Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Paganism and Promise
Scripture: Genesis 11:10-32
Code: 90-269

Well, let's open our Bibles to Genesis, chapter 11, in our ongoing study of origins, the Book of Genesis. I've entitled our look at this particular section, starting in chapter 11, verse 10, and going to the end of the chapter, "Paganism and Promise." Paganism and promise.

While there is a tremendous amount of speculation about the history of man, it is, frankly, unnecessary. We have an accurate account of the history of man in the Book of Genesis. And the historical record of man in Genesis is complete, all the way back to the first man, Adam.

In chapters 1 through 9 of Genesis, you go from Adam to Noah, with a very carefully laid out genealogy. Then, in chapters 10 and 11, you go from Noah to Abram, who became Abraham. So 1 to 9 takes you from Adam to Noah, and then 10 and 11 from Noah to Abraham.

From Abraham, you then move through the patriarchs, to Isaac, to Jacob, who then is renamed Israel, to Joseph, through the 12 tribes. God's covenant people are established as His witness nation, and that takes Genesis 12 to the end, chapter 50.

Exodus begins with the death of Joseph, about 1800 B.C. Israel is in Egypt by then. Chapter 2 is the birth of Moses, who then leads Israel out. Forty years of wandering, and they finally arrive in the land of Canaan, established in the land of promise.

The rest of the Old Testament is the story of Israel. It's a story of blessing and a story of cursing. The Old Testament closes about 400 years before the birth of Christ. There are 400 years between the end of the Old Testament historical record and the beginning of the New, called, for obvious reasons, the silent era.

The silence is broken by the birth of Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, just about two thousand years ago. The whole story of man, then, up to now, is something over six thousand years. Now, this is not an evangelical conclusion as opposed to a scientific conclusion or a traditional conclusion. This is simply what the Bible says. And you don't even have to be an evangelical to figure this out. Anybody who reads the book of Genesis can know this.

To demonstrate that, Talmudic scholars assembled themselves into a number of different schools in ancient Israel. And there was one such school called the school of Elijah. The school of Elijah was a group of scholars who were producing literature that interpreted the Old Testament and made it

applicable to the life of Jewish people.

Writing centuries before Christ, they wrote what is known as Midrash Rabbah, and in Midrash Rabbah this is what is stated. Now, remember, this is before the coming of Christ. I'm quoting from Midrash Rabbah, Talmudic scholars. "The world is to be for 6,000 years, 2,000 empty without the Torah," the law, "2,000 years with the Torah, then 2,000 years of Messianic times."

How did they ever come to that conclusion? Because if you follow the genealogical record of Genesis, it is approximately 2,000 years until God's law arrives, something a little more than that, actually. It is about 2,000 years from the arrival of the law and Moses until the coming of Messiah, and Messiah did come. And we are in Messianic times and have been for about 2,000 years.

Those Jewish Talmudic scholars could read Genesis just the way we can read it. They could go through the genealogy just the way we go through it. They could add up the numbers. They could draw the conclusions. And they came, essentially, to the same conclusion that anyone who takes the Bible at face value comes.

Of course, they were guessing at the length of the Messianic times, weren't they? But their literal interpretation of the first 4,000 years shows a very careful understanding of the genealogies in Genesis, and is essentially what we have been saying all along. They interpreted the Bible literally, bless them.

And, by the way, the Messiah did come at the 4,000-year point. Isn't that interesting? They said He would, and He did. And we have had 2,000 years of His spiritual kingdom ruling over the souls of all those who are His subjects, all those who believe the gospel. However, His earthly kingdom awaits the judgment of the ungodly, the salvation of Israel and the nations and His return. Were He to return right now, there would still be another thousand years of Messianic times, the glorious kingdom of Christ, which brings human history in this universe to its end.

I only take you there, to those Talmudic scholars, to emphasize the fact that anyone who is straightforward with an interpretation of Genesis comes to the same conclusion. Man was created something over 6,000 years ago. We take the Bible at face value because it is the only record we have. It's the only record of primeval history that we have.

Now, what I've just given you is essentially an overview of what the Scripture records, as the time of this universe is coming into existence and man's life in it. In these early chapters, then, we have been given the record of primeval ancient history. We even have a genealogy to flow through that period. From Adam to Noah, the genealogy is in chapter 5. From Noah to Abram, the genealogy is in chapter 10 and chapter 11.

Now, just reaching back and reviewing a minute, chapter 10 gave the record of the spread of Noah's family all over the earth, the sons of Japheth, the sons of Ham and the sons of Shem, the sons of Shem being nations that primarily are identified in the Middle East Semitic people. And of course it's from Shem that Abram comes, and through Abram comes the Messiah.

