- Hopefully you sought out good, godly counsel from others who could help you think through the various issues you are facing

Whether or not your big decision was yesterday or some time in the past, we have all been there

- We have come to a crossroads where a decision has to be made

This morning, we come to a very important crossroads in our study of Genesis

- Up to this point, we have studied chapters 1-11
- These events have been part of primeval history

When we think of creation, the Fall, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel, we are oftentimes lost in time

- Those events took place so long ago that we sometimes can't relate very well

In our study of Genesis this morning, we are going to cross over a very important threshold

- We transition from primeval history to patriarchal history

The rest of the book of Genesis revolves around four main characters

- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Joseph

Instead of dealing with entire nations or all of humanity in general, we will now be focusing on certain individuals and smaller people groups

- The first such person is Abram

We should be somewhat familiar with Abram

- His name will later be changed to Abraham

As a matter of fact, we will be studying the life of this man from Genesis 12 through Genesis 25 when he dies

- To say that he is an instrumental figure in the book of Genesis would be an understatement

There are many lessons to learn from this man

- Some good things for us to emulate
- Some bad things for us to avoid

We have a habit of having "heroes" of the faith

- It is certainly noble to desire to emulate the faithfulness and obedience of Biblical characters

But let's face reality

- Aside from Jesus Christ, we will encounter people who are sinners
- These men and women will challenge us by their godly choices
- And these same men and women will raise our eyebrows as we see them making sinful choices

I believe that is part of the beauty of the Bible

- It doesn't blush when discussing sin in the lives of others

This isn't to say that Scripture condones sin

- It is simply affirming that we all continue to make foolish decisions throughout our lives
- Even as believers in and followers of the Lord!

This morning we will be introduced to the man called Abram

- We will learn a little about his family background
- Then we will see how God puts a huge crossroad before him
- And Abram will have to make a very difficult decision

Let's read Genesis 11:27-12:3

This short section of Scripture helps us to transition from the primeval history to the patriarchal history through two (2) pieces of background information

- Abram's family is introduced (11:27-32)
- Abram's faith is challenged (12:1-3)

I. Abram's family is introduced (11:27-32)

²⁷ Now these are the records of the generations of Terah.

As we make this huge transition in the book of Genesis, it should not surprise us to see another reference to the Hebrew word, *toledot*

- Our English versions differ as to what word is used
- "Generations," "genealogy," "account"

This term is a hinge word that the author of Genesis uses when he wants to switch to a new lineage

- It is Moses' way of narrowing the focus of the Deliverer seed

This is the sixth use of this word throughout Genesis

- 2:4a – "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created"
- 5:1a – "This is the book of the generations of Adam"
- 6:9a – "These are the records of the generations of Noah"
- 10:1 – "Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood."
- 11:10a – "These are the records of the generations of Shem"
- 11:27a – "Now these are the records of the generations of Terah"

Do you see how the author is narrowing the focus every time he uses this word?

- He is tracing the specific line from which the Deliverer Seed will come

Matthew opens his Gospel with these words, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1)

- Jesus Christ is the Deliverer Seed who was promised back in Genesis 3:15
- He would come through the lineage of Abraham

But before we get to Abraham, we have to discuss his family background

- Hence, the reason for “*the records of the generations of Terah*”

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

Last week we concluded our message with a reference to Genesis 11:26, “*And Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran*”

- Abram is the son of Terah

Although Abram is listed first, it is most likely that he was not the firstborn¹

- We need to keep in mind that Moses doesn't always list children in the order of their birth
- To him, the order pertains more to importance as it relates to the Deliverer Seed

According to Joshua 24:2, Terah is known to have served other gods²

- Hence, he was an idolater and polytheistic in his religious convictions
- Since Abram was the son of Terah, it is very possible that Abram grew up practicing various forms of idol worship

It has been about 400 years since the Flood³

- All manner of sin has manifested itself
- We should not be shocked when we see sin such as idolatry being mentioned

The two locations that will be addressed today – Ur and Haran – are both known as cities entrenched in idol worship⁴

- The city of Ur was protected by a series of walls

In the midst of the city was a huge tower

- This tower was the focal point of the city⁵
- *This reminds you of Babel, doesn't it?*

²⁸ And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.

