

Peninsula City Church

Taste and See

You are joking, right, Abram, really?

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You are joking, right, Abram, really?

An Introduction

Q. How would you explain, the context and purpose of the Lord's call of Abram?

Recently I was reading Matthew's gospel and became focused on chapter one, verse one. That is, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1 ESV).

The thought occurred, "Why Abraham, what was it about him that he became part of the family line of Jesus Christ? What was his early life context, and what was the Lord's purpose in choosing him from all the people alive on earth at the time? He seems like such a random choice for a foundational figure for what God was going to do and for the Christian-Judeo worldview. It would appear as if God selected him from left field. That is, Abram was plucked out of his culture and context for God's purposes. By accepting the Lord's call, Abram stepped into the unknown of God's work and plan for him in his life. It is like what Nadia Bolz-Weber said in her book, *Finding God in All the Wrong People*,

"I simply continue to be a person on whom God work is at work. And I don't even seek that out, to be honest."¹

Was this the case with Abram? Was he just in a place where God could work in his life even though he did not even seek it? So, what follows are some of the musings, study and conclusions to this point in my journey on this topic.

What if someone asked you to tell them the story of Abraham, how would you go? Do you know the story of Abraham? Really, do you know the actual story? It needs to be said here that, many think they know about Abraham, but do they really. Yes, he is a person just like us with needs, desires and dreams, but we have so westernised him that it is hard, to tell the truth from the fiction regarding his story. In fact, our story of Abraham has been Christianised to the point that he has become somebody that he was not in the first place.

Here we will take a brief look at Abram, within his own context. We will review God's purpose for calling him, and the significance of his life on those to follow. Abraham did, in fact continually, "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34:8a) in his life, journey's and for his household. So, here, we will briefly review God's Call of Abraham to try to find out what it all meant. Firstly, we will consider why Abraham from an Old Testament point of view? Then and only then, we will look at some of his impact on the New Testament Christ-followers?

1. Why Abram from an Old Testament point of view?

Q. Who was Abram, and why did God sovereignly choose him?

His place in history

As one begins reading the New Testament, they will note that Matthew began his account with Jesus Christ's family line. It starts with Jesus going back to Abraham. Matthew presented the legitimacy of Jesus to be part of the line of Abraham. The family line in Matthew began as follows,

"The book of the genealogy (family line) of Jesus Christ, the son (ancestor) of David, the son (ancestor) of Abraham" (Matt 1:1 ESV).

¹ Bolz-Weber, Nadia. *Finding God in All the Wrong People*. (New York, NY: Convergent, 2015), 8.

Thus, we need to go all the way back to Genesis to try to understand the person of Abraham. It is in that context that, we read about where he came from in the first place.

We will start with Genesis chapter ten as Abram was from the family line of Shem, and then we move forward from there (**see Appendix One**).²

“These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood (Gen 10:1 ESV). (**see Appendix Two**)

So, we need to begin with Shem the son of Noah as he is the ancient ancestor of Abram.

“These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood” (Gen 11:10 ESV).

Then we see that Abraham’s (Abram at this point in time) father was Terah. Also, Abraham’s (meaning ‘father of many’) original name was, in fact, Abram, which meant “to be high father, exalted father”³ and was changed later in his life by the Lord.

²² “When Serug had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor. ²³ And Serug lived after he fathered Nahor 200 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁴ When Nahor had lived 29 years, he fathered Terah. ²⁵ And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah 119 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁶ When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran” (Gen 11:22-26 ESV).

The Move

As we read on it is here that we come across an important aspect of Abram’s life, i.e. he and his family came from Ur of the Chaldees, Gen 11:28. This was in fact, Southern Mesopotamia (meaning ‘Land Between the Rivers’, i.e. the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers) in the region of Sumer, which later became the kingdom of Babylon and is now modern Iraq as of 1920⁴. The city of Ur was important as it sat on the intersection of the trade route of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and the Persian Gulf.⁵ Consequently, it has rightly been said,

“Abraham is presented in the Bible as having come from Mesopotamia.”⁶

Scripture is silent regarding the type of lifestyle Abram lived while in UR, but it may have been a stationary existence. However, when he left Haran, he lived a semi-nomadic life in Canaan.⁷ This is seen in that, while in Canaan, he had shepherds to oversee his flocks. It has been said on the dating of the life of Abram that,

² Wilson, Marvin R. *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 3.

³ Williamson, Paul R. “Abraham,” In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 8.