So we noted in chapter 10 that the nations are scattered all over the world. And in chapter 10, verse 32, the chapter ends, "These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood." And they scattered everywhere.

He started in chapter 11, the first nine verses tell how they were scattered. They were scattered by a divine miracle of judgment, twofold miracle. God altered their language so they couldn't understand each other. Therefore, they collected in groups of people who could understand each other. And God not only altered their language, but God miraculously scattered them over the face of the earth. This was accomplished by the miracle at Babel. And away they went.

Now, in chapter 10, you have, as I said, the genealogy of all three of Noah's sons given. If you glance back at the chapter, it begins with the generations, the toledoth of Shem, Ham and Japheth, and then it goes on in verse 2, the sons of Japheth, and it goes on to list them. Verse 6, the sons of Ham, and it goes on to list them. The sons of Shem, down in verse 21. So you have this general listing of the genealogies that flow from the sons of Noah.

As we come, however, to chapter 11 and verse 10, the focus is again on Shem, but not in a broad sense, as it is in chapter 10. The focus on Shem in chapter 10 just shows all the various people groups that came from him, whereas in chapter 11, it narrows down the focus on one line, the line of election, we could call it, the line of Shem that goes directly to Abram, who is the father of Israel, and, next to Jesus, the most important man in the history of redemption.

As we see throughout the Genesis record, and we'll see it here, the story is an ongoing continuum of paganism versus promise. We saw that at the very outset. We saw that in the conflict between Cain and Abel. We saw that in the society that was built in the time of Lamech. We saw that in the society that was developed before the flood, where paganism dominated, and there were only a few who accepted God at His Word and believed His promise, one family of eight people who survived that horrifying holocaust.

Even after the flood, it is still that ongoing contrast of paganism and promise, the people of paganism and the people of promise. The Scripture from Genesis to Revelation diagnoses man and sort of drops him into those categories. Since the fall, which is recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, all men are sinful, wicked and in constant rebellion against God. Man is a rebel. He is opposed to God.

He is dead in sin, bound in the grip of paganism deep within his nature.

Romans 3 is probably the most concise description of the sinfulness of man. And I know you're familiar with Romans 3. I just want to call one thing to your attention. As you notice Romans 3:10-18, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; none who does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

You notice, if you have that kind of Bible that does that, that that is all in quotes and caps, because every one of those statements is taken from the Old Testament. That is not a New Testament diagnosis. That is an Old Testament diagnosis. Better yet, that is a universal diagnosis of the wretchedness of man. Man is defined as wicked and sinful and rebellious and opposed to God. Every way you can define him, that's how it comes out.

So the story of man is a story of paganism. It's a story of rebellion. But it is also a story of promise. We found that back in chapter 3, you can look at it for just a moment, brief review, in chapter 3 and verse 15, right in the middle of cursing the serpent and cursing the man and the woman, cursing the ground and cursing the environment around them, right in the middle of all those curses, verse 15 produces a promise.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." Right in the middle of this section in which everything is cursed is the first revelation of God's promise to crush the serpent, the first promise that God is going to deliver sinners from the power of their great adversary.

It is true, man chose Satan's word over God's, Satan's world view over God's, Satan's leadership over God's, Satan's will over God's, Satan's friendship over God's. And man became the enemy of God who hid from God, who distrusted God, who rebelled against God, who rejected God.

But it is also true that man was not fixed irretrievably and forever in that disastrous condition. Unlike the angels who fell and could never be redeemed, man is granted a promise that One will come and will crush the head of Satan. Satan may well have thought that if he could bring about the fall of man, man would be as irredeemable as his demons. He was wrong.

God had said, back in chapter 2, verse 16, "If you eat from the tree, you can certainly eat freely from any tree of the garden, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. In the day that you eat from it you'll die." Reality was, spiritual death did set in, but certainly not physical

death and not necessarily eternal death. Instead, they did eat, and life was produced.

The woman is told here, "You're going to have a seed. Not only are you going to have a seed, which means you're going to live, and out of your body is going to come a life, but out of your body is going to come a life that will crush the serpent." In fact, Adam was so confident that they were going to live, that he called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. He believed in the promise that she was going to produce life, and she did.

Chapter 4, he had relations with his wife and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. And again, in verse 2, she gave birth to his brother, Abel, and so it was. God even covered their shame. Chapter 3, verse 21, God killed an animal, made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them, in a magnificent picture of substitutionary death to provide a covering for sinners. God heard the cry of sinners. The end of verse 26, the last verse in chapter 4, "Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord."