We are given some rather sad information about Abram's family

- Abram's brother, Haran, dies

What is strange about this is that the father – Terah – outlives the son, Haran

- This must have been a sad day for Terah

We notice that this death of Haran takes place “*in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans*”

¹ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 114.

² Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 111.

³ Griffith-Thomas, 115.

⁴ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 165.

⁵ Davis, 165.

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And Sarai was barren; she had no child.

We move directly from the death of Terah's son, Haran, to two marriages

- Abram marries Sarai
- Nahor, Abraham's other brother, marries Milcah

Nothing is said about Sarai's family or background

- But we do know from other passages of the Bible that Sarai was also Terah's daughter
- The difference was that Abram and Sarai had different mothers

This would have made Sarai Abram's half-sister

- While this was certainly outlawed in the Mosaic Law, there seemed to be no prohibitions at this time
- This truth will come into sharp focus next week

Nahor, on the other hand, marries Milcah, "the daughter of Haran"

- Haran, as you remember, was the brother of Abram and Nahor
- Nahor marries his niece

We must keep in mind that as various people groups scattered over the face of the Earth due to the Lord confusing their language, those who spoke a common tongue would have gathered together

- In some cases, this would implied that families would intermarry with one another, as they did after the Flood

Verse 30 highlights a very important detail that should not be overlooked

- "And Sarai was barren; she had no child"

Obviously if Abram is the chosen lineage for the Deliverer Seed, he will need an heir – a son!

- But with Sarai barren, the author is bringing this tension out in the open for all to notice

Over the next eight or nine chapters, the Text will focus its attention on the promise of a son for Abram

- We will see the range of emotions that Abram and Sarai undergo as they wait for a son to be born to them

Without children the man could not continue his lineage

- Without children the woman enjoyed very little prestige but much frustration
- Without children, the husband and wife would have no one to care for them in their old age⁶

We have to keep in mind that Sarai was 65 years old at this time (cf. 12:4; 17:17)

- She wasn't getting any younger!

In this great chain of the blessed lineage, Sarai was the weakest link⁷

If they were to have children, it would have to be a work of God

- Yet it would be another 25 years before she saw the Lord's promise come to fruition!

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 1-15*, 273.

⁷ Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 101.

³¹ And 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. ³² And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

We are immediately thrust into an exodus from Ur

- We are not sure why but Terah is leaving this area and traveling “in order to enter the land of Canaan”
- Terah takes Abram, Lot, and Sarai with him

Even though Canaan is their final destination, the Text reminds us that they “went as far as Haran, and settled there”

Let me be honest upfront and say that I have as many questions about this as you do

- Why did Terah leave Ur in the first place?
- Why did Terah not go all the way to Canaan?

We do know that the land of Canaan should ring a bell

- Canaan was Ham's youngest son
- Canaan was the blunt of Noah's curse for Ham's indecency with him

God is about to send Abram to the land of Canaan which is full of a cursed people

- They will present problems to the Israelites for many years

It is interesting to note that Terah travels to Haran and “settled there”

- Compare this to Genesis 11:2, “And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there” (emphasis mine)

Those who desired to build the city of Babel deliberately decided to go against the Lord's command to fill the Earth

- Could it be that Terah, in his polytheistic mindset, decided to rebel as well?
- Or could it be that Terah's health was failing and he couldn't travel further?
- We don't know the answers to those questions

Ultimately, Moses tells us that it was in Haran that Terah died at the age of 205 years old

This is just a small sampling of some family background on Terah

- It is quickly summarized so that the bulk of time can be focused on one individual
- Abram

We now turn from Abram's family to his faith

II. Abram's faith is challenged (12:1-3)

^{12:1} 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;

