

Genesis 11:11-12:1—God Calls Abraham To Leave His Country And Family Behind

Memory Verse

Genesis 12:1-3 NKJV

Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. ² **I will** make you a great nation; **I will** bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. ³ **I will** bless those who bless you, and **I will** curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Introduction

We come to an abrupt change of pace here. So far, the first 11 chapters of Genesis has used a wide angle lens to look at world history, looking at what is happening globally and covering just over the first 2,000 years of earth history since Creation. Now the next 39 chapters (chapters 12 - 50) focuses on only one man and three generations of his descendants—this man being none other than Abraham.

Firstly today we will look at the genealogy from Shem to Noah. Secondly, Noah’s family tree, including that of his wife Sari. Finally today we will learn about God’s call of Abraham out of a life of idolatry: *To follow God, Abraham must be willing to leave his old life, and his family, behind.*

Outline: (Genesis 11:11-12:1)

1. The genealogy from Shem to Abram (11:11-26)
2. The family tree of Terah, Abraham’s father (11:27-30)
3. Terah, Abraham, Sarah, and Lot leave Ur and stop in Haran (11:31-32)
4. God’s previous call of Abraham (12:1)
5. Who is Abraham? An introduction to Abraham

1. The genealogy from Shem to Abram (11:11-26)

Genesis 11:11-26 NKJV

This is the genealogy of Shem: Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. ¹¹ After he begot Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

¹² Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah. ¹³ After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

¹⁴ Salah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. ¹⁵ After he begot Eber, Salah lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

¹⁶ Eber lived thirty-four years, and begot Peleg. ¹⁷ After he begot Peleg, Eber lived four hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters.

¹⁸ Peleg lived thirty years, and begot Reu. ¹⁹ After he begot Reu, Peleg lived two hundred and nine years, and begot sons and daughters.

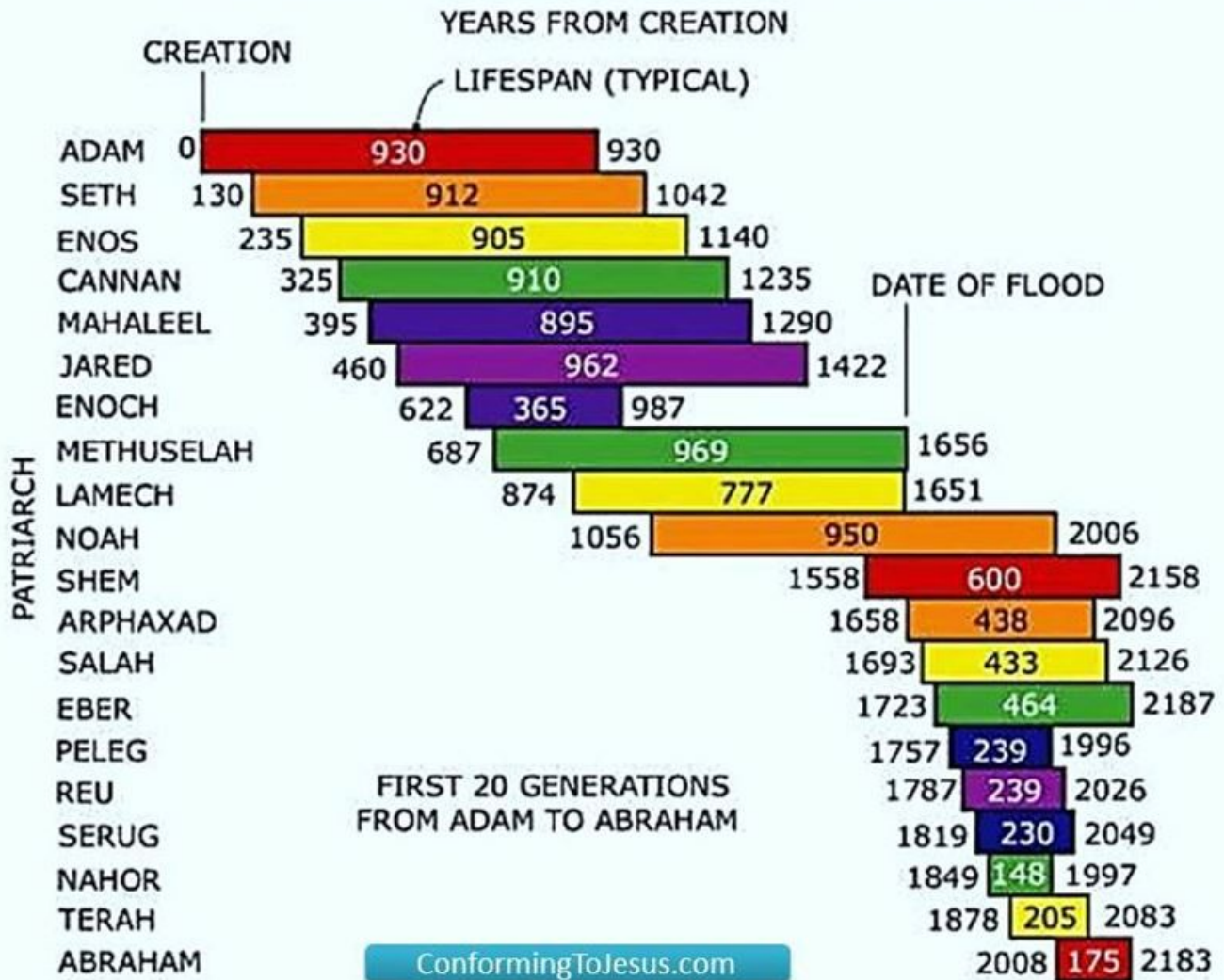
²⁰ Reu lived thirty-two years, and begot Serug. ²¹ After he begot Serug, Reu lived two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters.

²² Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor. ²³ After he begot Nahor, Serug lived two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

²⁴ Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and begot Terah. ²⁵ After he begot Terah, Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters.

²⁶ Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

LIFESPANS OF THE BIBLICAL PATRIARCHS



Shem only died when Noah was 150 years old

Looking at the table above, we can see that Abraham was born 2 years after Noah died. However, Shem was still alive, and only died when Abraham was 150 years old. It is highly likely that Shem and Noah knew each other, and also that Shem passed on the written records that he had written, plus those received from the previous patriarchs. Using the data from the chrono-genealogies here in Genesis 11 and other passages, we can work out that Noah was born 2008 years after creation (when Shem was 450 years old), and died 2183 years after creation (25 years after Shem died). I can just imagine Shem explaining to Noah what life was like before the flood, the experience of living for a year on the Ark with all those animals, and then having to start all over again on a flood ravaged earth.

A dramatic decline in life expectancy after the flood

These long life spans show just how overlapping the generations were at this time, with Shem living for 502 years after the flood, and the first three patriarchs in Shem's line who were born after the flood still living to be well over 400 years old.

Significantly, we see a dramatic decline in lifespans with Peleg which correlates well with what we discussed previously. It was in the days of Peleg that “the earth was divided” (see Genesis 10:25), meaning that the events of the tower of Babel happened about the time when Peleg was born. The sudden decrease in lifespans from 400+ years to 200+ years correlates well with the more difficult lifestyle each small family group or nation would have experienced as they all separated from each other and journeyed to establish new countries all over the earth. Taming the uninhabited wilderness and establishing new lives for themselves in distant lands is never easy. Some of these nation families travelled thousands and thousands of kilometres from the Middle East to their final choice of location where they decided to settle down and establish agriculture and build cities and other infrastructure. Remember that this migration was during the ice age, when the ice covered much of the northern hemisphere, and ocean levels were much lower than they are now. This meant that there were land bridges that the families or nations could use to move from one continent to another (the *Answers Book* is a great resource to get more information).