⁴ “Iraq.” <https://www.etymonline.com/word/iraq> (24th July 2019). The name Iraq is “from an Arabic name attested since 6c. for the region known in Greek as Mesopotamia; often said to be from Arabic *‘araqa*, covering notions such as ‘perspiring, deeply rooted, well-watered,’ which may reflect the desert Arabs’ impression of the lush river-land. But the name might be from, or influenced by, Sumerian *Uruk* (Biblical *Erech*), anciently a prominent city in what is now southern Iraq (from Sumerian *uru* ‘city’).”

⁵ “Ur.” <https://www.ancient.eu/ur/> (18th of July 2019). In addition, it has been said that in 2013, “British archaeologist says he and his colleagues have unearthed a huge, rare complex near the ancient city of Ur in southern Iraq, home of the biblical Abraham.” “Ancient site unearthed in Iraqi home of Abraham.” <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/ancient-site-unearthed-in-iraqi-home-of-abraham-44286> (1st August 2019).

⁶ Walton, John H. *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 13.

⁷ Williamson, “Abraham,” 9.

“During the 19th and early 20th centuries Abraham was considered to be a contemporary or near-contemporary of Hammurabi, the great king of the First Dynasty of Babylon.”⁸

He appears to have been quite well off since, he had a lot of wealth, servants, animals, and either soldiers or some of his servants were trained to fight, Gen 13:2,7; 14:14. So we are not told whether he had this before leaving Ur, or accumulated it while in Haran.

As we read through the following Scriptures, we learn that Abram married a woman named Sarai. As this is mentioned in the story, it must be relevant, even if we are not told whose daughter she was in these passages. It has been speculated that she may have been related to him somehow, see Gen 12:13,19; 20:2,12.⁹ As a matter of fact, Abram made an interesting statement later in their relationship to Abimelech the king of Gerar when he said,¹⁰

“Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife” (Gen 20:12 ESV).

Could this be the case, even though we do not have any of Terah’s wives mentioned?

²⁷ “Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. ²⁸ Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans.²⁹ And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai ‘my princess’, and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Gen 11:27-30 ESV).

There are a couple of things to notice from this above section of Scripture. Firstly, I don’t know about you, but I have heard it said that the Lord called Abram out of Ur. However, the Bible mentions Terah taking his household and leaving Ur of the Chaldees to go to the land of Canaan. Though, he only went as far as the region called Pandan-Aram (meaning ‘the field of Aram’) in northern Mesopotamia, which was north of Canaan and stopped there to live. But there appears to be quite a period between Genesis 11:31-32 (where Terah took his family and left Ur for Haran in Syria) and Genesis 12:1 (where God told Abram to leave for Canaan). **(see Appendix Three)**

Secondly, the writer pointed out that Sarai could not have children as she was infertile. This was an essential matter in the context of the story of Abraham and his family line. Because for his family line to continue, he needed children and grandchildren etc. As it has been said,

“Sarai’s barrenness then becomes the ground for great tension of the ensuing chapters: God has promised to make Abram into a great nation, but how can this happen when his wife is barren?”¹¹

The writer of Genesis highlights that the move from Ur to Canaan was Terah’s choice and not Abram’s. However, God was still involved in the overall process, since we read in Genesis 15:7,

“And He said to him, ‘I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess” (Gen 15:7 ESV; see also Josh 24:3; Neh 9:7, which endorses this line of thought).

⁸ “Abraham and the Chronology of Ancient Mesopotamia.” <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-timeline/abraham-and-the-chronology-of-ancient-mesopotamia/> (1st August 2019).

⁹ “Sarah/Sarai: Bible.” <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/sarahsarai-bible> (24th July 2019).

¹⁰ Zucker, David J. & Reiss, Moshe. *The Matriarchs of Genesis: Seven Women, Five Views*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 31. n. 6, 34. See also, Fuller, Brett Everett. *Relate Well: Properly Relating to Your World and the People Most Important to You*. (Bloomington, IN: Westbow, 2010), 54-55. Plus see, “My Wife, My Sister: Three times in Genesis, wives are ‘passed off’ as sisters.” <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/my-wife-my-sister/> (24th July 2019). “Abraham’s Early Life.” https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112063/jewish/Abrahams-Early-Life.htm (24th July 2019).

¹¹ Robar, Elizabeth. *The Verb and the Paragraph in Biblical Hebrew: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 4.

