

The Man Abram



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 11:27–15:21.*

Memory Text: “He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (*Genesis 15:6*).

We ended last week on a sour note: the Tower of Babel and all that it represented about fallen humanity's seeming inability to learn from the past.

This week we begin on a more hopeful one: the descendants of Shem, the family line from which sprung the patriarch Abram, who, according to Paul, is “the father of us all” (*Rom. 4:16*). That is, he is the father of all who believe in Christ, through whom the promises made to Abraham are realized; for through Christ we are now Abraham's seed, “and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:29*); the promise of a heavenly Canaan where no more evil, sin, and death exist, much less rule.

In other words, after the Fall, the Flood, Noah's drunkenness, and the Tower of Babel fiasco, the Lord now introduces, in the clearest manner yet, hope for the human race. And it begins with Abram, who—although living amid a family and a culture steeped in idolatry—was a follower of the true God and who, for his faithfulness, was given promises not only for himself and for his family but for the whole human race.

This week we begin looking at the life of Abram, his initial calling, his response, his humanity, and, most important of all, his relationship to God—the great exemplar of what it means for a fallen human being to live by faith, to be justified by faith, and to reveal that faith through works.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 18.*

Abram's Background

Read Genesis 11:10-32. (See also Joshua 24:2 and Acts 7:2.) What story immediately precedes these texts? Why might these accounts have been placed next to each other? What details are found here regarding the background and family of Abram?

Even though chronological considerations suggest that Abram was the youngest of Terah's sons, he appears to be mentioned first in Genesis 11:26, 27 because of his importance as the ancestor of the chosen family. Although archaeology has revealed much concerning the times in which Abram lived, the great empires of the day form merely part of the background. The spotlight is on certain patriarchs and their families who attempted to keep alive the truth and knowledge about God. This is the great focus of Genesis: The stories, however sordid at times, center on those whom God entrusted with preserving the knowledge of Him in a world filled with idolatry, paganism, and all forms of superstition.

In how many stages did the call of Abram take place, according to Acts 7:2-4? Compare Gen. 12:1 with Acts 7:4. Why do you think he went through these stages rather than going immediately to Canaan?

Stephen states that God first appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees and called him to go to the land He would show him. But he didn't go right away. Instead, there was the stopping point in Haran, where he lived until his father, Terah, died. It was after his father's death that he finally left for the Promised Land.

Abram's family was involved in false worship and idolatry; yet, for quite a while he remained with them. What might we learn from this story about how we should relate to members of our own family who are not walking with the Lord?

The Call

What reason did God give for calling Abram to leave Haran? *Gen. 12:1-3, Heb. 11:8-10.*

Notice a great irony here: Among the things that God says He will do for Abram when he leaves is to “make thy name great” (*Gen. 12:2*). Compare this with the Tower of Babel story, in which one of the reasons they worked on the tower was in order to “make us a name” (*Gen. 11:4*). From a human perspective, it seems more likely that those who would create their monumental human achievement would have a better chance of having “a name” than someone who—leaving behind family, race, culture, and fertile land—would travel to a place “not knowing whither he went” (*Heb. 11:8*).

Yet, today no one knows the name of any one of those who worked on the tower; in contrast, almost all the world knows the name of Abram.

What powerful lesson should there be in this contrast for us, who in our own way might seek to “make us a name”?

Besides the call, again, to go to Canaan (*compare Acts 7:2 to Gen. 12:1*), Abram was given this amazing promise that God would make of him a great nation. This obviously implied children, something else that he would have to take on faith, considering that up to this point his wife had been childless (*Gen. 11:30*). Despite all this, verse 4 seems to imply no hesitation on his part. God called him to go, God made promises to him, and Abram went ahead (*see Rom. 4:13*) by faith.

Abram, sure that God had called him, moved out by faith on what—from a human perspective—seemed very foolish. What does this say to us about having to move and live by faith, even to the point of “foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:25, 2:14)? At the same time, how must we be careful not to step out by “faith” under the assumption that God is leading when He might not be? How can we know the difference?

The Faith of Abram

Read all of Genesis 12. Write out what message it has for you about faith, about trials, about character, whatever impresses you. What can you take away from this story that could help you in your daily walk with the Lord?

We might expect that, because he was following the call of God, Abram would have had his paths smoothed by Providence. The Bible gives no evidence that as long as we remain faithful to Him, no trials will come. On the contrary.

Indeed, not long after he had entered Canaan, a severe famine caused him to depart for Egypt, which was watered by the flooding waters of the Nile. The Sacred Record teaches us that even those who follow God's commands may have to endure trials of faith. Think about what a great strain that famine could have put on his faith: called to go into this land, and look what happens! A famine? This famine, which drove him out of Canaan, could help explain his lack of faith regarding Sarai and Pharaoh. Hunger and fear reduced the hero of faith to a person with frailties that most of us can identify with readily. Faith succumbed to fear and fear to deviousness as Abram used one half truth to conceal the other half.

“The Lord in His providence had brought this trial upon Abraham to teach him lessons of submission, patience, and faith—lessons that were to be placed on record for the benefit of all who should afterward be called to endure affliction. God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.

When was the last time you failed a test of faith? What lesson did you learn from that failure that can help you next time not to fail?

Abram and Lot

Read Genesis 13:1-13. What does this tell us about the character of Abram? How does this help us understand the kind of man he was and why he was an example of what it means to live by faith? What Bible texts can you find that admonish us to show the same kind of spirit? See, for instance, *Phil. 2:4*.

Returning from Egypt, Abram called on the Lord at the second altar he had built in Canaan (*Gen. 13:3, 4*). Fortified by this renewal of his relationship with God, he was able to face another test. Once more the promise of land seemed to elude Abram (*vss. 5, 6*), and a decision had to be made.