Explaining some discrepancies in the genealogies

The later (newer) versions of the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament inserts the name of Cainan between Arphaxad and Salah in this genealogy. Because of this, the New Testament writers, who spoke Greek and would have regularly used the Septuagint version of the Old Testament Scriptures (remember that the New Testament is written in the ancient Greek language) also included Cainan in their genealogy in Luke 3:36. Most likely it is a copying error. Here are some reasons why just about all Bible scholars think that the addition of Cainan between Arphaxad and Salah in the later versions of the Septuagint, and thus its inclusion in the genealogy in Luke 3:36, *is a simple copying error*:

- It is not included in the genealogical record in 1 Chronicles 1:18 which was written before the Septuagint was.
- Cainan is not given as a son of Arphaxad in Genesis 10:24 (the table of nations where all the sons were listed).
- The Septuagint wasn't written until many centuries after Moses, around 700 years later, from the third century BC to the first century BC (three hundred to one hundred years before Christ—it was required as the Romans used the Greek language as their universal language, so everyone in the empire had to speak Greek, including the Jews).
- Cainan is not included in the earlier versions or copies of the Septuagint, only the later ones (the ones written closer to 100 BC). It's very easy for mistakes to creep in when copies are made of copies, which are then copied over and over again. Overall, there are relatively few copying errors within the Scriptures, especially compared to other ancient literature, where there are often major differences between different copies.
- The Masoretic scribes (a group of extremely accurate and conscientious Jewish scribes or scholars active from around 100 AD to 500 AD) compiled the present Hebrew text from the ancient copies of which many no longer exist today. This Masoretic Text is the most accurate version of the Hebrew Scriptures (it is what our Old Testament is based on today), and it *doesn't* include the name Cainan between Arphaxad and Salah.
- Lastly, the name Cainan is not found in any of the other ancient versions of the Old Testament, such as the Samaritan, the Vulgate, or others.

I took the time to go through this as so many people become discouraged and start to lose faith in the inerrancy of Scripture when critics and skeptics point out that there are *contradictions* in the Bible and they can't explain them. However, these are only *apparent contradictions*. The Bible commands us to have an answer for those who ask a reason for the hope that we have in God. This is basic *apologetics*, having a reasoned and logical argument to defend what we believe. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it. We need to know our Bibles.

1 Peter 3:15 AMP

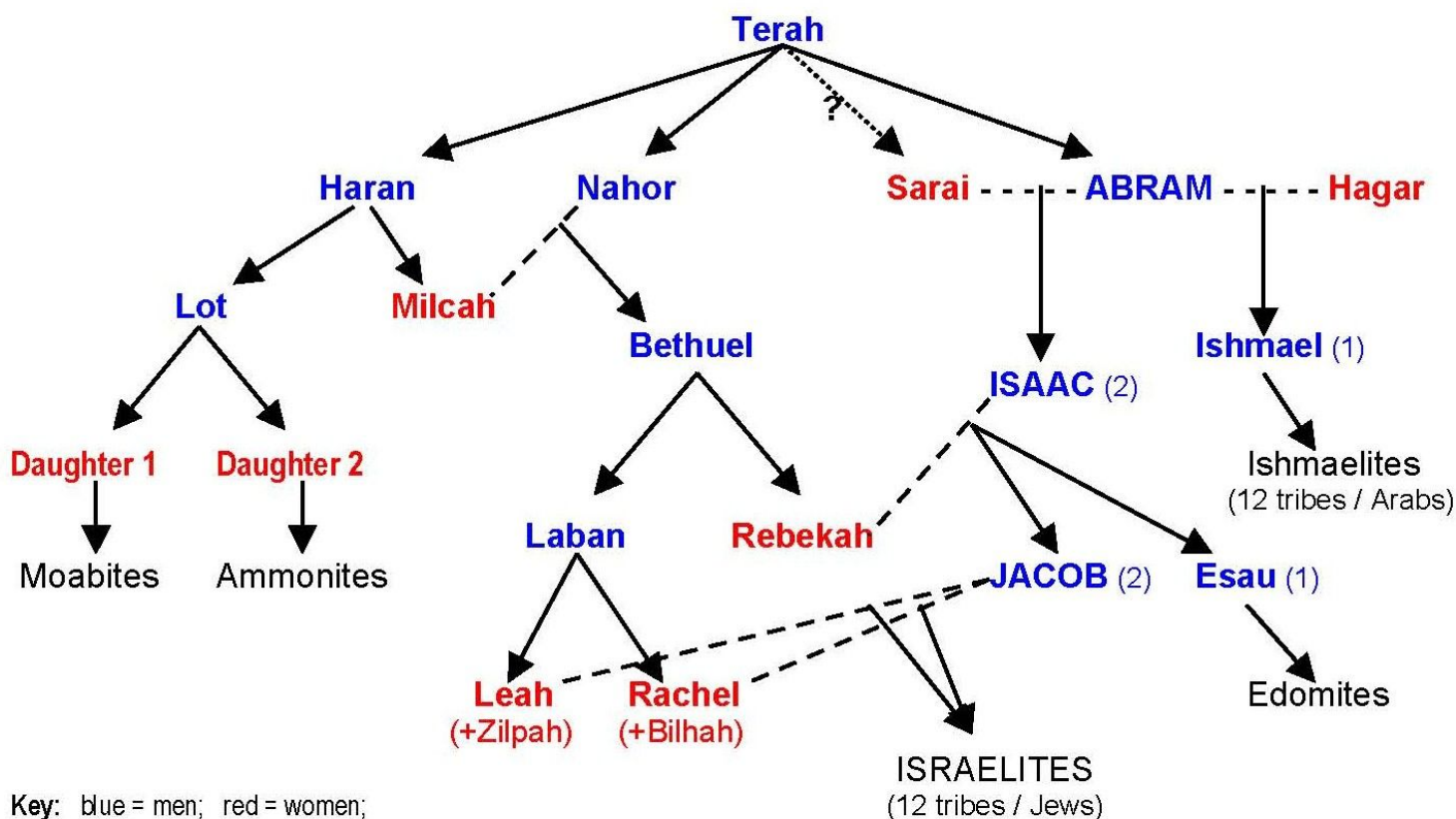
But in your hearts set Christ apart as holy [and acknowledge Him] as Lord. *Always be ready to give a logical defense [Greek: Apologia] to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you, but do it courteously and respectfully.* [Isaiah 8:12, 13.]