God is, in essence, starting over for the third time

- Adam and Eve were disobedient
- Noah's descendants had failed

Now God is concentrating His purposes on one particular people

- Specifically, one particular person – Abram

Once again, it seems as if some details are left out

- It seems as if we are missing a few pieces of the puzzle

We transition from Terah settling down and eventually dying in Haran to Abram

- Abram is confronted by God Himself

Later in Genesis 15, we read the words of the LORD, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it” (15:7)

- From a human perspective, it was Terah who brought his family out of Ur⁸
- From a Divine perspective, it was the LORD Who brought Abram out of Ur for His own purposes

God was already reminding Abram that He was sovereign

- God could be trusted because He was in control

We don't know exactly how God appeared to Abram

- We do know that ever since the Flood, God has removed His visible presence from the world

In the episode of the Tower of Babel, God came “down” to see what the humans were doing

- The insinuation is that God is in heaven, removed from sinful humanity

Even here in Genesis 12, God does not come down to speak with Abram

- Instead, it is His Word that confronts Abram

We also ask ourselves, “Why Abram? What had he done to warrant God's choice?”

- The answer is rather simple – nothing!

God chooses whom He wills

- There was nothing noteworthy or meritorious about Abram
- On the contrary, he was most likely an idol worshipper like his father prior to God's calling⁹

We all have to learn a lesson from this

- The reason any of us are shown blessing and favor from God is because of His choice of us
- Left to ourselves, none of us would receive any blessings

The New Testament affirms that “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23)

- We are born with this curse of sin
- Sooner or later, this curse will wrap its tentacles around us

The curse will cause a cessation of earthly life

- But more importantly, it will cause a separation from eternal life

But that verse in the NT continues, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”

- The only way for us to receive eternal life and avoid the curse is through this “free gift of God”

⁸ Mathews, 104.

⁹ Davis, 167.

The reason why God selected Abram was for the purpose of glorifying Himself

- That is the ultimate goal of our lives
- That is the ultimate goal of the universe

God treated Abram with such grace that only God could receive the credit and glory

- And so it is with any and all of us here this morning

Israel became spiritually proud, thinking that they deserved God's blessings because they were in the right earthly lineage

- But God reminded them that they must be like Abram, exhibiting faith in God
- If Israel hoped to see the grace of God, then they had better trust Him instead of trusting in themselves or their family tree

The LORD issues forth a command to Abram

- In a word, God tells Abram to separate himself from all that is familiar to him
- Abram is now to follow God, trusting that He knows best

If we only had Genesis to study, we would quickly surmise that this was the first time that God had spoken to Abram

- But that would not be true

In Acts 7, Stephen is giving his defense before the Council

- He says, "**Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,** ³ and said to him, 'Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' ⁴ Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, *God* removed him into this country in which you are now living." (7:2-4)

This is very important details that we don't have recorded in Genesis

- Stephen, whose words are recorded as Scripture, verifies God had first called Abram "**when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran**"
- Stephen also verifies that Abram settled in Haran as well
- After Terah's death, *then* Abram left to follow God's call

Some have suggested that God appeared to Terah and Abram, giving them this call to leave Ur to enter Canaan

- Speculation exists about what happened on the way
- We know that Terah worshipped other gods
- Ur and Haran were both cities filled with various gods
- Perhaps the allure of the other gods tempted Terah to compromise on the call from God

Nevertheless, God repeats this call to Abram and tells him to separate himself, "**Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you**"

- There is a very deliberate command, "**Go forth**"

This command is specified by three progressive steps of separation

- "**from your country**"
- "**from your relatives**"
- "**from your father's house**"

It could very well be that Abram had to forfeit his inheritance as part of following the LORD

- He certainly left behind his family (other than Sarai and Lot)
- But whatever price he had to pay to obey God was worth it

The New Testament affirms this principle, “**He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me**” (Mt 10:37)

- This isn't to say that we are to hate our family
- But God should be more important than our family

What will later be referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant consists of three blessings

- Land
- Seed
- Blessing

This passage is crucial to a proper understanding of the remainder of the Old Testament

- *Let's look at each of these blessings*

God not only tells Abram to leave his family and homeland

- He also provides something for Abram to look forward to, “**Go forth...to the land which I will show you**”

It was approximately 1100 miles from Ur to Haran

- It would be another 400 miles from Haran to Canaan¹⁰

Can you imagine God telling you, “**Leave what is familiar and dear to you. I will tell you where to go.**”

- This attitude of faithfulness is recorded in Hebrews 11:8 that Jacob read earlier, “**By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going**”

God basically pointed Abram in the right direction and said, “Go!”

