

Lesson 7: October 14, 2018

God Is Always Working

Bible Background • GENESIS 9 - 12

Printed Text • GENESIS 10:1; 11:10, 27, 31-32; 12:1-4 | Devotional Reading • HEBREWS 11:4-10

Many tasks seem daunting or even impossible for mere human effort. How can mere humans accomplish such challenging and important work? Genesis teaches that God worked over many generations from Noah to Abraham in order to bring blessings to the entire world.

Words You Should Know

- A. Bless *baraq* (Heb.)—To speak well of.
- B. Curse *'arar* (Heb.)—To abhor or hate.

Say It Correctly

- Chaldean. kal-DEE-uhn.
- Arphaxad . ARE-fax-ahd.
- Haran. HAIR-en.

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE the significance of the genealogical record in Genesis; EXPLAIN the reality that God works through generations to accomplish His will; and CELEBRATE how God has worked in our own families to bless others.

In Focus

Darius was frustrated. His friend Kendall had been telling him that he needed to wake up to the reality that Christianity was a religion forced on him by white oppressors. Kendall argued that Darius should follow the traditional religions of Africa as he did. Darius was unsure how to respond to Kendall, but he knew he was committed to following Jesus Christ regardless of what Kendall thought. One day he had a conversation with his great-grandmother whose grandparents were former slaves. “Granny, were your parents Christian?” he asked.

“Yes, baby. They may have not been preachers, or always been perfect, but they learned how to read from that Bible.” She pointed to a bookshelf in the corner of the room. “And I remember my parents singing songs about Jesus when I was young. They believed Jesus would free them from slavery, and when they finally walked into freedom they gave praise to God for delivering them!”

Darius was in awe. If his ancestors had believed in Jesus and they were slaves of people who called themselves Christians, surely he could stand up to Kendall. On his great-grandmother’s bookshelf, he saw the worn Bible and a book called *Africans Who Shaped Our Faith*. He decided he would do his own study to defend his faith to Kendall.

Why is it important to know our family history? How can we encourage children in our lives to learn about Jesus in a world where there is so much opposition to Christianity?

Keep in Mind

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:2–3, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV

Genesis 10:1 Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.

11:10 These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:

27 Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.

31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

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

12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

NLT

Genesis 10:1 This is the account of the families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. Many children were born to them after the great flood.

11:10 This is the account of Shem's family. Two years after the great flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad.

27 This is the account of Terah's family. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot.

31 One day Terah took his son Abram, his daughter-in-law Sarai (his son Abram's wife), and his grandson Lot (his son Haran's child) and moved away from Ur of the Chaldeans. He was headed for the land of Canaan, but they stopped at Haran and settled there.

32 Terah lived for 205 years and died while still in Haran. 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you.

2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.

3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

People, Places, and Times and Background

Abram. The significance of God's call for a nation through Abram was that up to this point no distinction existed between people and races in the manner that we think of today. After the Flood, the people were dispersed at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). The Bible depicts a detailed review of the descendants of Shem, Noah's eldest son. Out of Shem's lineage, through Abram, God would call out a people unto Himself to be witnesses throughout the earth of His greatness. They would receive the blessing for serving the one true

and living God in the midst of idolatry around them. Ultimately, Abram's seed through forty-two generations would bring forth the Messiah who would reconcile the world back to God (Matthew 1:1–17). Abram exemplifies the faith necessary to obtain righteousness and access to the promises of God through Jesus Christ.

The Land of Canaan. In Hebrew "Canaan" (kena'an, keh-NAH-an) means low region or lowland. It refers to the country west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, between the waters on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Named after Ham's son, the land was given by God to Abram's posterity, the Children of Israel, as promised. In modern geography, Canaan is now Palestine and the West Bank.

Background

Genesis 6–9 provides the account of the Flood that God sent as judgment for wickedness throughout the earth. Only eight people were spared: Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives. From these eight people, the whole earth was repopulated (Genesis 9:19).