Abram's failure in Egypt seems counterbalanced by the nobility of character that he demonstrated in his dealings with Lot. From the heights of Bethel Lot saw the Jordan Valley, well watered and fertile like the Garden of Eden and the plains of Mesopotamia. Lot chose that which appealed to his sense of immediate gain. Little did Lot realize what his choice would cost him. The decision was between "faith" and "sight," and the results demonstrate the wisdom of making the right choice. Abram's close relationship with the Lord and his determination to walk by faith enabled him to look beyond the immediate temporal advantages to eternal gain.

Read Genesis 13:14-18. What promise does the Lord give to Abram? Why do you think the Lord waited until this time before giving it (*see vs. 14*) to Abram? Again, why did it require a lot of faith on Abram's part to believe in these promises?

Think of the last time you saw someone reveal the kind of graciousness and selflessness displayed here by Abram. What do you think is the secret of having such a character, especially for beings who are, at their core, selfish sinners? What needs to happen in your own life in order for you to develop more of this kind of character? Imagine, too, what your local church would be like were everyone to display such an attitude.

Melchizedek and Abram

Genesis 14:1-16 recounts the story of the plunder of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abram's liberation of the people, including Lot, from the invaders. Thus, though a man of faith and a worshiper of the true God, Abram could also be a man of war.

What light does the Melchizedek episode cast upon the spiritual stature of Abram? How again do we see his faith revealed in his works? *Vss. 17-24.*

Melchizedek (meaning “my king is righteous”) was king of Salem (a name for Jerusalem; see *Ps. 76:2*) and priest of the Most High God. Abram worshiped the same God. In deference to Melchizedek, who welcomed and blessed the patriarch upon his return from the battle, Abram gave the king-priest a tithe of all (*vs. 20*), indicating that the institution of tithing was practiced long before Moses and the Jews.

After this great victory the Lord appears to Abram and gives him a wonderful promise. “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (*Gen. 15:1*). Ellen White indicated that Abram needed that encouragement, considering the ire his recent victories aroused in some of his neighbors.

Read Abram's response (*vss. 2, 3*). What's so human, so understandable, about why he would say what he did? Why, from all rational and logical standpoints, did this request make so much sense?

God (*vss. 4-6*) then repeated His earlier promise that Abram's descendants would be innumerable in multitude (*Gen. 12:2, 13:16*). Even though the advancing age of Abram and Sarai seemed to make the promise of descendants increasingly more impossible, Abram took God at His word and trusted the divine power. This is seen in Genesis 15:6, which Paul later quoted (*Rom. 4:3*).

Abram believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. How does it help us understand what it means to be accepted by God? What things in the story so far about Abram give you hope; what things show you the need to make some changes in your life?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 125–136; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 11:26 to 15:21.

After God promised Abram again that his seed would become a great nation, Abram sought a sign, an affirmation of the promise (*Gen. 15:7, 8*). “The Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement. By divine direction, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each three years old, dividing the bodies and laying the pieces a little distance apart. To these he added a turtledove and a young pigeon, which, however, were not divided. This being done, he reverently passed between the parts of the sacrifice, making a solemn vow to God of perpetual obedience. Watchful and steadfast, he remained beside the carcasses till the going down of the sun, to guard them from being defiled or devoured by birds of prey. About sunset he sank into a deep sleep; and, ‘lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him.’ And the voice of God was heard, bidding him not to expect immediate possession of the Promised Land, and pointing forward to the sufferings of his posterity before their establishment in Canaan. The plan of redemption was here opened to him, in the death of Christ, the great sacrifice, and His coming in glory. Abraham saw also the earth restored to its Eden beauty, to be given him for an everlasting possession, as the final and complete fulfillment of the promise.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 137.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss your answers to the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. How do we today, New Testament Christians, understand what it means to be accounted righteous before God?
- ❷ Do you know someone right now who believes that he or she is being called to go, like Abram, not knowing “whither he went”? What could you as a class do to help this person through whatever struggles his or her journey is presenting?

A Cry for Help

by JOSÉ CALIXTO

Olga and her husband were inseparable. When he developed kidney disease, Olga cared for him. For ten years he suffered intensely, and eventually he became bedridden. But the couple never ceased being each other's best friend. When he died in 2003, Olga was devastated.

Her friends and family surrounded her during the days following her husband's death. But as they returned to their own worlds, Olga fell into a deep depression. She could not find a way out of her loneliness. As her despair deepened, a plan emerged in her mind to end her suffering.

She gathered all the medicines her husband had taken and poured them into a cup. Then she sat down and stared at the cup of pills. How easily this cup of pills could end her suffering.

Suddenly Olga remembered Nailson and Maria, a couple who had been so kind to her during her husband's illness. She could not get them out of her mind. She put the cup of medicines on the table and reached for her telephone.

When Nailson answered the telephone, Olga poured out her heart to him. She told him she wanted to die. But before she died she wanted to attend a church. Nailson listened to her desperate cry and then told her, "Don't end your life, Olga. Let's go to the church today. We have worship, and you can come to our church."

Olga agreed. Nailson and Maria walked with Olga into the Adventist church. As she listened to the speaker, Olga felt the heavy load of suffering and pain lift and peace enter her heart. She had come to the church filled with despair; she left there filled with hope.

Nailson and Maria befriended Olga, helped her handle her bills, and bought her food until her husband's benefit checks started coming in. And they invited her to worship with them. Olga gladly agreed. She never missed Sabbath, a Sunday evening, or a Wednesday church service.

In her darkest hour, Olga met the Savior through sincere friends. Olga has been baptized, and she shares with others how God's love saved her life and restored her hope.

Your mission offerings help provide the means to reach and win hurting people such as Olga.