GENESIS: THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS · STUDY NOTES

Study 9: The call of Abram

For personal study or groups

Your name

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How to use these notes. Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

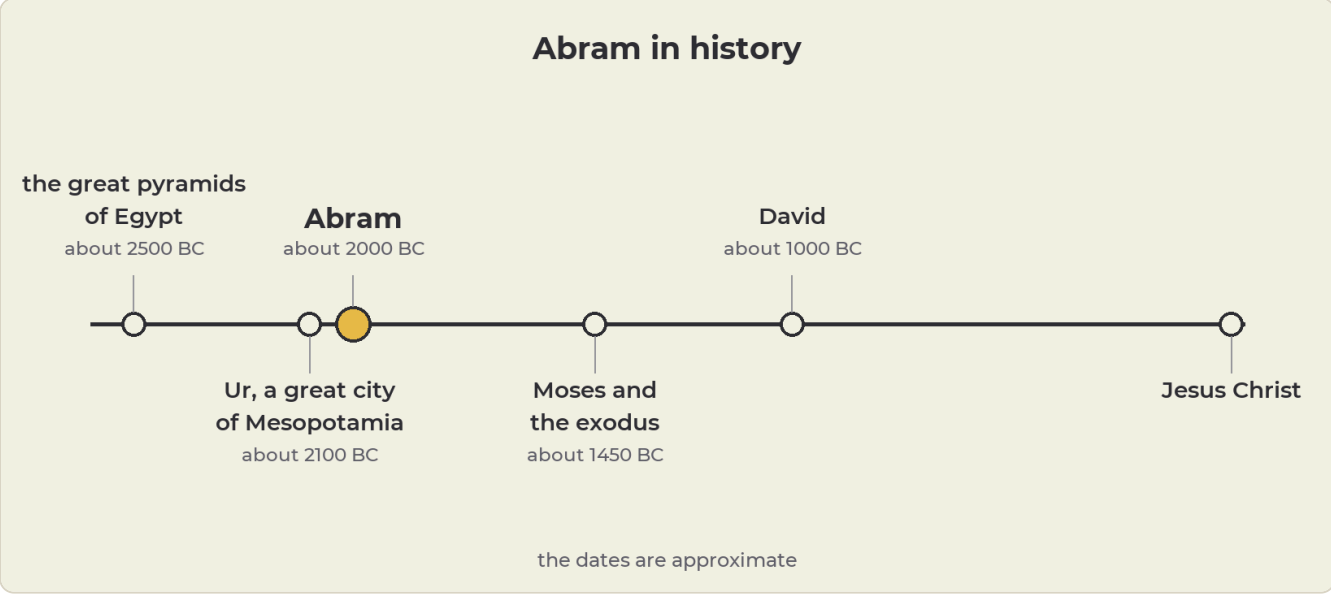
📖 **Before you start: read Genesis 11:27–12:20.** Read it in your own Bible, all the way through, before the videos. Then in this study we go through it together, a few verses at a time. (About 4 minutes.)

PART 1

Go to the land I will show you

Genesis 11:27–12:9

With chapter 12 the book slows down. After many centuries in eleven chapters, the next fourteen chapters follow the life of one man, Abram, later called Abraham. He lived about two thousand years before Christ, in a world of great cities, great kings and many gods.



Abram in history (the dates are approximate): the great pyramids of Egypt (about 2500 BC), Ur, a great city of Mesopotamia (about 2100 BC), Abram (about 2000 BC), Moses and the exodus (about 1450 BC), David (about 1000 BC), Jesus Christ.

1. Abraham. He was born in Ur of the Chaldeans, the son of Terah, and married to Sarai, who had no children. He set out for the land God would show him at seventy-five; Isaac was born when he was a hundred (Genesis 21:5); he died at a hundred and seventy-five (Genesis 25:7). He is "called a friend of God" (James 2:23) and "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11). But the hero of his story is not Abraham: it is the God who called him.