- Abram wasn't given specific GPS coordinates
- He wasn't given the name of the city
- As a matter of fact, he was to keep traveling until God told him to stop

Abram trusted God every step of the way

- Is it any wonder that he is the only person ever to be called “**the friend of God**” (James 2:23; 2 Chr 20:7)?¹¹

² 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;

God then issues forth some pretty powerful promises to Abram over verses two and three

- “**I will make you a great nation**”
- “**I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing**”
- “**I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse**”

¹⁰ Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 63.

¹¹ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, 114.

This is covenantal language where God enters into a binding commitment with Abram

- This is an unconditional covenant
- In other words, God Himself will see to it that this covenant is brought to its completion
- The fulfillment of this pact would not be contingent upon Abram¹²
- We will see more of the formal ratifying of the covenant in future chapters

The word for “**blessed**” occurs six times in Genesis 1-11 (1:22, 28; 2:3; 5:2; 9:1, 26)

- It occurs five times in Genesis 12:2-3 (twice in 12:2 and thrice in 12:3)

In Genesis, God’s blessing would be manifested in human prosperity, well-being, and childbearing¹³

You might remember Genesis 1:28, “**And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it’**”

- Part of the blessing of God would be the ability to have children

Here is God telling Abram that he would “**ble**ss” him

- All the while, Sarai is barren!

Imagine the heartache that Sarai must have experienced

- She had no second career to turn to
- She was committed and ready to be a mother

Over the following chapters, we will see this frustration emerge as Abram and Sarai attempt to take matters into their own hands in order to have a son

- They learn to wait on God to fulfill His plans
- God doesn’t need their help

God promises to make of Abram “**a great nation**”

- This is interesting in light of Genesis 10 that traces the 70+ nations that scattered over the Earth after the Babel incident

Now God promises to make Abram “**a great nation**”

- A group of people with a common land, language, and government¹⁴
- This would be the makings of the nation Israel

God had already prepared a Land for them

- But they would have trust God one step at a time

Abram must have scratched his head, thinking, “How can I be a great nation when I have no heir?”

- But all of this was a test of faith for Abram

God also tells Abram, “**and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing**”

- Abram would be the human vessel through which God would bless sinful humanity

It would be exclusively through Abram that sinners would find God’s blessing

- God had judged sinful humanity in the Babel incident by confusing their common language
- This drove people to the utter ends of the Earth to find people with common language and customs

¹² Mathews, 106.

¹³ Wenham, 275.

¹⁴ Wenham, 275.

It would be through Abram that these scattered nations could again be united

- Not in a common language
- But in a common salvation
- He would be the human means by which the curse would be replaced with blessing

In a little bit of providential irony, notice that God promises Abram, “I will make your name great”

- Those who sought to build Babel said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (11:4, emphasis mine)

Those rebellious men tried to accomplish a great “name” in their own power

- And God thwarted their efforts

Abram wasn’t seeking a great name and God promised it to him!

This is amazing, isn’t it?

- Those at Babel worked actively to make for themselves a name – and God didn’t allow it
- Abram did nothing – and God promised it¹⁵

This new nation and fame of Abram would be God’s vessel of taking the message of redemption – the Gospel – to every tribe and tongue

- Sin had scattered the peoples of the Earth
- Salvation would be a common need for every inhabitant of the Earth

³ and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.