Yet, how many times have we heard the idea that God called Abram to leave Ur? But Abram left under his father's direction, while his brother Nahor remained in Ur. Although they set out for Canaan, they only went as far as Haran in Northern Mesopotamia (in modern Syria) and then settled there.

³¹ Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. ³² The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran" (Gen 11:27-32 ESV).

His early life

So, if this is the case, what do we know about Abram's early life? What were some of the influences that moulded him from a child onwards to be the person that the Lord chose? This is especially as he lived in a culture that had many local gods. The main god of Ur, the city of the Sumerians, was the moon goddess Su'en. The following breakdown may be helpful regarding those around him that could have influenced him. It has been suggested that,

"When Abraham was born, Shem was 390 years old, and his father Noah was 892 years old. Abraham was 58 years old when Noah died. These are important facts, for, as we shall see later, Abraham spent many years in the house of Noah and Shem, and received instruction from them... Thus Terah, his son Abraham and his wife Sarai, and Lot, Haran's son, and all their household left Ur of the Chaldees in Babylon and set out for Canaan. On the way, they came to Charan, where Nahor lived, found it a good place, and stayed there.

Three years later, when Abraham was 55 years old, G-d appeared to Abraham and told him to take his wife and household and go on to Canaan. This Abraham did, and he stayed there 15 years. At this time, when Abraham was 70 years old, G-d made a covenant with him, and soon afterwards, Abraham returned to Charan, where he stayed for five years. Then, once again, G-d appeared to Abraham and told him to leave his father's home and native land for good and go to the land of Canaan. This time, Lot his nephew (and brother-in-law) accompanied him. Terah died in Charan, and Nahor remained there with his family.

Thus, at the age of 75, Abraham came to dwell in the land of Canaan, the land which G-d had promised him to be the chosen land for his children as an everlasting inheritance."¹²

Based on the estimates given above, Abram's family timeline may look like the following,¹³

| Abram/Abraham | Abraham's Family was approx. | Abram/Abraham was approx. |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| The flood | Shem was 98, Noah was 600 | |
| Abraham born | Terah 70, Shem 390, Noah 892, | 58 when Noah died at 950 |
| God appears to Abram: 55 | Terah 125, Shem 445, Noah 947 | |
| Abraham leaves for Canaan: 75 | Terah 145, Shem 465 | |
| Ishmael born, Abram 86 | Terah 156, Shem 476, Sarah 77 | |
| Abram: 99 becomes Abraham | Terah 169, Shem 489 | 135 when Terah died at 205 |
| Isaac born, Abraham 100 | Terah 170, Shem 490, Sarah 91, Ishmael 13 | 137 when Sarah died & she died at 127 |

¹²). "Abraham's Early Life." https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112063/jewish/Abrahams-Early-Life.htm (24th July 2019).

¹³ Walton, John H. *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie, 1978), 34.

| | | |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Abraham died at 175 | Terah had died 40 yrs earlier at 205, Shem lived 38 yrs after Abraham & died at 600 | |
|---------------------|---|--|

It has been pointed out that,

“The universalism that marked Gen chaps 1-11 having now failed, the Lord begins anew, singling out one Mesopotamian in no way distinguished from his peers as yet.”¹⁴

The Hebrew

What this means for Abram is that when he was born, he was Mesopotamian (or Iraqi), and not a Hebrew. In fact, the family of Abram were not called Hebrews until Gen 14:13. This is the first time the word was used in the Old Testament, and it meant ‘one from beyond.’ In Abram’s case over the Jordan river, i.e. Mesopotamia. So, it was it more related to the place of his origin, rather than his tribe, or people group.

“Then one who had escaped (from the battle with the local chieftains for Lot’s rescue) came and told Abram the Hebrew (one from beyond *the river*), who was living by the oaks of Mamre (just south of Jerusalem) the Amorite, brother of Eschol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram” (Gen 14:13 ESV).

So, the word was first used to reveal where Abram had come from and not his current state of existence. It has been said about the root of the designation of Hebrew that,

“The name ‘Hebrew’- *Ivrit* (עִבְרִית) originally comes from the word *ivri* (עִבְרִי) meaning ‘crosser’. This refers to the foreign origins of the Israelites, on the other side of the river. Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, was the first to *cross over* the Euphrates River and make his home in the Land of Canaan. But at the time of the Bible, the language of the Hebrews had a different name: *Yehudit*, literally ‘Judahite,’ the language of the tribe of Judah.”¹⁵

Therefore, as word Hebrew came from the root word *‘abar* (עָבַר) its meaning helps the reader to understand where he came from, i.e. ‘to pass over’ or ‘cross over,’ ‘alienate,’ or even to ‘take away.’ The first time that the root word was used was in Genesis 8:1 indicting the movement from one place over to another location.