2. A family with no future. Abram's brother Haran died young, in Ur. "But Sarai was barren; she had no children": humanly, the line of the promise had come to a dead end. Terah set out from Ur "for the land of Canaan", but the family settled in Haran, far to the north, and there Terah died.

1 **Read Genesis 11:27–32**

Who died in Ur? What do we learn about Sarai? Where did the family settle?

3. Chosen by grace. Joshua tells us what Genesis 11 does not: "Long ago your fathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham". Abram was not looking for the true God; the true God came looking for him. God still calls His people in the same way: "It is by grace you have been saved!" (Ephesians 2:5).

2 **Read Joshua 24:2–3**

What did Abraham's family worship? What did God do?

4. Abram's journey. Between Ur and Canaan lay the great desert of Arabia, so travellers went the long way round, up the river Euphrates to Haran, then south-west to Canaan: many hundreds of miles on foot.



Abram's journey: Ur of the Chaldeans (the family sets out), Haran (Terah dies; God calls), Shechem (an altar to the LORD), Bethel and Ai (an altar; he calls on the LORD), the Negev, and, in the famine, Egypt.

5. "Leave… and go." God's first word to Abram is a command: leave "your country, your kindred, and your father's household", circles closer and closer to home. In that world your family was your safety. And he was to go "to the land I will show you", not even told its name. The God who calls him is the God who said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:3). Abram went because God was greater than every fear. Stephen tells us God first spoke to him "while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran" (Acts 7:2).

3 Read Genesis 12:1–3

What did God tell Abram to leave? What did He promise him?

6. "I will…" God promises a great nation, to a man whose wife had no children; blessing; a great name, to a man who did not try to grab one, unlike Babel; and "you will be a blessing". First God blesses, then we become a blessing: you cannot pour water from an empty jug. And then the greatest promise: "all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." In these verses the word "bless" comes five times.

7. The gospel, foretold. Paul says that in these words the Scripture "foretold the gospel to Abraham": God "would justify the Gentiles by faith". The blessing comes through Jesus Christ, "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

4 **Read Galatians 3:7–9**

Who are the sons of Abraham? What did the Scripture foretell to Abraham?

8. "So Abram departed." God spoke and Abram went, with no bargaining, at seventy-five, "without knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). God does not usually speak to us as He spoke to Abram, but He has not stopped calling: "in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:2). His call to us is in His written Word.

5 **Read Genesis 12:4–9**

How old was Abram when he left Haran? Who was in the land? What did God promise him there? What did Abram build?

9. Two great obstacles, and God's power. "At that time the Canaanites were in the land", and Sarai had no children. Yet God said, "I will give this land to your offspring." God makes promises only He can keep. He chose a man whose wife could not have children, so that the power would be seen to be His: "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong... so that no one may boast in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:27, 29).

6 **Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–29**

Whom did God choose? Why?

10. A tent and an altar. At Shechem and near Bethel, Abram built altars, and "he called on the name of the LORD". The tent showed he was a stranger passing through; the altar showed that his life was centred on God. His first response to God's promises was worship.

11. Looking for a city. Abram never owned the land in his lifetime; he lived in tents, "for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Our true home, too, is with God: "I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

7 **Read Hebrews 11:8–10**

How did Abraham obey? How did he live in the promised land? What was he looking forward to?

PART 2

Down to Egypt

Genesis 12:10–20

1. A famine in the land of promise. Soon after Abram arrived, a severe famine came, and he went down to Egypt "to live there for a while". The Bible does not say whether going was wrong, and teachers differ. What it makes very clear is what he did next.

8 **Read Genesis 12:10–13**

Why did Abram go down to Egypt? What did he ask Sarai to say, and why?

2. "Please say you are my sister." It was a half-truth (Sarai was his half-sister, Genesis 20:12), told to deceive. It kept Abram safe but put his wife in great danger, and it forgot God's promise: "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you". "The fear of man is a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is set securely on high" (Proverbs 29:25).