Genesis 10 begins with a table of nations presenting the known tribes of that time. This table gave the "horizontal" genealogy of Noah's three oldest sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth— and serves as a precursor to the scattering that will later occur at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Not only will the tribes and clans be identified by their geographical location, but also by their languages (Genesis 10:31).

This genealogy differs from the one provided later in chapter 11, in that the intention here is not to prove ancestry, but show affiliations and allegiances among tribes. Ancient readers would have been able to tell from its arrangement which tribes fell under God's blessing, and which were cursed (see Genesis 9:20–27; 12:1–3)—and they associated accordingly, providing the backdrop for future conflicts and wars. Although Shem is listed first, his genealogy is provided last, indicating that his story and descendants will be the focal point.

What does this section imply about the connections of all of the people groups of the world? How could this knowledge affect one's relationships and interactions?

At a Glance and In Depth

At-A-Glance

1. Noah to Shem (Genesis 10:1)
2. Shem to Abram (Genesis 11:10, 27, 31–32)
3. Abram's Call (Genesis 12:1–4)

In Depth

1. Noah to Shem (Genesis 10:1)

Genesis 10:1 introduces what is called the “Table of Nations” by listing Noah’s three sons, mentioning in passing that he and his wife had other sons after the Flood. Nothing else is said about those sons. However, as the sons’ descendants are listed later in the chapter, one sees the ethnic, political, and geographical development of future tribes and people groups. Shem is the father of Semitic language groups, including the Jews or Hebrews. The name “Hebrew” is believed to be derived from Eber, Shem’s great-grandson; the name “Jew” is derived from Israel’s son Judah. From Ham would come a variety of people groups; Cush would be modern-day Ethiopia and Sudan, and Mizraim was also called Egypt. Japheth’s descendants would comprise the Indo-European language groups in the north. Since they would eventually settle far away from the Israelites, they are not major factors in Israel’s history. Ham’s descendants, however, are constantly intertwined in the story of the Israelites, as both antagonists and allies. For example, Canaanites, Ethiopians, and Egyptians are descendants of Ham. However, there have been intermarriages and blending of cultures that make these distinctions hard to apply in our modern era.

As you consider later conflicts in the Bible how does this genealogy provide insight?

2. Shem to Abram (Genesis 11:10, 27, 31–32)

In Genesis 11, there is a break from the genealogical record for an explanation of how people came to scatter throughout the earth at the Tower of Babel.

The genealogies continue by providing more details on Shem’s line, introducing people who are pertinent to the unfolding story: Abram, Sarai, and Lot.

Genealogies recorded in the Bible often reveal God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises. “Vertical” genealogies, such as this one, were also used to prove a person or tribe’s claim to a kingdom or dynasty. After God blessed Shem, that blessing would be extended to future generations. Showing that Abram was in the line of Shem (nine generations removed) authenticates the promise of blessing that he would receive in chapter 12.

Consider your own genealogy. Write down your ancestors as far back as you can. What can you learn about yourself based upon stories of your ancestors?

3. Abram’s Call (Genesis 12:1–4)

There are several things to note about Abram’s call.

God’s call to Abram required sacrifice. Abram had to leave his land, his family, and his father’s house. In the ancient world, inheritance, land, and family (heirs and legacy) were extremely important. Since this call came after his father’s death, Abram would be forfeiting the financial security (both present and future) found in owning his father’s property and his inheritance. He would also be walking away from responsibility as the heir who was expected to fill the role of head of household.

God’s call was conditional. He promised to make Abram a great nation, bless him, make his name great, protect him through blessing and cursing others, and bless the world through him. However, these blessings were contingent upon Abram obeying the command, “Go.”

Obedying God's call required a considerable amount of faith. Abram and his family were pagans who worshiped idol gods (Joshua 24:2). Therefore, he had no relationship yet with the one true God. He was given a command and promise by a God he did not know to leave all that he had ever known, at seventy-five years old, to go to a place that was yet to be determined. Abram was trusting that God's inheritance would be greater than the one he left behind.

