

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There is real inspiration for the Christian disciple in the story of Terah leaving behind the city of Ur and its pagan worship, for the promised land of God where the true worship of the living God would be both found and put into practice. The hard part is that this story covers a very long period during which Terah and his family would have had to go about their daily lives, probably not as aware of what was going on as ourselves, who look back at what happened from a great distance. Faithfulness over a long period is one of the most important prerequisites of God's blessing, for which we need strength and patience.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you look back over a long time, how has God led you, spiritually, to where you are today? It may be impossible for you to be clear about some of the details, but nevertheless, try to look at the broader picture.*
- *Choose a great Christian leader, and read about them using books, or by researching on the internet. Try to discern the means of revelation the Lord has used to guide this person. How does this compare with what God has done in your own life?*

Final Prayer

We praise You, Lord God, for ministers, priests, deacons, church workers and all other saints of God, both ordinary and special, who guide Your people through today's troubled times. Bless them with love, patience, resoluteness and courage in the face of the evils of this world, and grant them peace. AMEN

Prayer

Dear Lord and Father of all, You do not stand at a distance from us, but You care for us and yearn to help us. Despite our varied and complicated problems, You see everything clearly, and You understand what we do not, even things which seem to be random. Sustain us by Your Spirit, we pray, and build us up in confidence and faith, so that we live at peace with ourselves, with others, and with You: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Nuclear power

Pray about the world trade in nuclear fuels, whether legal or illegal, and the politics behind the acquisition, possession and use of nuclear fuels. Pray for good to conquer evil.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for Morgan Tsvangirai, the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe*
- *Pray for Israel and the consequences of its election results*
- *Give thanks for the joy of worship and the love of God*

Meditation

Where is the heart of faith today?

The will to live according to the Gospel,
To pay the price for being named 'Christ';
And bear the world's rejection without fear?

Where is the stomach to do what's right,
The guts to grasp the truth, and never let it go?
To know the price Christ paid for resurrection
Was losing all to win a crown more glorious?

Where is the wit, the mind and intellect
To search through faith and never hesitate
Because the facts are not convenient;
But hold to what is given because of the Giver?

Now, He will come, and when He comes,
He'll know what we have done with what we have.
He'll know our hearts and minds and feelings.
Will He find faith and love unbound within all three?

Bible Study - Genesis 11:10-32

¹⁰ *This is the record of the descendants of Shem. Two years after the Flood, Shem became the father of Arpachshad when he was one hundred years old. ¹¹ He lived 500 years after the birth of Arpachshad and had other sons and daughters.*

(this table contains the information in verses 12 to 25)

Father	Age at birth of son	Son	Years lived after birth
Shem	100	Arpachshad	500
Arpachshad	35	Shelah	404
Shelah	30	Eber	403
Eber	34	Peleg	430
Peleg	30	Reu	209
Reu	32	Serug	207
Serug	30	Nahor	200
Nahor	29	Terah	117
Terah	70	Abraham, Nahor, Haran	

²⁶ Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran after he was 70 years old. ²⁷ These are his descendants. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. ²⁸ Haran died before his father Terah in his native land of Ur, in Chaldea. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. Abram's wife was Sarai, and Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Sarai was barren; she had no children. ³¹ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, Abram's wife, and together they set out from Ur in Chaldea to go to Canaan; but when they came to Kharan, they settled there. ³² Terah lived to the age of 205 years, and he died in Kharan.

Review

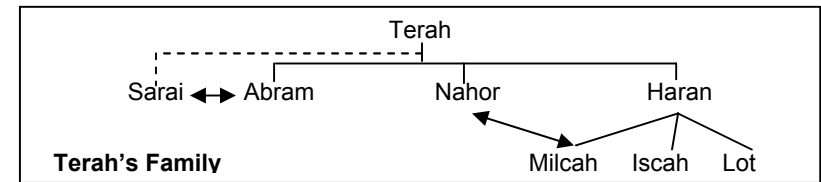
Our reading today is the second half of Genesis 11, which gives us the last pieces of information required before we begin the story of Abram (later renamed Abraham by God), the man chosen by God to be the ancestral father of the people of Israel. The function of the genealogy in chapter 11 is to provide us with the link between Abraham and his forefather Noah, through whom God saved the world at the time of the Flood, and through whom the blessings of God were conveyed via the line of his son Shem. The story of Abraham which begins in earnest at the beginning of chapter 12 is hugely important for the whole Bible, because Abraham became the father of the Israelite nation, and through them, the spiritual father of all Christian people (Romans 4).

The list of ten names from Shem to Abraham given by this text is not without either significance or controversy. The first thing to note is that the list has similarities to the earlier genealogy from Adam, through Seth, to Noah, found in Genesis 5. Of course, the names are not the same, but both contain ten generations and both are the 'generations of blessing' chosen by God. The descendants of Adam through Seth to Noah are separate from the descendants through Cain (Gen 5) because of his sin of murder; and the descendants of Noah through Shem to Abraham (Gen 11) are separate from the descendants through Canaan because of Ham's sin after his father Noah became drunk (Gen 9:20f.). Each righteous list of ancestors is 'blessed' with 'other sons and daughters' in fulfilment of God's blessing (1:28), but at each generation, only one son is chosen as the bearer of the lineage. This is an indication of the unique choice of God for family

succession, and this will become an important theme throughout the rest of Genesis as generation follows generation after Abraham.

All this seems puzzling and over complex. Why should God work in this complex and impenetrable way? The point however is that if we observe these features, then we will find ourselves picking up the right themes for the coming stories of Genesis. Moreover, what we are dealing with here is the beginnings of God's story of salvation, which is not a story of logic but of surprise, driven by the will of Almighty God and not, as the New Testament puts it 'by the will of a father' (John 1:13). It is helpful for us to be reminded that Scripture is not primarily a story of human experience but of divine planning and foresight.

The central section of our text is written out in the Hebrew text, but is best set out in the form of a chart or table, and for that reason, I have provided this instead of the usual translation (see above); the information is exactly the same, it is a matter of how we see it. The last few verses (11:26f.) describe the family relationships of Terah, and at this point, the family becomes very complicated:



Terah was the man who first heard God's voice instructing him to set out for Canaan (11:31), not Abraham, as so many people believe. Abraham was Terah's son, and he was married to Sarai, his half sister, according to Genesis 20:12, by a different wife of Terah. The fact that Sarai was barren could be interpreted as God's disapproval for an irregular marriage in His sight!

The rest of Terah's descendants are also important for the coming stories of Genesis, for Abraham had two brothers, Haran and Nahor. Haran had two daughters, Iscah and Milcah, and one of them, Milcah, married her uncle Nahor. Whilst Haran died and we hear no more of Iscah, Nahor and Milcah crop up later on in Genesis as the grandparents of Rebekah, the young girl sought out as the bride of Isaac (Genesis 22, 24). The epic journey from Ur in Chaldea (today's southern Iraq) was therefore undertaken by a strange collection of Terah, Abraham and Sarah, who were barren, and Terah's grandson Lot. We might easily guess that Terah hoped the younger Lot would be his heir, but as we know, God had other plans. Terah himself died before the journey to Canaan was complete, and Abraham assumed the leadership of the small group of nomads, about to embark on their own epic journey.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Be honest, have you read this genealogy before? What have you learned from it that is new to you? How does this affect your faith, if at all?
2. Is it important that we trace a history of God's blessing today?
3. Why do you think that God leads people on journeys without saying where they are going?