



# Genesis

## The Call to Abram

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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### Introduction

Once the earth was washed clean by the waters of the Flood, God made a covenant with Noah and his family. This is a truly remarkable element in His continually unfolding revelation of Who He is. In spite of the extent of wickedness in the human community and the depth of grief it caused Him, God nevertheless shows Himself eager to make a fresh start with His beloved human creatures. He renews His commandment to be fruitful and have dominion over the earth. Things are not exactly as they were in Eden, of course. Man bears the scar of sin's disfigurement; the animals, created to be his helpers, will now fear him. In addition, man is no longer left to his own conscience to resist evil. Now there will be law and retribution to contain the human inclination to violence.

As we followed the story of Noah and the Flood, we noticed some ominous clouds gathering in the sky of the newly re-created earth. Noah was a righteous, faithful man, but he was not perfect. His son, Ham, arrogantly took advantage of his father's weakness. That offense precipitated the pronouncement of a curse by Noah on Ham's descendants. Suddenly we found ourselves reminded of Eden in ways we hadn't expected. A promising start went sour quickly.

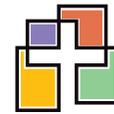
How will God respond to the continuing threat of pride and the evil it leads to? He has promised never to wash the earth clean by water again. If, on the renewed earth, the good and the bad will be mixed in together, as it was in Noah's family, what will prevent or restrain the bad from overpowering the good? If we are asking these questions, then we are ready for this lesson on chapters eleven and twelve of Genesis. In it we will find that God meets every challenge to His plan for man, in ways that go beyond what the imagination might suggest. Because the problem we see in man is man himself, our impulse is to expect that God's solution will work around him or skip over him. Get ready for a surprise.

Read this passage all the way through, at least once. Then answer the questions on the text that follow.

### Genesis 11



1 Now the whole earth had one language and few words. 2 And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the



### Genesis 11 (cont.)

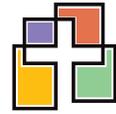
the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. 10 These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was a hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; 11 and Shem lived after the birth of Arpachshad five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. 12 When Arpachshad had lived thirty-five years, he became the father of Shelah; 13 and Arpachshad lived after the birth of Shelah four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters. 14 When Shelah had lived thirty years, he became the father of Eber; 15 and Shelah lived after the birth of Eber four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters. 16 When Eber had lived thirty-four years, he became the father of Peleg; 17 and Eber lived after the birth of Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters. 18 When Peleg had lived thirty years, he became the father of Reu; 19 and Peleg lived after the birth of Reu two hundred and nine years, and had other sons and daughters. 20 When Reu had lived thirty-two years, he became the father of Serug; 21 and Reu lived after the birth of Serug two hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters. 22 When Serug had lived thirty years, he became the father of Nahor; 23 and Serug lived after the birth of Nahor two hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. 24 When Nahor had lived twenty-nine years, he became the father of Terah; 25 and Nahor lived after the birth of Terah a hundred and nineteen years, and had other sons and daughters. 26 When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. 27 Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. 28 Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, 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. 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 two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.



### Questions on the Text

#### The Tower of Babel Read Genesis 11:1-9

1. Remember that it was Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, who built the city of Babel, in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:9-10). What appears to be the motivation of this city's builders, especially in the creation of the tower?
2. [Note: The name "Shem" in Hebrew means "name."] If these descendants of Ham want to "make a name" for themselves, what does this suggest about their attitude towards their patriarch, Noah?
3. When God sees what men have undertaken to do in Babel, what threat to mankind does He see in it? How does He respond?
4. The solution to this offense in Babel is for God to fragment human civilization by different languages. What, then, does the diversity in human language really represent? Read Acts 2:1-13. What is the significance of the fact that on the Day of Pentecost, men who speak many different languages hear the gospel spoken in their native tongues by the apostles, who knew only Aramaic, the language spoken in Galilee?



### Questions on the Text (cont.)

#### The Descendants of Shem

#### Read Genesis 11:10-32

[Note: These verses give the genealogy of Shem, Noah's righteous firstborn son. See that Shem lived a very long time, long enough to be alive when Abram was born. That would have made Shem the great patriarch of Noah's family and the one on whom the blessing of God rested.]

5. This genealogy leads up to one family, Terah, and his sons, Abram and Nahor. They lived in Ur, a large city of Mesopotamia. Read Joshua 24:2-4. What had become of Shem's "family religion" by this time?

Read the following passage all the way through, at least once. Then answer the questions on the text that follow.