Verse 4 begins "So Abram departed," a testament to why it would eventually be said Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (from Genesis 15:6).

Consider people in your life who have exhibited this amount of faith. How does it affect your view of and relationship with God?

Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning

Search the Scriptures

1. Read Matthew 1:1-17 (for more details, read the entire passage). What does this passage detail? Compare and contrast the passage with Genesis 11.
2. Reread Genesis 12:1-3. How does the above passage in Matthew relate to it? Describe the ultimate manifestation of "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (v. 3).
3. Count the generations that passed on from Abraham to Christ. Consider that it is believed that Abraham lived between 2000 and 1500 BC. What does this teach you about God's character? What about the level of faith of ancient followers of God?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God did not give Abram any information about where he was going. Name some qualities Abram must have possessed in order to follow God's call and leave without question or reservation.
2. Abraham built an altar wherever he went as a sign of faith, discipleship, and thanksgiving. These altars were reminders of God's faithfulness for generations. Though building altars in modern times is not practical for us, what steps can we take in order to "mark" our journey with the Lord as Abraham did?

Lesson in Our Society and Make it Happen

Liberating Lesson

Racial tensions and immigration issues stand to destroy communities, as people continue to fail to treat those seen as "other" equally—with humanity, dignity, and respect. Many of the tensions of the world can be traced back to Noah's lineage. Self-fulfilling prophecies of sorts have come to pass, when one people group believes falsehoods about another, and acts in accordance with lies and misinterpretations of Scripture. There is an enlightening video where individuals are interviewed about their ethnic background. They claim, "I'm 100% this..." or "I can't stand this group of people." Then they take DNA tests and are astonished by the results, discovering they are more connected and related than they imagined. Ironically, the process of healing could begin from recognizing one truth. When God started over, He started with one man and his offspring. We have the same origin.

Application for Activation

Consider what could have happened to Abram's legacy if he chose comfort and security over faith. Would there have been the miracle of Isaac's birth? The twelve tribes of Israel? David? Would his name have been in the line that would include Jesus? Abram had no idea that his departure would have such an impact. He obeyed a God that he did not know. Yet, we struggle, even in having the benefit of hindsight. Is there something that you feel called to do that you have not done? Are you walking in disobedience in a particular area? Why? Fear? Comfort? Desire for stability? Laziness? Distraction? Consider the potential consequences of such disobedience. This week, ask God to bring to your remembrance God-given calls and dreams that have fallen by the wayside. Ask that He will grant you Abram-like faith to obey Him.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light On The Text

Genesis 10:1; 11:10, 27

10:1 Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood. 11:10 These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: 27 Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.

These verses from Genesis 10 and 11 highlight the lineage connecting Noah to Abram. God made promises to Noah and would also continue to have a special relationship with Abram who had an inheritance of faith and promises from God through Noah. This section is also important to show the growth and repopulation of the earth after the Flood; although God had flooded the earth, His purpose and promise for humanity would continue through the generations.

Genesis 11:31–32

11:31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. 32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

Genesis 11 introduces the narrative about Abram, whose life forms the basis of three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

First we meet his father, Terah, who was the father of three sons, Haran, Nahor and Abram. The descendants of two, Nahor and Abram, combined to form the line of Israel, for all the wives of Isaac and Jacob came from the line of Nahor.

Terah took his family and left Chaldea. His name seems to mean a wanderer or a pilgrim. The Old Testament does not tell us why Terah decided to move his family. His aim was to go the land of Canaan. Though this passage does not state so explicitly, something seemed to have happened to this man. Here we find grace working in the heart of the one whose children were to inherit the land of promise and serve as instruments of God, bringing the promised seed into the world. Haran, the father of Lot, died before his father (Genesis 11:28). When Terah left Ur, he took his extended family with him, including Lot. This is vital to people of African descent, for we have always been people who value the extended family. In the past grandparents took in their grandchildren if their children died before them. The city of Haran was a halfway mark that fell short of their goal to reach Canaan. They were not far from the Promised Land, yet they never proceeded to it. Terah left Ur to go to Canaan but settled in Haran instead, where he stayed until his death. Just as we do not know why Terah set out, we do not know why he stopped before reaching his goal. Though scholars have some conjectures, it is important only to note that they stopped short. They found employment and proceeded to enter into relationships with the people of the place. It took a tragedy for Abram to leave Haran and head where God directed him (Acts 7:4). The death of his father did not change Abram's calling. While it is good that Abram respected his father, often children must take their parents' vision further. Abram's respect for his father was not to stand in the way of God's command.