“But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over or pass over (*‘abar* it is a verb hiphil waw consecutive imperfect, that means the wind was caused by God to pass over) the earth, and the waters subsided” (Gen 8:1 ESV)

His call to leave and follow

The Lord called Abram out of Haran (not Ur) to leave his father’s household and go to the land of Canaan. In Genesis 12:1-3, we read that the Lord said to Abram, “I will bless you and will be a blessing.”

¹ “Now the LORD (Yahweh) said to Abram, “Go from your country (Haran) and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation,

¹⁴ Berlin, Adele, & Brettler, Marc Zvi. *The Jewish Study Bible*. (New York, NY: Oxford Uni Press, 1999), 30.

¹⁵ “The Hebrew truth revealed.” https://lp.israelbiblicalstudies.com/lp_iibs_biblical_hebrew_hebrew_facts-en.html?cid=71883&adgroupid=-1&utm_source=Email_Marketing&utm_medium=Hebrew_Facts_07_19&utm_campaign=BIB_EN_EML_Hebrew_Facts_2019-07-10_71883&commChannel=1&stid=6877068&hash=310c31e5b6e4e267cebb3bc58524221e&_at=0.3.9838386.0.207921246.xtdjxzxejshp8sdsdw8&_at=0.3.9838386.0.207921246.xtdjxzxejshp8sdsdw8 (18th July 2019).

and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed (or 'by you, all the families of the earth shall bless themselves')” (Gen 12:1-3 ESV).

The 'Go,' in verse one, is, a command to Abram leave his country. That is, '*lehk l'kha*' which is translated as 'You go out.' Or as it has been suggested by a Jewish Hasidic (a mystical arm of Judaism),

“*Lekh* - 'Go;' *L'kha*- 'into yourself.’”¹⁶

In another place, it has been translated as,

“Go, go forth, go by yourself, do not hesitate – but go immediately!”¹⁷

This brings out the true imperative nature of the command. It was not merely a suggestion, but a command to be obeyed and, obeyed straight away.

Then in verse four, we read that Abram ('exalted father') obeyed God's command. The reader is told that Abram was 75 years old when told to leave Haran. While Sarai ('my princess') was 66 years old when she moved with her husband.

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak (terebinth tree) of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring, I will give this land.' So, he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb” (Gen 12:4-9 ESV).

See the journey as shown below¹⁸

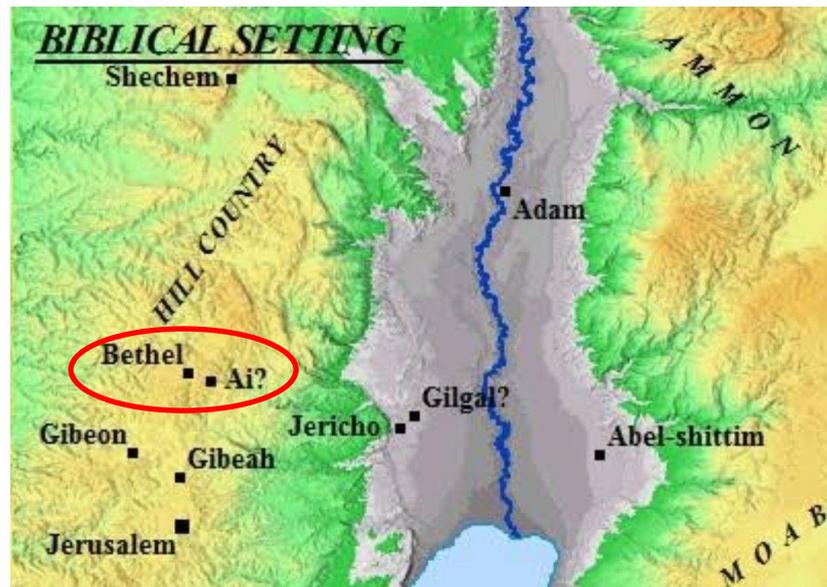


¹⁶ Sherwin, Byron L. *Faith Finding Meaning: A Theology of Judaism*. (New York, NY: Oxford Uni Press, 2009), 68.

¹⁷ *The Complete Jewish Study Bible: Insights for Jews & Christians*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 17.

