

SESSION 1

CALL OF

ABRAHAM

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I. **PRAYER / PURPOSE**

II. **PANORAMA**

A. **Twelve Movements**

1. Prologue
2. **Patriarchs**
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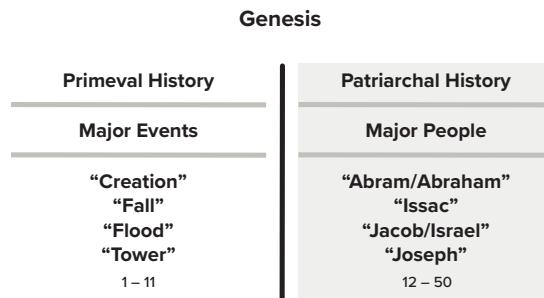
B. **Timeline**

1. Prologue #1

2. Patriarchs #2

III. MOVEMENT #1: "PROLOGUE" (Background)

A. Charted: Major Events/Major People



B. Outline: "Toledot" Sections

Creation (1:1-2:3)

1. **Toledot of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4-4:26)**
2. **Toledot of Adam (5:1-6:8)**
3. **Toledot of Noah (6:9-9:29)**
4. **Toledot of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1-11:9)**
5. **Toledot of Shem (11:10-26)**
6. **Toledot of Terah (11:27-25:11)**
7. **Toledot of Ishmael (25:12-18)**
8. **Toledot of Isaac (25:19-35:29)**
9. **Toledot of Esau, the father of Edom (twice) (36:1-8; 36:9-37:1)**
10. **Toledot of Jacob (37:2-50:26)**

◆ INSIGHT

This word, "toledot" is found 10 times in Genesis. It marks off a section of the book. Usually translated "generations of" or "descendants of," its usage in Genesis leads to a good translation as "what became of" with the subsequent Biblical material providing the answer.

IV. MOVEMENT #2: "Patriarchs"

A. Genesis 12-50 (Horizontal Chart)

Abraham	Issac	Jacob	Joseph
12 25	25 26	27 36	37 50

B. Genesis 11:27-50:26 ("Toledot" Structure)

1. See Outline of Genesis by 10 Toledot sections (see above).
2. Remaining "Toledot" sections (Movement #2):

a. "Account of Terah" (11:27-25:11)

The previous "toledot" of Shem (11:10-26) has traced the line of blessing ("seed of the woman" – 3:15) to Terah, the father of Abraham.

This section introduces the reader to Abram (Abraham), the one with whom God will make an everlasting covenant.

- b. “Account of Ishmael” (25:12-18)
Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Sarah’s handmaiden, is not slighted, though he and his descendants are not of the elect line.
- c. “Account of Isaac” (25:19-35:29)
The promises of Abraham are passed to his son, Isaac. This section introduces Isaac’s two sons, Esau and Jacob. Tension escalates between the brothers, though Jacob will continue the line of blessing and covenant promise.
- d. “Account of Esau”
Two separate accounts (36:1-8 and 36:9-37:1) comprise the genealogy of Esau, son of Isaac. Though Esau is not of the chosen line (Jacob is), his record as the father of the Edomites is given.
- e. “Account of Jacob” (37:2-50:26)
The final toledot concludes with the descendants (twelve sons) of Jacob. Though Joseph will take prominence, it is the story of divine protection of the sons of Jacob that drives the section.

V. LIFE OF ABRAHAM

A. Vertical Chart (Genesis 12-50)

Life of Abraham		
The Call 12-14	The Covenant 15-21	The Confirmation 22-25
From Ur to Haran to Shechem to Bethel (12)	Covenant Given & Ratified (Abram to Abraham) (15)	Testing of Abraham (22) “The LORD Will Provide” (22)
To Egypt (Sister Story #1) (12)	Hagar and Ishmael (16)	Death of Sarah (23)
To Negev (Abram & Lot separate) (13)	Covenant Confirmation & Circumcision (17)	Cave of Machpelah (23)
Abram rescues Lot (14)	Sodom and Gomorrah (18-19)	Isaac and Rebekah (24)
Abram and Melchizedek (14)	Abraham and Abimelech (Sister Story #2) (20)	Death of Abraham (25)
	Birth of Isaac; Departure of Hagar & Ishmael (21)	
	Treaty at Beersheba (21)	

B. Abrahamic Cycle (Concentric Pattern)

The following “concentric pattern” (or chiastic structure yet without a central, singular pivot) is adapted from Waltke (*Genesis*, 20). Note the meticulous structural and thematic arrangement.