2. The family tree of Terah, Abraham's father

Genesis 11:27-30 NKJV

This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. ²⁸ And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹ Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. ³⁰ But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Family of Abraham



Abraham's relationship to Sarah

Sari (later Sarah) was actually Abram's (later Abraham) half sister, the daughter of his father Terah, but not his mother.

Genesis 20:11-12 NKJV

And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. ¹² *But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.*

As we have discussed before, it was not uncommon in those days to marry close relatives. Not only was it necessary in the years after Creation and then again after the flood, but there was no command not to, and also there was no significant risk of genetic diseases or deformities. This was because there hadn't been enough time for the copying errors or mutations in the genes to build up to dangerous levels.

The family tree diagram above also shows at least two other marriages involving close relatives. Isaac married his second cousin (Rebecca, his dad's brother's son's daughter), and Jacob married his cousins (Rachel and Leah were daughters of his mother's brother, Laban).

The fact that Sarai (Sarah) was Terah's daughter, but not Abraham's full sister, is a strong indication that Terah most likely had more than one wife. This is another indication that Abraham didn't come from a godly home, as polygamy was common in the pagan nations at the time. We'll go into Abraham's idolatrous background later.

How old was Terah when Abraham was born? Another apparent contradiction

Reading the text, it would seem that Abraham, because he was listed first, was the eldest or firstborn child. Therefore if Terah was 70 years old when he had his first child, and Terah died at age 205 (see Genesis 11:32), this would make Abraham 135 years old when he left Haran (on the border of the land of Canaan) and finally entered the land of Canaan.

Acts 7:4 NKJV

"And he [Steven] said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, ³ and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' ⁴ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. *And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.*

The problem is that Abraham was only 75 years old when he left Haran. "So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran" (Genesis 12:4 NKJV).

Don't be concerned though—like before, there is a simple solution to this *apparent contradiction* in the Scriptures. The reason is simple—the Bible doesn't always list the children in order of age, but rather in order of importance. One example of this is Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. They are typically listed in that order. However, when we cross reference other scriptures, we find that Japheth was actually the eldest, and Ham was the youngest.

Genesis 10:21 NKJV—*Japheth is the oldest or firstborn son of Noah*

And children were born also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, **the brother of Japheth the elder.**

Genesis 9:24 NKJV—*Ham is the youngest son of Noah*

So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what **his younger son [Ham]** had done to him.