### Genesis 12

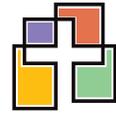
1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." 4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 Thence he removed to the mountain 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 on the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. 10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." 14 When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels. 17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone." 20 And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had



## Questions on the Text

### God Calls Abram

#### Read Genesis 12:1-3



## Catholic Scripture Study

6. The Lord speaks to Abram (who lived about 2000 B.C.), about whom we know very little, except that he is a Shemite, a member of the family destined to have a covenant relationship with God (because of Noah's blessing in Gen. 9:26-27). What is the first thing God requires of him? What is the significance of that requirement?

7. In just three verses, the word "bless" (or some form of it) appears five times. Think back to Eden (Gen. 1:28) and back to Noah as he got off the Ark (Gen. 9:1). What does this profusion of references to blessing suggest to us about what God is set to do?

[The promise that God makes to Abram has three parts. First, God will make Abram the father of a great nation. That nation was the nation of Israel, which did not exist before Abram. Second, God will make his "name great," which, in that day, meant not that he would be famous but that he would father a dynasty of kings. Third, God promises that all families on the earth will be able to bless themselves through Abram. This means that through Abram's descendants, God will open a door of blessing for men, reversing the curse pronounced in Eden. During the course of Abram's life, all these promises will be transformed by God into covenants, which we will see in Genesis 15, 17, and 22. How were these covenant promises eventually fulfilled?

Abram's descendants became a "great nation" (and not just a collection of tribes) at about 1500 B.C., when Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt and back to their homeland, Canaan. God established a covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, giving them a liturgical and civil code to live by. This distinguished them from all other nations on earth. They agreed to be His people by keeping that covenant.

Abram's name became "great" in about 1000 B.C., when God made David king over Israel. This was a wonderful time in the history of Israel, when their enemies had been defeated, the land had been secured, and David sat on the royal throne in Jerusalem. God made a solemn promise to him that one of his descendants would always sit on that throne. In other words, David began a royal line of kings.

"All families" could bless themselves through Abram when, in about 4 B.C., Jesus, who was a Son of David and thus of Abram, was born. Jesus came to make universal blessing once again possible for humanity. Jesus established His Church before He left, which would perpetually offer blessing to the world, until His return.]

8. See how deeply and completely this promise of universal blessing is rooted in a human being and his descendants. Knowing human history as we do from Genesis, isn't this risky? Why do you think God chooses to work this way?

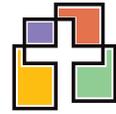
### Abram Sets Out

#### Read Genesis 12:4-9

[Note: Be sure to check your Bible for a map of Abram's travels.]

9. Contrast Gen. 11:4 and 12:4. What kind of man does Abram seem to be?

10. We learn from vs. 6 that the Canaanites were in the land that God intended to give Abram, the Shemite. Remembering the curse of Noah on Canaan (see Gen. 9:24-27), what can we expect from the encounter of these two tribes of people?



### Questions on the Text (cont.)

#### Abram Sets Out (cont.)

11. God makes a promise to Abram; Abram responds by building altars, and he "called on the name of the Lord," a phrase we first saw associated with Seth, the son of Adam and Eve. What does this suggest about the relationship that is developing between God and Abram? Why do you think Abram is so prone to building altars?

#### Abram is Tested

#### Read Genesis 12:10-20

12. Abram was faced with a famine in the land that he had left everything for. What do you think this did to his faith? What was his response to the crisis?

13. For Abram to tell the Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister was half-true-she was his half-sister-but what was the intention of this deception? What was God's response to Abram's weakness? Why do you suppose God didn't just start over with someone more reliable?

14. Clearly God intends to build His own nation, beginning with a miraculous birth to Abram and Sarai. How do you think a nation will preserve righteousness better than individuals (Adam) or families (Noah)?



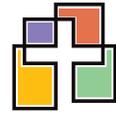
### Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text in the lesson (see Genesis 12 for the highlighted text in this lesson.) Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these questions:

1. Abram and Sarai left everything in order to receive the gift God promised them. They received much more than they lost. Ask God if there is anything you need to leave behind in your life that might leave you feeling like Abram did...a situation that is wrong for you, a sin or imperfection that you cling tightly to, a power you should relinquish, etc. Seek a true conversion, and take hope from the example of Abram.

2. Have you ever felt like Abram might have when he obeyed God but faced a difficulty because of it? Were you able to accept it as a test of your faith, or did you see it as a sign of failure? Did you learn from it, or did it become a stumbling block in your life? Speak to God about it.