A Genealogy of Terah (11:21-32)

B Genealogy of a Son; Spiritual Odyssey Begins (12:1-9)

C Lies about Sarah; Protection in a Foreign Palace (12:10-20)

D Lot Settles in Sodom (13:1-18)

E Abraham: Interceding for Sodom and Delivering Lot (14:1-24)

F Covenant with Abraham: Annunciation of Ishmael (15:1 - 16:16)

F' Covenant with Abraham: Annunciation of Isaac (17:1 – 18:15)

E' Abraham: Interceding for Sodom and Praying for Lot (18:16-33)

D' Lot Flees Sodom (to Settle in Moab – 19:1-38)

C' Lies about Sarah; Protection in a Foreign Palace (20:1-18)

B' Birth of a Son; Spiritual Odyssey Peaks (21:1 – 22:19)

A Genealogy of Nahor (22:20-24)

As in most chiastic-type structures, the most important “hinges” occur at the mid-point. With such a literary structure in view, this points to the Abrahamic Covenant (F and F'). The importance of this covenantal arrangement cannot be overstated. This will be addressed in the next section.

Note also that this structure does not include the death of Sarah and burial site – Gen. 28). Nor does the pattern include the search for a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24) or the death of Abraham (25:1-11).

IV. **LIFE OF ABRAHAM** Genesis 12-25

A. **The Call (12-14)**

1. Generally: a call to a new destiny

GENESIS 12:1-3

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”

- a. Previously (Genesis 11) mankind has rebelled and suffered the judgment of dispersal. If man would not “fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28), if he would not “be fruitful and increase in number...multiply on the earth and increase upon it” (9:7), then God in judgment would “scatter them over the face of the earth” (11:9).
- b. The call of Abram pivots the Genesis story from global events to one particular man who will bring the gift of salvation blessing to the whole world.
- c. Grammatical insights (12:1-3):
 - (1) Two Hebrew imperatives:
 - (a) “Leave your country”... Leave!
 - (b) “You will be a blessing”... Be a blessing!
 - (2) Three promises attached to each imperative:
 - (a) Leave
 - “I will make you into a great nation” (12:2)
 - “I will bless you” (12:2)
 - “I will make your name great” (12:2)
 - (b) Be (a blessing)
 - “I will bless those who bless you” (12:3)
 - “I will curse” (whoever curses you) (12:3)
 - “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (i.e. Abram) (12:3)
 - (c) The call begins with a command to leave the safety and security of his homeland. This requires faith in order to be obedient to the call.

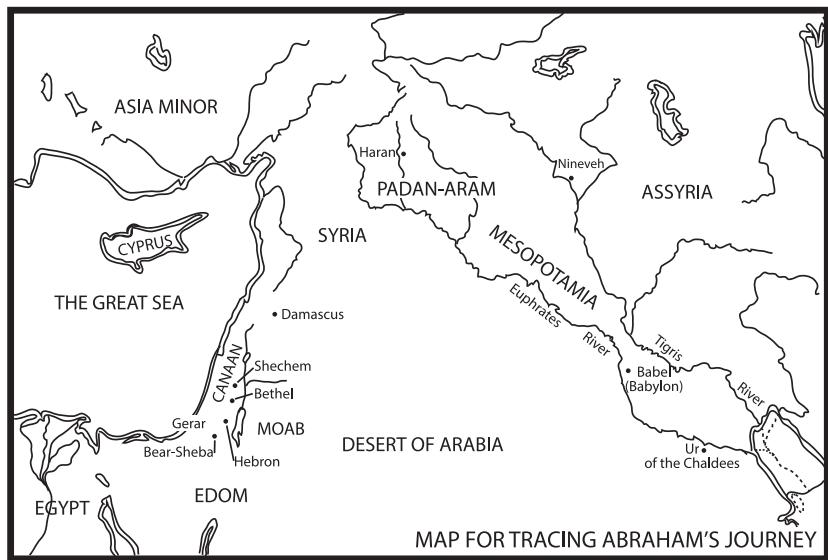
Genesis 12:4 records, “So Abram left....”

