



Sunday School Lesson for Sunday, December 5, 2004.
Released on: Wednesday, December 1, 2004.

"Called to Follow in Faith"

Devotional Reading: **Jeremiah 1:4--10**

Background Scripture: **Genesis 11:27--12:9**

Golden Text: "Now the Lord 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

LESSON AIMS

1. Describe the historical situations of Abram as he and his family obeyed the call of God to leave Ur and then Haran.
2. Evaluate the faith of Abram through his positive responses to God's call to venture into the unknown.
3. 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.

Genesis 11:27--12:9

²⁷ This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. ²⁸And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹Then 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. ³⁰But Sarai was barren; she had no child. ³¹And 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. ³²So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

¹ 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.
²I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
³I 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."

⁴So 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. ⁵Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. ⁶Abram passed through

the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.

⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he 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. ⁹So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

QUESTION 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?

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.

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

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, "Practice makes perfect!" What is practiced in the home spills over to the school system, the neighborhood, the church, the job, everywhere.

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

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!

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

The word "seed" 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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

"Called to Lead With Integrity"

Devotional Reading: 2 Samuel 7:19--29

Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1--13

Printed Text: **1 Samuel 16:1--13**

Golden Text: 1 Samuel 16:7

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