9 **Read Proverbs 29:25**

What is the fear of man? What happens to the one who trusts in the LORD?

3. The man of faith afraid. The Bible hides nothing. Abram, the man of faith, fell through fear, and would tell the same lie again years later (Genesis 20). "So the one who thinks he is standing firm should be careful not to fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

4. The plan "worked". Sarai "was taken into the palace of Pharaoh", the woman through whom the promised nation was to come. Abram grew rich with sheep, cattle, donkeys, servants and camels: wealth from a lie, which would bring its own troubles (Genesis 13; Genesis 16:1).

10 **Read Genesis 12:14–16**

What did Pharaoh's officials do? How did Pharaoh treat Abram?

5. "The LORD, however." "The LORD, however, afflicted Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Abram's wife Sarai." Abram would not protect his wife, so God did, and with her His promise. An unbelieving king had to rebuke the man of God: "What have you done to me?"

11 **Read Genesis 12:17–20**

What did the LORD do? What did Pharaoh ask Abram? How was Abram sent away?

6. God keeps His promise. "He let no man oppress them; He rebuked kings on their behalf" (Psalm 105:14). The story is not mainly about Abram's failure but about God's faithfulness: "if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). This is never an excuse to sin: "Shall we continue in sin so that grace may increase? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1–2).

12 **Read Psalm 105:12–15**

How are Abraham's family described? What did God do for them?

7. Abram and Israel. Many teachers have noticed that Abram's story here follows the same steps as Israel's later story. The Bible gives a hint: "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans" (Genesis 15:7), and "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:2).



Abram and Israel, the same steps: a famine in the land; down to Egypt; Sarai taken into Pharaoh's house, and Israel made slaves in Egypt; plagues on Pharaoh; sent out with great wealth; back to the land, and on to the land. The God who brings His people out.

8. The faithful Son of Abraham. Abram lied to save himself. Of Jesus it is written: "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). He did not save Himself; He gave Himself for His bride, the church. John Piper put it like this: "The only candidates for the blessing of Abraham are sinners." Every promise to Abraham is made sure in Christ: "For all the promises of God are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

13 **Read 2 Corinthians 1:20**

Where do all the promises of God find their "Yes"?

Study 9 in summary

Out of a world of idols, God called Abram by grace alone, and made him promises that reach the whole world: a land, a great nation, a great name, blessing, and "all the families of the earth will be blessed through you". In that promise the gospel was foretold, and it comes true in Christ, the son of Abraham, for all who believe. Abram took God at His word and went, with a tent and an altar, looking for the city whose builder is God. Then in Egypt the man of faith was afraid, and lied, and put the promise in danger; but the LORD protected Sarai and kept His word. God's promises do not depend on our faithfulness, but on His, and they are all "Yes" in Christ.

THINK IT THROUGH

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What did God tell Abram to leave behind, and what did He promise him?

2. According to Galatians 3:8, what did God foretell to Abraham?

3. Why did Abram tell Sarai to say she was his sister?

4. Why is it a comfort that God's promises do not depend on our faithfulness?

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

Memory verse for study 9

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

GENESIS · STUDY 9 · MEMORY VERSE

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

Genesis 12:2

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **Genesis 11:27–32** *27This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. 28During his father Terah's lifetime, Haran died in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. Abram's wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, who was the father of both Milcah and Iscah. 30But Sarai was barren; she had no children. 31And Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai the wife of Abram, and they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan. But when they arrived in Haran, they settled there. 32Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.*

2 **Joshua 24:2–3** *2And Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your fathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. 3But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through all the land of Canaan, and I multiplied his descendants. I gave him Isaac,*

3 **Genesis 12:1–3** *1Then the LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you. 2I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you; and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you."*

4 **Galatians 3:7–9** *7Understand, then, that those who have faith are sons of Abraham. 8The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and foretold the gospel to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