Genesis 12:1

12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

This verse relates the first recorded time God spoke to a person since Noah. After a long silence, God begins His direct work with His creation, beginning a family that would eventually bring the Savior. We have no indication that Abram was seeking God. Purely out of His grace, God chooses to bless Abram. He appoints a place for him, then challenges and charges him. This call is full of implication for the relationship that will develop between Abram and the Lord. God will have regard and respect for Abram, making a special people out of him. God's words were "get thee out." This was directed to three important levels of Abram's life, progressing from the remote to the personal. The first was directed to the sentiment of national attachment. The Hebrew literally reads "from thy land." Ancients defined themselves by a radical connection to their own parcel of earth. Relating to this attachment to earth or land may be hard for people in America today, but for people of the indigenous world, this was once considered the ultimate attachment. This was Abram's world. Owning a parcel of land meant stability and provision. Your own land was necessary for providing food and goods for your family. Another idea that this command may call up in the minds of ancient people is abandoning their god. For many ancients, their god was tied to their land, so if you moved too far away, your god had no power in your new land. God was asking Abram to do something radical. Secondly, the "get thee out" was toward Abram's extended family connections. The Hebrew term *moledeth* (mo-LEH-deth) speaks to the lineage of Abram, both direct ancestors and cousins. Staying at Haran would have given them a sense of being among their own people. The third direction of the "get thee out" was toward his father's house. Again the phrase "out of thine father's house" can mean a variety of things as it especially relates to one's immediate family. It can also refer to the social status of one's mother as the daughter of someone of high standing. However, after these negatives, God tells Abram how the "get thee out" has a positive direction. God said "Get thee ... unto a land that I will show thee." There was a constructive formation being proposed by God. God was indicating that He was moving toward something great and wanted Abram to be more than a quiet spectator. God was going to show Abram a land. If Abram would obey, then it would appear to him what God was doing. The Hebrew for "shew" (*ra'ah*, rah-AH) here can refer to physically looking at or experiencing

something. For example, God showed Moses the plans for the tabernacle (Exodus 26:9), and He shows mercy to the psalmist (Psalm 85:7). The meanings can blend here. God promises Abram will both see the land with his eyes and experience it as he lives there.

Genesis 12:2-3

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all of the earth be blessed.