So in the midst of the curse, in the midst of the disaster and the rebellion and the sin and the fallenness, there was promise. Paganism flourished and developed. Really it was launched, I suppose we could say, by Cain. It was subsequently developed fully into a world in which God was so displeased that He had to drown it. But, at the same time, there was also the promise. The seed of a woman, the virgin-born Son, would someday come and crush Satan's head.

That's the first prophesy in the Bible. It is the first time that the great reality that "where sin abounds, grace much more abounds" can be applied. So even before God banished Adam and Eve, even before He sent them out of the garden for their paganism, He gave them a promise, that paradise could be regained forever. And when the whole world plunged into unrestrained evil and God had to drown the whole world, there were eight who received the promise. And from those eight, a new world began.

Chapter 9, verse 1, "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'" And so it would be through Noah, now, that the seed would come to bruise the serpent's head. And of Noah's sons, it would be through Shem. And of Shem's progeny, it would be through Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, or Judah, that the Messiah would come. And so the record moves inexorably toward the arrival of Messiah.

So, as we come to this genealogy, I want us to see here, and I think you'll see it, this continual contrast between paganism and promise. I think formal pagan religion was sort of launched at Babel. Then the religion that was formalized at Babel in the ziggurat, which was a form of pagan worship probably identified with astrology, when the people were scattered all over the world, they took their religion with them.

It was a hybrid of some of the truth of the true and living God twisted and perverted by whatever form of paganism had developed at Babel that flowed out across the whole world. But God had a plan to bring about a nation who would be a witness nation to go to the world and tell them about the true and living God, whom they had forgotten.

So when you come in to chapter 11, it's really important to see the genealogy. You go from Shem, in verse 11, verse 10, all the way down to Abram, who appears toward the end of this genealogy for the first time in verse 26.

Now, let me give you a little bit of background. We're going to see this as we go. Abram's family were pagans. They were idolaters. They probably worshipped the gods of astrology that had been invented at Babel. And they seemed to have been especially involved in the cult of worshiping the moon god. That, by the way, the worship of the moon god, was a cult that flourished in ancient Mesopotamia.

To understand something about the family of Abram, turn over to Joshua, chapter 24, for a moment. And I'm just going to give you a little bit of a preview so you kind of know where we're going here, and to show you that even after the flood, the development of all these families and nations after Babel, was pagan. In spite of the fact that the flood had happened and they had eyewitness testimony that it had happened, because the survivors of the flood were still around, and I'll point that out in a little bit, nonetheless, they descended into paganism.

"And Joshua said to all the people," gathering the tribes to Shechem there in verse 1, "'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River,"'" Euphrates River, "'"namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods."'" Abraham's father was an idolater. He served other gods. He was a pagan, in every sense.

And he is simply an illustration of the way the world went. It plunged down the same identical path that it had before the flood. And that is because the heart of man is so wretched innately that that's the way he goes.

The world didn't go upward religiously. It didn't develop a higher and higher kind of religion. It went from knowing the truth down, down from the truth of God, down from the reality of faith in the true and living God who was creator, down from salvation by grace, repentance, faith, down from worshipping and loving the true God, down into idolatry. The path is outlined very clearly in Romans, chapter 1, from the heights of worshipping the true God to the muck of idolatry and demon worship.

And by Abram's time, the whole world was idolatrous. Well, they had been before they were scattered, and they were no less idolatrous after the scattering. And, by the way, they still are today.

But there was at least one true worshipper. Turn to the seventh chapter of Acts. And this is the great sermon of Stephen, which is a historical recitation of the history of God's work with Israel.

And he says, in verse 2, "'Hear me, brethren and fathers. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, "Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you." Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran, and from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living.'"

The God of glory appeared to our father, Abraham. That is indicative of the fact that here was a man not unlike Noah who was a true believer, and through that man, God would shape a nation to tell the world of idolaters about Him. So Abram becomes critical as the father of this people. In the midst of a sea of paganism, even the pagan family in which he lived, he had come to believe in the true God. So it was Abram that would be the father of the nation and the ancestor of the Messiah.

So the Babel event was judgment, but it was followed, again, by hope. Now, this genealogy that we're going to look at, verse 10, begins two years after the 40-day flood. And, interestingly enough, you're not going to find anything about death in this genealogy. You go back to the genealogy of chapter 5, and he died, and he died, and he died, and he died, and he died, and he died, and he died. It's a genealogy of death. And it's all moving inexorably toward this terrible massacre in the flood.