Therefore, if Noah’s three sons were listed in order of age, from oldest to youngest, it should be Japheth as the eldest, then Shem in the middle, and then Ham as the youngest. This helps us to understand that Abraham was not the firstborn son of Terah. In reality, Abraham was born when Terah was 130 years old. It makes sense that Abraham was listed first as he obviously is very important in the historical account that follows—Abraham was chosen by God to be the father of the nation of Israel, through whom would come the promised Seed, the Messiah. Again, when we use Scripture to interpret Scripture, these apparent contradictions vanish like a mirage on a hot day as you get near them.

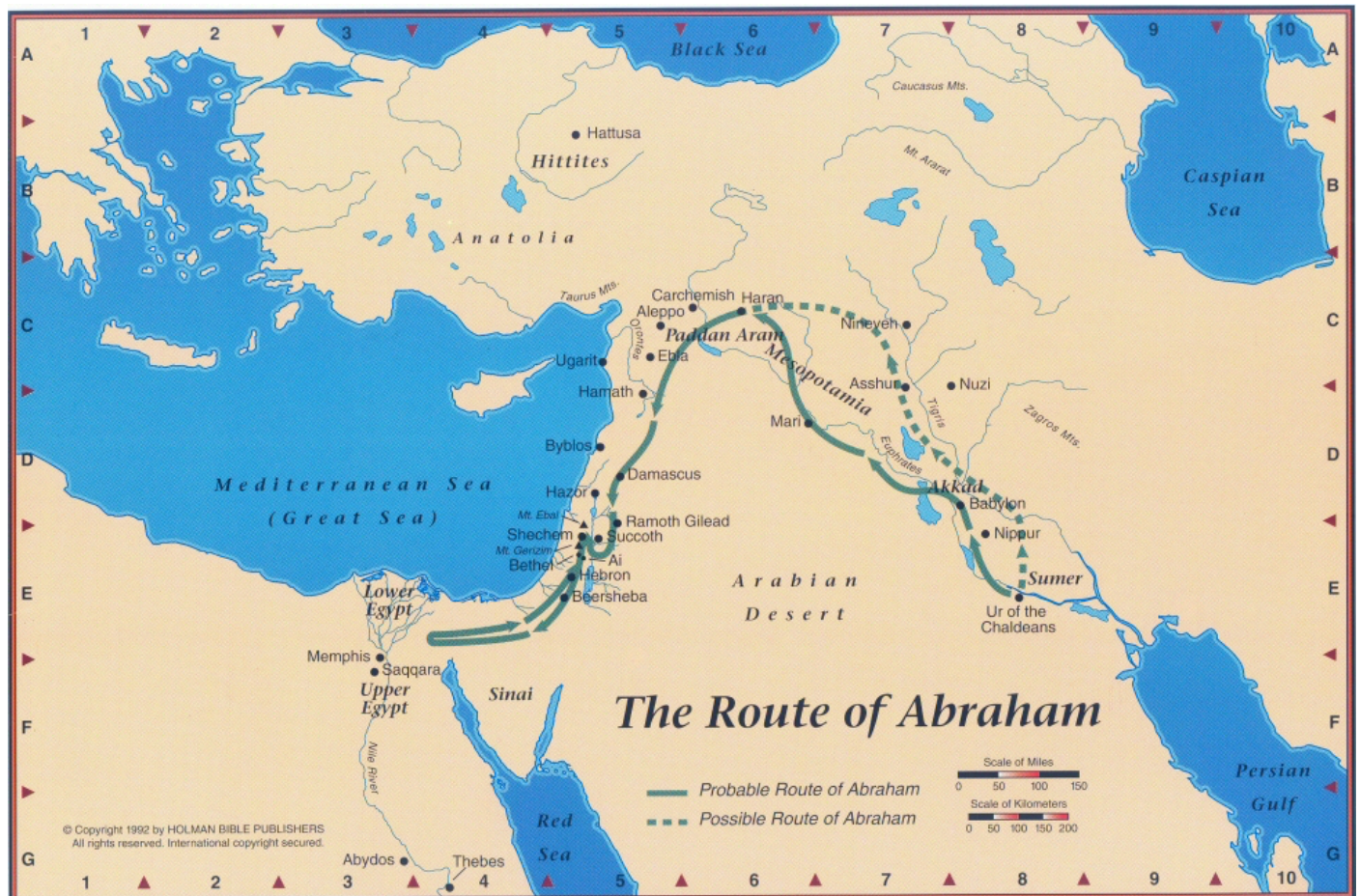
3. Terah, Abraham, Sarah, and Lot leave Ur and settle in Haran

Genesis 11:31-32 NKJV

**And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.
³² So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.**

Where is Ur of the Chaldeans, and how far is it?