Depending on how various individuals and people groups responded to Abram would tell whether they would be blessed or cursed

- Proof of this is seen when Abraham lies to Pharaoh about his wife, Sarai
- The Text tells us, “But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife” (12:17)

For those who wanted to be blessed, they need to bless Abram

- In doing so, they would acknowledge God’s hand of blessing upon him

But for those who cursed Abram, they themselves would be cursed

- They would be rejecting God and His hand of blessing on Abram

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

These blessings that God promised to Abram were not exclusively for his lineage

- God tells Abram, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”

What a thought!

- Through this one man, God would bless all of humanity

From Genesis 3 through 11, we saw countless episodes of how the curse of the Fall affected humanity

- And here is a man through whom the whole earth would be blessed

¹⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 1-17*, 372.

Abram would be the lineage through whom the Deliverer Seed would come

- Jesus Christ would reverse the curse of the Fall!

We know that the Church is composed of Jews and Gentiles

- People from every tribe and tongue
- Not just from one people group

No wonder the apostle Paul breaks out into a burst of praise at the end of Romans 11, “**Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!**” ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? ³⁵ Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.” (11:33-36)

The sad reality is that despite the universal blessings available through Abram, some would still refuse to trust in this Deliverer Seed

- God told Abram, “**and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse**”

There would be some who would acknowledge Abram as the instrument and channel of blessing

- But there would be others who would curse Abram, rejecting him

The apostle Paul, in the New Testament, alludes to this section of Scripture in the book of Galatians

- In chapter three he writes, “**Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.**” ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, ‘All the nations shall be blessed in you’” (3:6-8)

Paul says that the Scripture “**preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham**”

- That is amazing that God affirms that here in Genesis 12 the Gospel is being proclaimed

There are some who would say that the Old Testament presents salvation by works whereas the New Testament presents salvation by grace

- Galatians 3:8 testifies that the Gospel is the same for both the Old and New Testaments

The difference is that the OT looks forward to Christ

- The NT looks back to Christ
- But the object of salvation is still Christ, the Deliverer Seed!

Later in Genesis 15, we read of Abraham, who “**Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness**” (15:6)

- Years before the Law was written Abram believed
- Centuries before Christ came to die, Abram believed

The challenge is the same today

- Some people think that righteousness comes about through the Ten Commandments
- Others think that it is possible to be reconciled with God through good works or religious works

Throughout history, God has had only one way to be saved from the curse of sin

- That is by trusting in the One who can reverse the curse
- Jesus Christ is that Deliverer

If you try and find deliverance from sin any other way than through Christ, you will die in your sins

- You will spend eternity separated from God

Paul writes in the latter part of Galatians 3, “**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** ²⁹ **And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise**” (3:28-29)

- Are you like Abram this morning?
- Are you trusting in God for your righteousness?

What a challenge this must have been for Abram

- His father, Terah, was an idol worshipper
- Not exactly the model of integrity and faithfulness

But Abram responds quite well in the face of such an enormous encounter with God

- He had a major decision to make
- Would he trust God?

I am reminded that God never places burdens on our shoulders without providing the needed power

- Put another way, “**My grace is sufficient for you**” (2 Cor 12:9)

When you and I obey God, trusting Him to take care of us, the blessings of obedience far outweigh the sacrifices that we have to make

It isn't always easy to follow God

- Sometimes you must trust God even though you can't see where you are going next or when it makes sense to us

I believe this is why the Christian life is referred to as a “**walk**”

- Enoch walked with God (5:22, 24)
- Noah walked with God (6:4)
- God would tell Abram to walk before Him (17:1)
- The NT is full of references to our walk

The term “walk” implies a slow, steady process of following

- It is taking one step at a time

“**Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path**” (Ps 119:105)

- God's Word guides us one step at a time
- That was certainly the case for Abram

I don't know what challenges God may bring into your life this week or in the weeks ahead

- But I do know that God is merciful
- His grace is sufficient

As God did with Abram, God is committed to stretching our faith and trust in Him

- We can either compromise, falling short of God's best
- Or we can trust God without having to see all of the details