3. God's plan to restore blessedness on earth was to build a nation. Righteousness is difficult to live alone. Jesus, the descendant of Abram Who made all things new, built the Church as a nation of God's people, whose unity will serve to strengthen them in the covenant. How does the Church work that way in your life? How are you working that way for others in the life of the Church?



### Opportunities for Additional Study

#### Points to Ponder

As we reach chapter 12 of Genesis, we find that we are about to become deeply acquainted with the lives of two human beings, Abram and Sarai. They are the first people in Scripture who are followed this closely in the narrative. This in itself should serve as a sign to us: "These are important people. Watch them." From the first verse of Genesis, God has been revealing Himself to us in His relationship with His creation. Yet now we will have an extended opportunity to see God at work in very human situations as He moves along His plan to win the world back to Himself.

Abram, whose name will later be changed to Abraham, becomes the Father of Israel. He is the first Jew. In him we ought to be able to see what God intended when He created a nation for Himself. He was, of course, a real human being in real history, but he is also one of God's works of human art. The rest of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, constantly look back to this great patriarch. If we are attentive, his life will serve as a window into life with God-what it means to be chosen, called, and equipped to live in the blessedness of God. This is knowledge most precious to every baptized believer, since it is what we have committed ourselves to in our baptismal vows.

Sarai, whose name is later changed to Sarah, is included in this examination of the life of faith, although her part is not as detailed as that of Abraham. Nevertheless, the New Testament says about Sarah, among other things, that "by faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful Who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). The miracle that began God's plan took place in Sarah's body. Hers is a life worth watching.

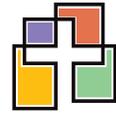
The story of Abram and Sarai will be one that is human and divine. Are you ready for that? It will cause some wincing, just as the episode of Abram's lying to the Pharaoh created a ripple of disappointment. Yet if we are willing to open our hearts to these human beings, as God did, they will help us to see the gold that God purifies out of vessels of clay like us.

#### Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

On God's promise to Abram - "In order to gather together scattered humanity God calls Abram from his country, his kindred, and his father's house, and makes him Abraham, that is, 'the father of a multitude of nations.' 'In you all nations of the earth shall be blessed.' The people descended from Abraham would be the trustees of the promise made to the patriarchs, the chosen people, called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church. They would be the root onto which the Gentiles would be grafted, once they came to believe." (59-60)

On Abram and Sarai as examples of faith - "The letter to the Hebrews, in its great eulogy of the faith of Israel's ancestors, lays special emphasis on Abraham's faith: 'By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.' By faith, he lived as a stranger and pilgrim in the promised land. By faith, Sarah was given to conceive the son of promise..." (145)



### Summary

#### In this lesson, we observed that:

1. In a city built by descendants of Ham, Babel, men decided to band together and make a name for themselves, establishing a center of power and autonomy. Their pride led them to try to build a tower to heaven, a demonstration of their insubordination and arrogance.
2. God opposed this abuse of man's unity by confusing the one language men spoke into many different languages. They had to quit building the city and tower because they could not communicate. The separation of men into nations speaking different languages is a sign that men used their unity for the wrong goals. It would take a miracle of redemption and new birth to give men natures in which they would use their unity to love and serve God. That restoration began on the Day of Pentecost and continues today.
3. God called Abram, a Shemite, to leave his homeland and his father's house for a new country. He promised to bless Abram by making of him a great nation, one with a dynasty of kings, and to extend His blessing to all families on earth through Abram. In this, God promised to resolve the problem that drove Adam and Eve out of Eden. In some way as yet unclear, God is going to do a work on earth that will result in man's blessedness. He will once again be pleasing in God's sight. Details are few, but this promise is a beacon of bright hope for all human beings.
4. Abram put his trust in God and left home. Turning his back on comfort, safety, familiarity, and perhaps the pleas of his family, he made a clean break with his past to follow the voice of God, Whom he did not really know. He went out to receive the astounding gift God offered to him.
5. Abram grew in reverence of God. He built altars as a sign of this reverence, acknowledging that God is worthy of honor, praise, and sacrifice.
6. When faced with the crisis of a famine, Abram went down to Egypt with his entourage. When he feared for his life, he urged Sarai to help him deceive those who might kill him because of her. This was not how God wanted Abram to live, so He sent plagues on the Pharaoh's household. God revealed Himself to be with Abram wherever he was, looking after him. Thus Abram entered into a deeper knowledge of the God Who had called him.

### A Message from the Authors

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