The following map shows how Abraham lived in a town called Ur of the Chaldeans, near the Persian Gulf, along the Euphrates River, in the Fertile Crescent. To get to Canaan, he travelled for about 1,000 km, heading north west along the fertile crescent, basically following the Euphrates river, and passing through Babylon (or Babel), until he, his father, and his nephew Lot, arrived in Haran. Haran is located in what today is northern Syria. It was only when Abraham’s father Terah died that Abraham then travelled about another 800 km from Haran to Canaan (what is now called Israel).



Ur of the Chaldeans was a very upmarket city in its time, most likely with flushing toilets and many other luxuries (flushing toilets first appeared in Mesopotamia in Abraham's time). The picture below represents what Ur would have looked like based on the ruins that have so far been excavated. Notice the broad wall and the ziggurat, with a temple for the moon goddess. It was also a wealthy city as it was on a trade route along the Euphrates river. Abraham had to leave a lot behind, trading a life of wealth and luxury for a life of living in tents for basically the rest of his life.



4. God's previous call to Abraham

Genesis 12:1 NKJV

Now the LORD *had said* to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.

What we notice here is that this command that God gives to Abraham was given while he still lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, near Babylon. This is confirmed in the New Testament.

Acts 7:4 NKJV

"And he [Steven] said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham **when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,** ³ and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' ⁴ **Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran.** And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.

The call had three parts. Firstly, get out of your country. Secondly, leave your family behind (except his wife Sarah). Thirdly, start walking, and I'll show you where to go.

Abraham settles in Haran for at least 15 years until his father Terah dies

So close, but so far. Haran is adjacent to, but not inside the Promised Land. Abraham stayed there until his father Terah died, which was a minimum of fifteen years later. We can learn a lesson from this as God didn't speak to Abraham again (in Genesis 12:7) until Abraham had fully obeyed what God had first told him to do. God was patiently waiting for Abraham to fully submit himself to Him.

Abraham was told to leave his family behind, but he didn't. Instead, his father Terah and nephew Lot went with Abraham. It is clear that Abraham did not make God more important than his father Terah or his family (his nephew Lot). The Scripture says in Genesis 11:31, **"And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there."**

God had a reason for telling Abraham to go alone. Both Terah and Lot caused major problems for Abraham. Firstly, for a reason that we do not know, Terah didn't want to, or simply could not, travel from Haran to the land of Canaan. We also know that he was an idolator (we'll come back to this later). Therefore, because Abraham refused to make obeying God more important than obeying his idolatrous father, he was stuck living in Haran for a minimum of 15 years while he waited for his father to die. Simply put, Abraham has not fully repented of his old way of life yet. Listen as Jesus explains what repentance is.

Matthew 8:18-22 NKJV

And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. ¹⁹ Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."

²⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

²¹ Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

²² But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

In Matthew 18:21, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father", does not mean that his father had already died. Rather, the young man, a disciple of Jesus, felt obliged to stay at home and look after his father until his father died before he could leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Basically he was saying, "When it's convenient, I'll follow You Jesus, but for now, family comes first". Jesus didn't accept this kind of second rate commitment, telling the half-hearted disciple, *"Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

Jesus explained more about the cost of discipleship in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 14:23-33 AMP

Now huge crowds were going along with [Jesus], and He turned and said to them,

²⁶ If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his [own] father and mother [in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude toward God] and [likewise] his wife and children and brothers and sisters—[yes] and even his own life also—**he cannot be My disciple.**

²⁷ Whoever does not persevere and carry his own cross and come after (follow) Me **cannot be My disciple.**

²⁸ For which of you, wishing to build a farm building, does not first sit down and calculate the cost [to see] whether he has sufficient means to finish it?

²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid the foundation and is unable to complete [the building], all who see it will begin to mock and jeer at him,

³⁰ Saying, This man began to build and was not able (worth enough) to finish.