¹⁸ “History of the Journeys of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/map_of_the_journeys_of_abraham_isaac_jacob.htm (18th July 2019).

A map of Bethel and Ai¹⁹



Then in Genesis 16:1-2,15-16 (as a result of Abram and Sarai going to Egypt and getting as a servant for her), we read how that Sarai's servant Hagar got pregnant to Abram and had a son named Ishmael meaning 'God hears'. In verse three of chapter 16, we see that Abram is now 85 years old and that Sarai was 76 years old when Ishmael is born. It wasn't until Genesis 17:1-7,15-19,21 that we read of the Lord making a covenant with Abram "My covenant with you and your descendants." Then in vv17,24 Abram's name was changed by the Lord to Abraham that means, 'father of a multitude' he was 99 years old when this happened. In addition, at this time, Sarai's name was changed to Sarah meaning 'princess' she was now 91 years old. They still did not have any children together at this point in time other than Ishmael through Hagar (he was now 13 years old, Gen 17:25). Then in Genesis 21:1-3,5, we read how Abraham now 100 and Sarah 91 had a son through a miracle a gift from God, he was called Isaac 'laughter.' This was because Sarah laughed when she heard that God would give her a son being so old, Gen 18:9-15.

A significant person

We could do a lot more study regarding Abraham, but hopefully, we can get the idea concerning the origin, call, obedience and heart of the man. Consequently, he became a significant person in the history of Israel. He was mentioned within the old Testament over 220 times, over 60 times as Abram or Abram's and over 160 as Abraham or Abraham's. The Scripture used the foundational phrase; the Lord used this phrase to refer to Himself as "the God Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" numerous times, e.g. Ex 3:6,15, Moses used it Ex 4:5 etc. In fact, it has been pointed out that,

"The world's three largest monotheistic religions—in fact possibly monotheism itself—found their beginnings with him. Over 3 billion people in the modern world cite Abraham as the 'father' of their religion. Abraham was promised by his God descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky, but today two branches of his family, the Jews and the Muslims, continue to battle for his birthright."²⁰

As we have seen Abraham really did live a full life and then died at 175 years old,

⁷ "These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. ⁸ Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:7-8 ESV).

¹⁹ "Map of Bethel and Ai." <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/a0/d1/57/a0d157feda7227bcc392b6cb6b0965e3.jpg> (18th July 2019).

²⁰ "Abraham." <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/biblical-proper-names-biographies/abraham> (31st July 2019).

Taste and see

So over Abraham's life, he did and could say that he really did,

“taste and see that the LORD is good!” (Ps 34:8a ESV).

He was living proof of the goodness of the Lord. He took Abram of the map (so to speak) into a new country, with different languages, customs and religions as His ambassador of the Kingdom of God. It was by faith the Abraham trusted the Lord and was willing to go off the map and trust Him to provide for him and his household. This message is so foundational that the faith of Abraham was used repeatedly throughout the New Testament.

2. Abraham from the New Testament point of view

Q. Explain the importance of Abraham for New Testament Christ-followers?

The name Abram is not used in the New Testament. However, Abraham is used about 75 times. This shows how the Lord transformed him and explained how he trusted the Lord. Having taken Abraham of the map into unknown territory (for Abraham) is an example for all Christ-followers. He has been foundational to the formation of the New Testament perspective of faith. Those who we read of in the New Testament would be taken off the map into their own unknown territories.

Conflict or not?

So far, we have seen how the early life of Abram was recorded in Genesis. However, there are some who would say that the Bible contradicts itself when it comes to the New Testament account of Abram leaving Ur.²¹ Since, when we read between Genesis 11:26-12:4 and 15:7 and Acts 7:1-7, there seem to be some differences. But, is this the case?

¹ “And the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’ ² And Stephen said: ‘Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ ⁴ Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. ⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. ⁶ And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ⁷ ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that, they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ ⁸ And He gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so, Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs” (Acts 7:1-8 ESV).

Consequently, this section of Scripture could appear to be in conflict with Genesis 11:26-12:4. What do we do about this apparent contradiction between these two passages of Scripture?²²

Well, first, we need to remember that Stephen is making commentary on the life of Abram as recorded in Genesis. So, it has been included within the canon of Scripture; it must be true. Consequently, the issue is not with the Bible, but with our understanding of it. Remember that, Stephen was answering a question from the high priest as to his right to be doing what he was

²¹ “Did God call Abraham before or after he moved to Haran?” <https://www.contradictingbiblecontradictions.com/?p=3334> (1st August 2019).