5 **Genesis 12:4–9** *4So Abram departed, as the LORD had directed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5And Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all the possessions and people they had acquired in Haran, and set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, 6Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the Oak of Moreh at Shechem. And at that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." So Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8From there Abram moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built an altar to the LORD, and he called on the name of the LORD. 9And Abram journeyed on toward the Negev.*

6 **1 Corinthians 1:26–29** *26Brothers, consider the time of your calling: Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were powerful; not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28He chose the lowly and despised things of the world, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, 29so that no one may boast in His presence.*

7 **Hebrews 11:8–10** *8By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, without knowing where he was going. 9By faith he dwelt in the promised land as a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

8 **Genesis 12:10–13** *10Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. 11As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "Look, I know that you are a beautiful woman, 12and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13Please say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake, and on account of you my life will be spared."*

9 **Proverbs 29:25** *The fear of man is a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is set securely on high.*

10 **Genesis 12:14–16** *14So when Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15When Pharaoh's officials saw Sarai, they commended her to him, and she was taken into the palace of Pharaoh. 16He treated Abram well on her account, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels.*

11 **Genesis 12:17–20** *17The LORD, however, afflicted Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Abram's wife Sarai. 18So Pharaoh summoned Abram and asked, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? 19Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" 20Then Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning Abram, and they sent him away with his wife and all his possessions.*

12 **Psalm 105:12–15** *12When they were few in number, few indeed, and strangers in the land, 13they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. 14He let no man oppress them; He rebuked kings on their behalf: 15"Do not touch My anointed ones! Do no harm to My prophets!"*

13 **2 Corinthians 1:20** *For all the promises of God are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him, our "Amen" is spoken to the glory of God.*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Study 9: The call of Abram

> **Memory verse:** “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

Aims

- See from Genesis 11:27–12:9 that God called Abram out of an idol-worshipping family by grace alone, and made him promises that reach the whole world: a land, a great nation, a great name, blessing, and "all the families of the earth will be blessed through you"; that in this the gospel was foretold (Galatians 3:8), and comes true in Christ, the son of Abraham.
- See Abram take God at His word and go, with a tent and an altar, looking for "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10).
- See from Genesis 12:10–20 the man of faith afraid and deceiving, and the LORD who protected Sarai and kept His promise; God's promises rest on His faithfulness, not ours, and are all "Yes" in Christ.

Suggested timing (about 75 minutes, or two meetings)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer. Ask the group to read Genesis 11:27–12:20 before the meeting.
- **35 min** Part 1 video (17 min); Genesis 11:27–12:9, with Joshua 24:2–3, Galatians 3:7–9, 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 and Hebrews 11:8–10.
- **25 min** Part 2 video (11 min); Genesis 12:10–20, with Proverbs 29:25, Psalm 105:12–15 and 2 Corinthians 1:20.
- **10 min** Reflection questions. Close in prayer, thanking God that He called us by grace and keeps His promises in Christ.

For most groups, take one part each week. If you do, read the passage for that part aloud together before the video.

Tips

- This study opens Section 2 of the course. Use the timeline and the map (Part 1) to give the group their bearings: Abram lived about two thousand years before Christ, and travelled from Ur, up the Euphrates to Haran, and on to Canaan.
- Some in your group may have left their own country, as Abram did. Let them share, gently, if they wish; but keep the focus on God's call and God's promises, not on migration.
- God does not usually call us today by a voice from heaven, as He called Abram. The study says so plainly: His call to us is in His written Word. If someone is anxious that God might suddenly tell them to leave home, reassure them.
- Abram's lie (Part 2): the study calls it sin plainly. Whether going down to Egypt was itself wrong is left open, as the Bible does not say; do not let the group get stuck there.
- Sarai in Pharaoh's palace: keep to what the text says. There is no need to discuss what may or may not have happened.
- The picture of Abram and Israel (Part 2) is offered gently, as something "many teachers have noticed". Present it in the same way.
- The heart of Part 2 is God's faithfulness. Members who feel they have failed God need to hear that His promises in Christ do not depend on their faithfulness, and also that this is never an excuse to sin (Romans 6:1–2).