

Lesson 33

God Calls Abram

Abram had faith and obeyed God.

Overview

Lesson Focus

God called Abram to leave his home and go to a place he did not know. God gave Abram some great promises, including the promise that one of his descendants—Jesus Christ—would bless all families! Abram believed God and showed amazing faith and obedience as he followed God to Canaan and also as he looked forward to a place in heaven.

Key Passages

Genesis 12:1–2, 12:5; Hebrews 11:8

Memory Verse

Genesis 12:1–2 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go . . . to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Before the creation of the world, God determined to reveal himself through his merciful plan of redemption (Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:4). God offers this plan by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8) and originally revealed it to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. In the midst of the curse that came as a result of their disobedience, God gave the promise of a Redeemer who would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15).

As we learn of God’s call to Abram (later renamed Abraham), we see more of the promise whose fulfillment is revealed throughout Scripture. God’s eternal plan to bring redemption continued with the Abrahamic Covenant—God would make Abraham a great nation that would in turn bless all nations (Genesis 12:1–3). Abraham was called physically to be the father of the Jewish nation; but more than that, he was called to be the father of all those who believe by faith in the promised Messiah, both Jew and Gentile (Romans 4:9–12).

It was because of Abraham’s amazing faith—faith in things hoped for but not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1)—that he could obediently follow God’s lead and believe the incredible promises made to him (Genesis 17:17). In fact, his faith provided the stamina for him to leave his home, go to a foreign country, and wait for his wife Sarah to conceive and bear a child. This was the child that would produce for Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand by the sea (Hebrews 11:8–12). These descendants would become

a new nation, appointed by God himself, through which he would ultimately bring a Savior, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1).

As mentioned earlier, our faith comes through grace, as a gift from God. In Romans 4, the Apostle Paul presents Abraham as an example of faith. Abraham proved his faith by his obedience. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith (Romans 4:20). This faith was what provided Abraham's righteousness (Romans 4:22), just as it is our faith in God's provided Savior, Jesus, that brings us to a righteous standing before him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Historical/Apologetics Background

What better way is there to look at the history of Abraham than to consider the genealogy carefully recorded by God? Genesis begins at the beginning and gives us details of the history of mankind—starting with Adam. (See Genesis 10 and 11.)

These genealogies are God's way of revealing his intention from the very beginning to use sinful man to accomplish his perfect plan of redemption. We witness generations of the descendants of Adam weaving through history to the patriarch Abraham. We recognize Abraham's role in the plan and watch expectantly as he begets Isaac to carry on the seed that will one day provide the Messiah.

The history of this account includes God's call to Abram to leave Ur and go to the land of Canaan. Abram was traveling with his father and family (Genesis 11:31) and stopped short of Canaan in Haran (Acts 7:2–3). We aren't told why this caravan stopped in Haran, but we do know that Abram's father, Terah, succumbed to the idolatry of that pagan city (Joshua 24:2). It was after Terah died in Haran that God again called Abram to the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:1). Once Abram arrived in Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and promised the land to his descendants.

Here again, we observe the faith of Abram as he built an altar to the Lord and worshipped him despite the fact that he was still childless. Abram believed God and knew that the truth and promises yet to be fulfilled in this land would include all mankind for all eternity.

We trust the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and stand on it firmly as our authority in all things. But it is exciting when God allows us to confirm biblical accounts with present-day discoveries.

There are two locations proposed for Ur, the birthplace of Abraham. One is the modern town of Urfa, Turkey (notice the shared root with Ur), which is less than 20 miles from Haran. According to Jewish and Muslim tradition, Urfa is to be identified as Ur, the hometown of Abraham.

Many scholars identify Abram's birthplace as the Sumerian city of Ur, excavated by Leonard Woolley in 1927. These excavations provide much more information about religion and life during the time of Abram.

The people had adopted Sin (also called Nanna), the moon god, as their patron. A ziggurat was erected as a temple to Sin, perhaps hearkening back only a few generations to the Tower of Babel, when God judged the people for disobedience and idolatry by confusing their language. Ur was a thoroughly pagan city where the religious leaders and rulers used idolatry to control the populace. Royal burial pits were discovered that included masters and their servants—giving the appearance that once the royalty died, servants willingly (or unwillingly) committed suicide. In one case, as many as 68 servants were found buried with their master.

After learning about the pagan, godless nature of the people of Ur, we are not surprised that God would call Abram to move from that city and journey to a new location where he would continue the fulfillment of his plan of redemption for all who would believe.

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