²² “Reconciling Gen. 11:26, 12:4 and Acts 7:4, Abraham and Terah's age.” <https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/reconciling-gen-11-26-12-4-and-acts-7-4-abraham-and-terahs-age-turretin.97247/> (25th July 2019). Archer, Gleason L. *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 378.

doing, Acts 7:1. If he was wrong in any way, they would have pounced on him for his interpretation of the story of Abraham, and they did not. Therefore, Acts 7 is his correct response to their question. Stephen began by demonstrating that as a Jew, he knew the history of the historical lineage and account of Abraham. That is why he went all the way back to Abram and his call. As far as Stephen was concerned, the Lord had everything in control and even if it was Terah that decided to leave Ur Abram was part of that plan.

Secondly, when Stephen says that the Lord appeared to Abram, this is what happened,

“The God of glory appeared to our father Abram when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran” (Acts 7:2 ESV).

Other than this statement we have no other record of what Stephen said, but if he said it and it is part of Scripture, then it is true. Not everything that happened in the lives of those in the Old Testament (and here Abraham) has been recorded. So, God may have appeared to Abram while in Ur and then again in Haran. But one thing that we can take from this account in Acts 7 is that Stephen knew his Scripture. Because, he may have used his understanding of passages like Gen 15:7; Josh 24:3; and Neh 9:7 to gain this understanding. That is,

“And He said to him (Abram), ‘I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess’” (Gen 15:7 ESV).

“Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River (Ur of the Chaldees) and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac” (Josh 24:3 ESV).

“You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham” (Neh 9:7 ESV).

Therefore, I do not see any contradiction between Genesis 11 and 12 and Acts 7. Instead, I see that together these passages give a fuller picture of what happened in the early days of Abram and his call by God. Stephen knew this truth and stated it without any criticism on this interpretation from the religious leaders. This is the biblical interpretive principle of ‘Scripture interprets Scripture.’

Abraham in the New Testament

In addition to all of this, we also find that Abraham was used as an illustration of someone who had faith in the Lord and His Words. This was even when the Lord took him off the map from his home into Canaan or said that he would have many descendants. For example, in Genesis 15:6, the writer recorded that,

“And he (Abram) believed the LORD (that he would have many descendants), and He counted it to Him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6 ESV see the context in Gen 15:1-20).

Then Paul in his writing to the local church in Rome quoted this verse and commented on it declaring that,

“Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness” (Rom 4:9 ESV).

“That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness’” (Rom 4:22 ESV).

He also used it when writing to the church in Galatia,

“just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (Gal 3:6 ESV).

James also quoted this passage from Genesis commenting on it,

“and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’-- and he was called a friend of God” (Jas 2:23 ESV).

A sample of some of the other things said of Abraham was that,

- Abraham was “God’s friend” Jas 2:23.
- Believers in all generations are called the “children of Abraham” Gal 3:7.
- The phrase “the God Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” Jesus used it Matt 22:23; as did Peter Acts 3:13 etc.
- Abraham as an example of faith: “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” Hebrews 11:8.
- He was called “our father” in the context of the history of Israel and for all those who are of the faith: Lk 1:73; Jn 8:53; Acts 7:2; Rom 4:11,16; Gal 3:7,29.

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. How would you explain, the context and purpose of the Lord’s call of Abram?

As we read through the life of Abraham and his household, knew what it meant to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps 34:8a ESV). We can see throughout the Scripture from Genesis through to Acts, and beyond that, Abraham became foundational to what the Lord was doing. This was even though the Lord to Abraham of the map and out of his comfort zone. Just as Abraham was part of the Lord’s plan, we are part of the intention of the Lord. So, when He takes us off the map, we need to trust His leading and follow Him, this is regardless of where we came from, our successes, failures and future. The Lord’s work and plans are not contingent on what we think or want Him to do, us fully knowing where and why He is taking us. If He can take someone from Mesopotamia (the southern region tip of modern Iraq) and use him as a foundation for His plans for the world, then He is ready to take anyone He chooses and fulfil His will through them.

Have you ever been told that you are not useful to the Lord for Him to work in and through you? Has someone ever said about you, “You are joking right, (you name), really? Why would God use you? He has taken you off the map so to speak into unknown territory, have those around you tried to interrupt you and turn you aside from His leading? Conversely, have you done, said or thought any or all these things about someone that the Lord has chosen and use for His work and plans?

- Stop and pause in His presence for a moment and think about this matter.

