

TUTORIAL

1.21

God chose Abram. Lot chooses Sodom and Gomorrah

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Genesis 11:27-32, Genesis 12, 13:1-13.**

Last time

We followed the record of God completing His rescue of Noah and His family from the global destruction. Records were given of the three lines of the human race, coming from Noah's sons Ham, Shem and Japheth. The Narrative continues when, only 3 generations after the Flood, the population, settled in the Babylonian plain, is indifferent or actively defiant toward God. In pursuit of their humanistic goals they planned to build a great tower but God thwarted their plan by changing their languages, and thus beginning the process of scattering humans around the world.

God interacts with Abram, a descendant of Shem

The Account moves forward 10 generations (approx. 350 years) to now focus on someone that God is going to relate to in a very special way. (Genesis 11:27-30) This relationship will prove to have enormous consequences for the entire Story of God's interaction with human beings. The man, of course, is Abraham – at this point still called by his birth name, Abram. A descendant of Shem, Abram had grown up in Southern Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq).

Back when the languages were divided at the time of the failed Tower project, a group speaking an early form of *Aramaic* settled not far from the Babel area, founding the very important city of the time, Ur, on the lower Euphrates. By Abram's time, far from worshipping the true, Creator God, as a community, they had told their own, entirely different false story, which included gods created out of their own imaginations and from the natural world around.

This *idolatry*, would prove to be a common feature of human cultures everywhere, and at every point in history, including today. And, as we'll see in the Narrative, it is something of particular abhorrence to God because it formalises and systematises the human default away from Him, from the

relationships with man He pursues, away from an appropriate faith-based approach to Him, away from His righteousness and grace. And, perversely, it puts into His rightful place things that He himself created.

Abram was clearly different to the majority culture of his community, including his own father, Terah, who we're told worshipped idols. We're not told all the details of how Abram came to know God, but the Narrative does describe his obedient response to God's revelation and communication. In the introduction to the extended family and its history, there is mention made of a fact that will prove to be significant to the Story. Sarai, Abram's wife, it says, is unable to have children.

The text here in the Genesis account (Genesis 11:31,32) goes on to describe Terah initiating a migration of the family to Canaan in the west, near the Mediterranean. We also know from other parts of God's Word that Abram's joining with his father on this move was prompted by God coming to him and telling him to go. So Abram, responsive to God's direction begins the move with his wife, father, and nephew Lot. To avoid the Arabian Desert they must make a large loop north and west, then eventually south to Canaan in the "Fertile Crescent." Heading up the Euphrates river valley, probably via Nineveh, they reach the city of Haran (near the modern Turkish city, Urfa), where Terah dies.

Abram is to have a significant role in God's plans

We don't know exactly how long Abram and his group stayed in Haran, but while there God again communicates with him directly...we're not told whether in direct, audible speech, but that was often the way God spoke back before His written Word became the primary means - as it is today - of His communicating with people. He tells Abram to start out again and travel with his extended family group to a particular area - a "land" the text says, that God will show him. (Genesis 12:1)

Along with the directive, God makes him some momentous promises. (Genesis 12:2-3) He's to become the father, the progenitor, of a great nation. God will cause him to prosper and protect him, he'll bless those who help Abram and curse those who oppose him. He will become a famous and important man and, most significant of all, through Abram, God declares, "all the families of the earth" will be blessed.

God has clearly not forgotten His plan to rescue His lost image-bearing race that was first intimated hundreds of year back now in the dark, terrible day of the Turning Away, the Fall. The One He said who would come to crush the head, to break the power of the Enemy. Despite the ongoing rebellion before and after the Flood, despite the idolatry, the defiance, the sin, the indifference,

the rebellion...God's grace was not diminished. Those things only have the effect of making it shine out all the brighter. So now, the Plan is to be moved forward a significant step. The pathway for the Deliverer is to be initiated. A man, a family, a people, is to be situated for the Promised One to come through.

The Narrative doesn't say, but we can safely assume that Abram knew about the Promised One and was waiting for Him to be revealed. Whether he understood the full implications of God's promise that through him the families of the earth would be blessed we can't be certain. Regardless, having God the Creator making these declarations must have filled him with a sense of excitement and anticipation. The fact that he simply believed God though is remarkable. Remember that he had no children, his wife being unable to conceive.

And yet Abram believes God, believes His promises. This faith, specifically Abram's (later Abraham) like Noah's would be used as a benchmark, a definitive mark of faith...believing something for which there is no evidence or even contrary indications, based entirely on God's assertions.

The family migration is completed

He and Lot, their families, servants, livestock, and all their possessions leave the trading city of Haran and begin the journey west and then south, paralleling the Mediterranean coast down to Canaan. (Genesis 12:4,5) Although having long ago given up their city culture for a nomadic lifestyle, Abram and Lot were by no means destitute wanderers. In fact, they would have been considered quite wealthy, with livestock numbering well into the hundreds, and mention of silver and gold. Later, when needed, Abram is able to muster over 300 men for battle so there must have been well over this number of people in his extensive household. Certainly they were able to occupy large tracts of grazing land without being driven off by any existing inhabitants.

Initially Abram and Lot's groups settle side by side, but eventually tensions between their staff over pasture allotments necessitate a separation. Lot chooses the well-watered lands of the Jordan Valley proper, near to the city of Sodom. In time this will prove to be a very poorly advised choice as it locates them near to the city of Sodom, a notoriously evil community that would become synonymous of course, with "life-style" choices that God would judge harshly. Abram, on the other hand, chose to settle for a time, possibly under God's guidance (though we're not told specifically) in the less fertile country to the west, near to Hebron...what is now called the Judean hills.





DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. The lesson highlights the fact that God spoke to Abram (Abraham). Think back over what we've covered so far of God's actions in history and try to remember all the different times God communicated. Also put that in the context of Him speaking to us now through His Word. Would you agree that this aspect of communication is something profoundly essential to who He is? Make any observations you'd like to about what this means to you personally, and also any wider implications.
2. Do you feel a kinship with Abram and his early life in Mesopotamia as a believer in a majority culture that rejects God? What challenges does this bring? Also comment on any parallels you see between God calling Abram to a journey of faith into a new land and your own journey with God into unknown areas (geographic or otherwise).
3. Consider the whole area of faith and trusting God. Describe the contrasts – if any – you see in the picture of faith that is developing in the Biblical narrative and the way it is often presented in popular Christian teaching and books. How do we avoid the trap of being self-seeking or trivial in the exercise of our faith?



ACTIVITIES

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1. In approximately half a page write a synopsis of the life of Abraham. (Please include a map showing key places).