In verse 2 we see God's promises to Abram. Here God is clear that He will bestow greatness and blessing upon Abram. God will bring forth that which He has charged and committed to Abram. God was ready to deal with any displeasing hindrance and execute the promise. This promise is in seven parts, which is important because seven is the number of completion or perfection in Hebrew thought. This means the blessing from God to Abram is a perfect promise, not just words but a divine oath. By speaking seven times God was indeed swearing an oath by Himself to Abram. The first part is a promise directed to Abram's posterity. God says, "I will make thee a great nation." The word "make" is taken from the Hebrew word *asah* (asaw'). Other uses of this specific grammatical construction deal with fashioning objects out of copper or wood (Exodus 27:3; Isaiah 44:17). Here, the image is that similarly, God will fashion a nation out of Abram. More than just fashioning a nation, God will fulfill His purpose for that nation and furnish her with all that she needs to be God's nation. God will bring this about through Abram's obedience. In order to keep this promise, God will embark on a journey, keeping and laboring to maintain what He has "made," showing us divine sacrifice and service. What was God going to make? God says, "a great nation." The word great is from the Hebrew *gadol* (gaw-DOLE), which means great in all ways. God was going to make a high and noble people, a big (numerous) people. The second promise reads, "I will bless (Heb. *baraq*, bah-ROCK) thee." God knows that human beings need immediate blessing. God understands that as much as Abram loves to have a great posterity, he also desires to be blessed in his lifetime. Abram will be a man who benefits from his relationship with God. The abundance of God's blessing was now promised to Abram. This blessing was completely based on the character of God. God will personally affirm Abram for whatever Abram does for God's sake. Abram has no reason to look for his self-affirmation from any other source than the God whom he came to know. Abram was going to receive blessing from God, not from a human being. The third part of this promise is directed to Abram's name: "I will... make thy name great." The idea here is that Abram will occupy a definite and conspicuous position in the history of humankind. Abram's name will be recognized wherever it is named. Having a great name means Abram will be a man of honor and authority. It also refers to his nobility of character. His renowned name will be reported throughout history. The fourth part is where God adds "thou shalt be a blessing." Instead of using the future tense, as the English translates, the Hebrew verb here is an imperative, which makes this a command that implies Abram should uphold or live out this blessing. Many of us know people who are blessed but fail to bless others. We also may have met people who are renowned, but whose presence has not been a blessing. In fact, there are some whose memories make us curse the day we met them. Just because someone is great does not mean that he or she will bless others. Our history as people of African descent is full of people who were famous in their lands not because they were a blessing, but a curse to us. The fifth promise speaks to what God will do for those who bless Abram (v. 3). To keep the rhythm of the text and the process of oath-taking, which was common among the ancients and some traditional African people, this should be read, "I will make them a blessing that bless you." God will prepare a blessing for those who bless Abram. This could mean that God will say thanks to those who reach out to Abram and to his children. Another reading could be that God is the one who leads those who bless Abram to bless him. They would not bless Abram if God's Spirit does not move within their hearts. This promise is very important, particularly given the fact that Abram will live out his life as a stranger in a strange land. The unwritten rule of the ancient world and in traditional African cultures is that those who minister to strangers or pilgrims were in fact ministering to God and shall be blessed by Him.

The sixth promise from God to Abram is related to people's treatment of Abram and Sarai in their pilgrimage. The King James Version reads, "and curse them that curseth thee." Other versions are clearer in their reading as it relates the ancient rite of promise-making and oath-taking. The New Living Translation does a better job portraying that two different Hebrew words were translated "curse" in the KJV. The first "curse" (Heb. 'arar, aw-RAR) tells us what God will do. The word is from a primitive root that means to abhor or to hate. God then will hate and attack those who curse Abraham. The second Hebrew word translated curse is the word qalal (kaw-LOL; NLT: treat with contempt), from a root word meaning to make light of someone so that they become a joke. It also means to make something or someone feel small. As Abram was a stranger in the land to which God called him, he was an easy target. People could trifle with him and revile him because his family was not great and no great warriors were around to defend him. This was a warning to those who may feel great in themselves and thus be led to trample upon Abram's human rights because he was a stranger. The seventh part in the King James Version reads, "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God's final promise to Abram was a universal promise. This blessing includes all human beings. The Hebrew mishpakhah (mish-pah-KHAW) is often translated "families" as it is here, but the way it is used here can also refer to all classes of people. It can refer to the whole race or humanity as a species. In the final word, Abram's call is for the blessing of all tribes, people, and kindred.

Genesis 12:4

4 So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

Here, Abram begins his second journey to Canaan. Abram brought out the various properties that he had acquired in Haran. He was now assured that God will bear him out. His departure from Haran was in obedience to God's Word. We are told that Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. One is never too old to strike out on a new venture for the Lord. As an older man of seventy-five, Abram followed the commandment to shoot forth into a new area and spread his wings. Though it may have been the winter of age in human eyes, God's command caused Abram to spring up and stand out for God and for the blessing of humanity. Any time is a good time to obey the Lord; any age is a good age. Abram ran with the promise.