Why would you do that to someone who do you think you are to judge what the Lord is doing? If someone has done this to you, they have no right to do so. So, we need to look to the Lord and see His will for us, even if we are finding ourselves in unknown territory an absolutely know that this is the will of the Lord. Remember that I said His will, not your idea or some idea that you have concocted. Recall that the Lord chose Abraham and equipped Him, and He never saw the future results of what has happened as a result of him obeying the Lord call.

We have seen what the Bible has said regarding Abram in his day, but what has the Holy Spirit been saying to us today? That is, what is the one thing that is standing out? We need to apply this;

otherwise, it is merely all academic. Then we need to respond to what the Holy Spirit has been saying to us from His Word.

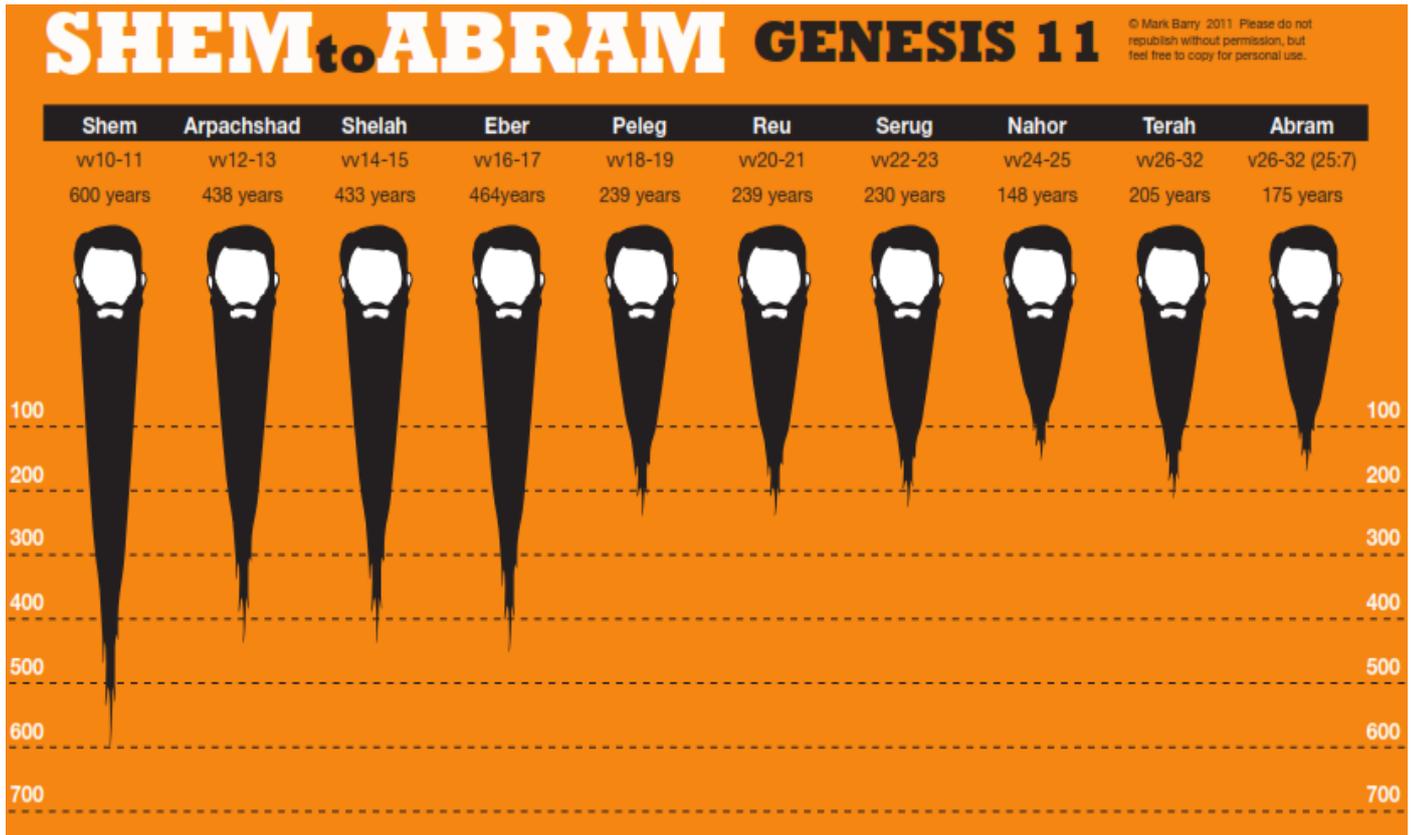
In response, we need to ask through this process:

- What personal application can be found from the passages?
- What is God teaching me today?
- That is, “What is God saying to me?”