³¹ Or what king, going out to engage in conflict with another king, will not first sit down and consider and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand [men] to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

³² And if he cannot [do so], when the other king is still a great way off, he sends an envoy and asks the terms of peace.

³³ **So then, any of you who does not forsake (renounce, surrender claim to, give up, say good-bye to) all that he has cannot be My disciple.**

Again, Abraham demonstrated only partial obedience. Yes, he did actually leave Ur of the Chaldeans, which was a big step, especially since he didn't know where he was going to end up, and he was giving up a life of ease and luxury. But he disobeyed because he didn't leave his family behind as God had commanded him—"Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, **from your family and from your father's house**, to a land that I will show you. (Genesis 12:1 NKJV).

How differently things would have worked out later if Abraham had only obeyed at the start. But what we will learn over the following weeks, is that Abraham had to grow in his faith, he had to learn to trust God. At the end of Abraham's life, he is not only willing to give up his family, but also to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, the one whom God promised that the Messiah would be a descendant of, believing that God was able to raise him from the dead—we'll learn about this when we get to Genesis chapter 22.

The consequences of partial or delayed obedience—a "parched and barren" life

Names are often important in the Scriptures, giving us a lot of insight into people and events. It is interesting that Terah's name means "delay", and the name Haran means "parched or barren". Putting the two together, *we observe that when Abraham delayed in obeying God, when there was incomplete repentance leading to incomplete obedience, then Abraham experienced a parched and barren life.* Simply put, because Abraham chose to love and honour his family more than God, and was therefore more loyal to them than to God, he did not fully obey God. Therefore, Abraham was not in fellowship or walking with God. The result was that Abraham, for that period of his life, for at least 15 years, did not experience the beautiful joy of walking in fellowship with the Lord. God did not speak to him or give him any further revelation until he had obeyed and was in the land of Canaan, "So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ... ⁷ **Then** the LORD appeared to Abram and said..." (Genesis 12:4, 7 NKJV)

John 15:10-11 NKJV

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

¹¹ "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

In effect, partial obedience has the same effect as no obedience, we are still walking in darkness.

1 John 1:3-6 NKJV

...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

"Terah died in Haran: Sometimes we can gain meaning from names in the Bible. The name Terah means, "delay." The name Haran means "parched, barren." When Abram was in partial obedience, then delay and barrenness characterised his life. When we delay in drawing close to God we also experience barrenness." (David Guzik)

5. Who is Abraham? An introduction to Abraham

Genesis 11:26 is the first mention of Abram, whose name will later be changed to Abraham. His name is mentioned 312 times in 272 verses in the Bible, making him probably the most famous man in the Old Testament. A third of the entire book of Genesis is spent describing the life of Abraham. Here are some interesting facts concerning Abraham:

A. Abraham is called the “friend of God”

2 Chronicles 20:7 NKJV

Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of *Abraham Your friend forever?*

Isaiah 41:8 NKJV

“But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, *the descendants of Abraham My friend.*”

James 2:23 NKJV

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” *And he was called the friend of God.*

B. Abraham is known for his faith

“Men and women in the Bible are famous for many different things, but Abram is great for his faith. Moses was the great lawgiver; Joshua a great general; David a great king, and Elijah a great prophet. Most of us know we can never be great in those things, but we can be great people of faith. We can be friends of God...

If you despair in knowing you do not have Abram’s faith, take comfort in knowing you have Abram’s God. He can build in you the faith of Abram, because He built it in Abram himself.” (David Guzik)

C. Abraham grew up in a family that worshipped idols

Joshua 24:2 NKJV

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River [the Euphrates river] in old times; *and they served other gods.*”

Later on, when Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, went back to Abraham’s relatives, they were still worshipping idols. In fact, Rachel stole the household idols.

Genesis 31:19 NKJV

Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father’s.

D. Abram and Sarah were barren

Genesis 11:30 NKJV

But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

The name Abram means “father”. Just imagine living in that culture, where names meant something. You introduce yourself to someone, saying, “Hi, my name is Abram (meaning “father”).” They reply, “Okay father, where are your children?” We will find out later that for 25 years this was very hard for Abraham and Sarah to cope with as they waited, at times not patiently, for God to fulfil His promise of a son. However, as we go on, we will see how God used this to build Abraham’s and Sarah’s faith.