HEBREWS 11:8-9a

“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. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country...”

2. Geographically: a call to a new land

The call for Abram had required that he leave Ur (Acts 7:2-3); he did so and traveled to Haran (11:31). From Haran, Abram took his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, to enter the land that God had promised He would show Abram (12:1). The map (below) shows the key locations in this regard.



*Taken from I. Jensen, *Genesis: A Self-Study Guide*, 48-49.

3. Wavering: a sojourn into Egypt

GENESIS 12:10-13

"Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. ¹¹ As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.'"

From an act of faith-obedience Abram then displays fear of the famine by journeying to Egypt. This is the first of three "sister-stories" in Genesis. The use of deception to gain one's desires will be a recurring theme in Genesis. Even so, God blesses "in spite of" this lapse.

4. Abram and Lot (Gen. 13)

GENESIS 13:1-4

"So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ² Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

³ From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴ and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD."

- a. Abram's wealth was due to the sojourn in Egypt (12:10-20). Though it amassed for him great wealth, it almost cost him his wife.
- b. Bethel was a holy site where earlier Abram had built an altar (for worship) and "called on the name of the LORD" (12:8). Is this return to Bethel significant? Is this an evidence of repentance (over the "Egypt affair")?

GENESIS 13:5-7a

"Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. ⁷ **And quarreling arose** between Abram's herders and Lot's."

- c. The vast possession of flocks and herds (indicative of God's blessings) bring Lot and Abram into conflict.
- d. Graciously, Abram gives Lot the choice of the land in which to settle. Presumably, Abram was older than Lot, thus the more remarkable the gesture.
- e. In Abram's mind, Lot was the best choice to be his heir since Abram and Sarai were old and barren. If so, then in light of God's promise of the land to Abram, this would be a partitioning of the Promised Land.

GENESIS 13:14-17

"The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, 'Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. ¹⁷ Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.'"

5. Rescue of Lot (Gen. 14)

- a. While Abram settled in Hebron and worshipped the Lord at that place (13:18), Lot settled in the lush Jordan Valley near Sodom, the place of wicked men (13:10-13).
- b. In time a coalition of kings from Mesopotamia invaded Canaan and Lot was taken captive (14:8-12). Word reached Abram of the plight of his nephew.

GENESIS 14:14-16

"When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as

far as Hobah, north of Damascus.¹⁶ He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.”

- c. Retaliation was a common practice of the day. Perhaps, more so, was his devotion to his kinsman.
- d. How could 318 trained men defeat an alliance of kings?
 - (1) Abram did also have an alliance with Mamre, Eschol and Aner (with an unnumbered collection of men) (14:13).
 - (2) Abram and men were facing a victorious army, yet one that had labored through the battles and fatigue of warfare (14:8-9).
 - (3) Abram and men successfully attacked at night (cf. the story of Gideon and the Midianites, Judges 6-8; 300 fierce fighters vs. thousands).
 - (4) Kidner (*Genesis*, 120) suggests that the attack could have been “possibly against only an escort-group lagging behind (cf. 16) the main force.” Regardless, the efforts were successful and Lot, his possessions and his people were rescued.