How should I respond to what is being said, or so what?

- What are you going to do about it?
- What do you need to do to respond?
- Pray and respond

Appendix One

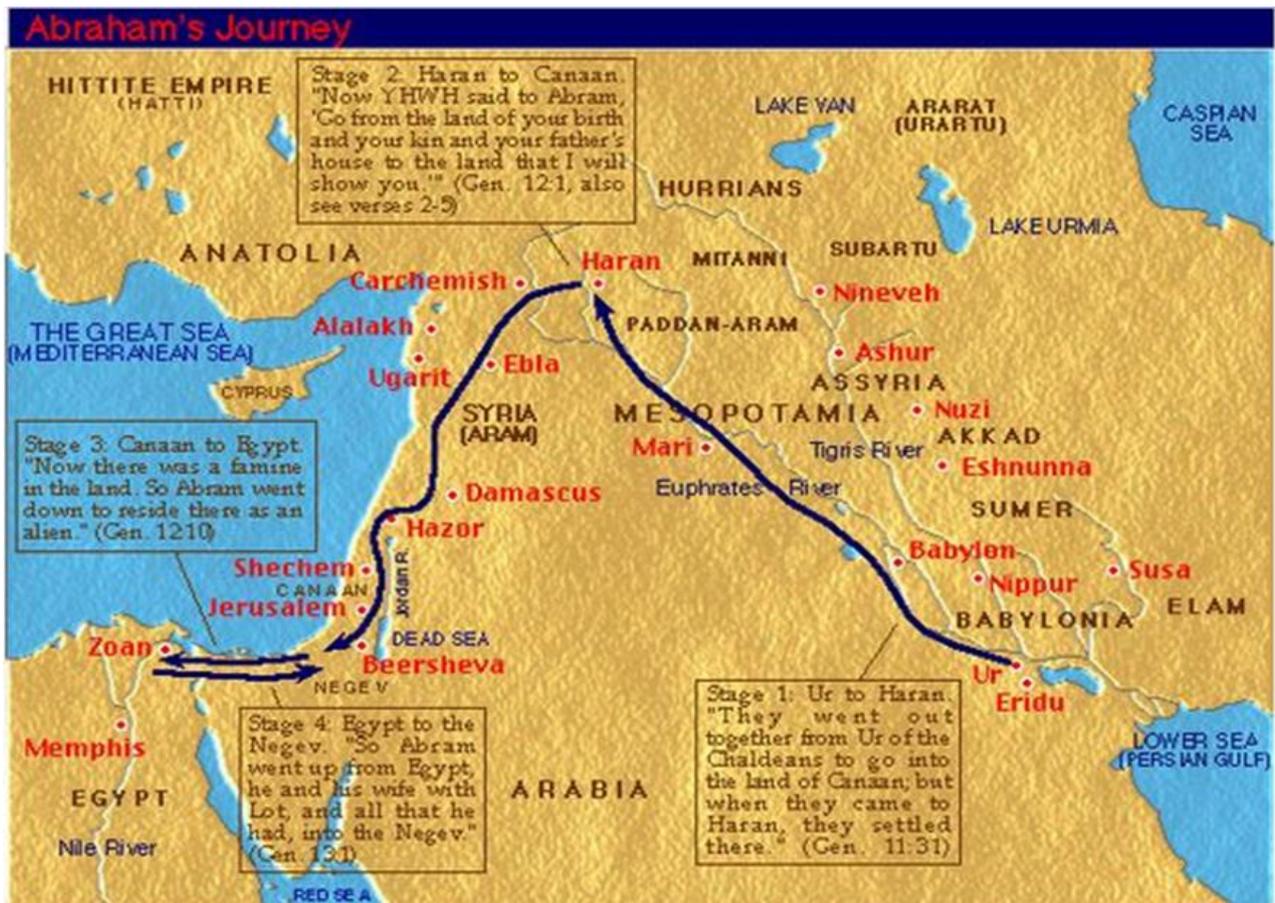


Appendix Two²³



²³ "The Sons of Noah & Their Inheritance." <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/448952656582256857/?lp=true> (4th August 2019).

Appendix Three²⁴



²⁴ "Abraham's Journey." <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/51087777006779894/?lp=true> (3rd August 2019).