6. Meeting with two kings (Gen. 14)

- a. King of Salem

GENESIS 14:18-20

“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High,¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”

- (1) The king-priest was named Melchizedek (“king of righteousness”).
- (2) Likely, Abram had friendly relations with the priest-king before the war. The fact that Abram shared a tithe (“tenth”) of that gained in battle may indicate Abram’s sense of obligation to the priest of God Most High (Hb. “El Elyon;” combined in v. 22 with YHWH). It further would acknowledge Abram’s recognition of the gracious hand of God Most High upon Abram’s rescue efforts.
- (3) The New Testament will see Melchizedek as a priest of unknown origin or lineage. His legitimate priesthood predated the Levites and becomes a model for the unique priesthood of Christ (cf. Ps. 110:4 and Hebrews 7).

- (4) Some attempt to identify Melchizedek as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, though there is little compelling evidence to do so.

- b. King of Sodom

GENESIS 14:21-24

“The king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.’²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth,²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’²⁴ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.’”

- (1) This rejection highlighted Abram’s full and complete dependence upon God alone.
- (2) This also allowed Abram to maintain his moral claim to his own possessions, not beholding to any other. “The gifts of the ungodly are often attached to deadly strings” (J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 182).

B. The Covenant (15-21)

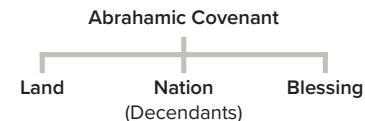
- 1. Refer to the chart, “Life of Abraham” (p. 8). Chapters 15ff begin a new section in the continuing story of Abram.

- 2. This session will highlight the Abrahamic Covenant in overview. Session 2 will complete the story.

- a. Recall the “Call of Abram.”

GENESIS 12:1-3

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.² I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”



b. Read the preview to the “Covenant with Abram”

GENESIS 15:1

“After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’”

- (1) “Do not be afraid...” Of what? Perhaps Abram was fearful of further war (Gen. 14).
- (2) Perhaps Abram was fearful of dying without promised offspring (12:7).

GENESIS 15:2-3

“But Abram said, ‘Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ³ And Abram said, ‘You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.’”

- (1) With the separation (schism?) of Abram and Lot, it could be that Abram’s concern was that only his trusted servant would inherit his wealth (per the custom of that day).
- (2) Abram’s faith seems to be wavering. Where is the offspring promised? Yet God replied that “a son coming from your own body will be your heir” (15:4). Moreover, your descendants will be as great as the stars at night.

3. Note the spiritual condition of Abram

Before the formal giving and ratification of the covenant, Abram’s spiritual condition is highlighted. This verse is considered to be one of the most important verses in all of the Scriptures.

GENESIS 15:6

“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

GENESIS 15:6 (NEB)

“Abram put his faith in the LORD, and the LORD counted that faith as righteousness.”

- a. To believe is to trust or to put faith in.
- b. The object of faith is the Promise-Fulfilling God.
- c. The result is to be declared (judicially not experientially) righteous before God.
- d. This principle of a right standing before God is later appropriated by NT writers:

ROMANS 4:1-3

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”

GALATIANS 3:6-9

“So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ ⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ ⁹ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

THEOLOGICAL TERMS

- Faith: “belief in and commitment to something or someone” (M. Erickson)
- Justification: “to announce a favorable verdict, to declare righteous” (C. Ryrie)
- Righteousness: “the state of being just or morally pure” (M. Erickson)

INSIGHT

“Faith is the force behind the deed. The deed is the finality of the faith. The verb is translated ‘was made complete’ (etēleiōthē) and means ‘to carry to the end.’ Faith finds fulfillment in action. So it was with Abraham... Paul said that Abraham was justified by faith, and James said that Abraham was justified by faith evidenced by what he did.” (R. Blue, “James” in BKC, 827)

JAMES 2:20-24

“You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.”

- e. Constable (135) notes, “Moses probably recorded Abram’s faith here because it was foundational for making the Abrahamic Covenant—God made this covenant with a man who believed in Him.”
4. Faith and obedience is an early, foundational teaching of the Scriptures. “The Hebrew construction translated “believed” (in 15:6) means to place trust in someone with confidence (eg. Ex. 19:9; 1 Sam. 27:12)” (Mathews, *Genesis* 11-50,166).