But this is a genealogy of life. It says, "He lived these many years, he lived this many years, he lived this many years, he lived, he lived, he lived, he lived, he lived." And it really points out the different mode. Prior to the flood, everything was moving toward this disastrous death. After the flood, God said He would never do that again. Everything was marked out by life. It indicates that what was prevailing before the flood was death, judgment. What was prevailing after the flood was promise, promise, promise.

So we come to this genealogy, which goes from Shem right on down to Abram. The genealogy in chapter 10 follows one son of Eber by the name of Joktan. But the genealogy in chapter 11 follows a different son of Eber, Eber's son, Peleg, because he's the line to Abram. This is the elect line, the covenant line. And it reminds us again that God is sovereignly controlling, moving history, people, events to fulfill His will. So here is the line of the promised seed.

And we could get a lot...I don't want to get you too convoluted in your thinking, but these are overlapping lives. It isn't that one person dies and another one starts, then another one dies and another one starts. They're overlapping. I mean, Terah, for example, Abram's father, if you put the numbers together, was 128 years old when Noah died. So Noah was alive for 128 years of Terah's life. He had a firsthand eyewitness who survived the flood. In fact, Noah died probably two years before Abram was born.

All these records, then, could be easily kept and easily passed down, because the lives were overlapping. Messiah's line, then, went like this: Adam to Noah to Shem to Peleg to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Judah to Jesse to David to Solomon to Hezekiah, Josiah, Joseph, Jesus. And the genealogies can be traced in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke.

But here is this section of those records. Verse 10, "These are the records of the generations of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; and Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of Arpachshad, and he had other sons and daughters." Now, Shem is the elect line. He lived a hundred years, and he had a son. That's interesting, because Abraham was a hundred years old when he had a son.

Now, let me give you little numbers to think about. Noah was 500 when his first son was born. Chapter 5, verse 32, he was 500 years old when he had his first son. His first son, by the way, was Japheth. Shem was likely born two years later, because in ancient times, mothers generally nursed their babies for about 24 months, or up to 24 months, so they wouldn't be able to conceive for that amount of time that they were nursing their children. So it would be maybe she nursed for a year, a year and a half, and sometime in that era she became pregnant again and Shem was born, two-plus years, let's say, after Japheth.

So Shem would've been 100 years old two years after the 40-day flood, and that's what it says. He was 100 years old and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood, which means that he wasn't the firstborn. We know that, because the firstborn was born when Noah was 100, and he wasn't 100 until two years after the flood.

Shem lived 500 years after he became the father of Arpachshad, had other sons and daughters, a total of 600 years. His father lived 950 years. So we see something beginning to happen rather immediately, right? Life span is shortening significantly. The effects of the flood on the world, the universe, the atmosphere, as well as the effect of sin passing down from generation to generation.

Then comes Arpachshad, who lived 35 years, became the father of Shelah. "Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Shelah, had other sons and daughters." At 35, he fathered Shelah. He lived another 403 years, for a total of 438 years. So, again, the life span is dropping. He had other sons and daughters.

Now, at this point, another little technicality, the genealogy moves from Arpachshad down to Shelah. However, if you go to Luke 3:36, you will read another name stuck in there. You don't have to do it. But in the genealogy of Luke, the name Cainan appears. C-A-I-N-A-N is the way it's transliterated. It appears in the genealogy in Luke. And the question is, why? Why?

This genealogy in the Old Testament right here in Genesis 11 is repeated one other place. It's repeated in I Chronicles 1. And in the genealogy here, the name Cainan is not recorded, and in the genealogy of I Chronicles 1, Cainan is not recorded, either. The Masoretic scribes, who knew the Hebrew well, didn't put it in any of their texts. But the name Cainan does appear in the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament.

It is likely that some scribe at some point, copying Luke's Gospel, and being familiar with the Septuagint, picked up Cainan out of the Septuagint, which isn't in the Hebrew text, Septuagint being a translation, not an inspired original, and stuck it into Luke's account. It is better, then, when you see the word Cainan in Luke's account, to understand it as an addition made at a later time.

Also, the Septuagint convolutes the order of the names, as well, and so it's not precisely reliable as a primary source. So, just in case you come across the name Cainan, the best understanding of that would be that it was added later by someone who thought it should be there because they picked it up in the Septuagint version.

All right, moving on...isn't this fascinating...to Shelah. Shelah was a man's name in those days, lived 30 years, became the father of Eber. Eber is the term from which we get "Hebrew." "And Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Eber, and he had other sons and daughters."

By the way, Shelah became a very common name for families in Judah. Chapter 38, it's mentioned a number of times, chapter 46, verse 12, Numbers 26:20, I Chronicles 2, I Chronicles 4. Shelah becomes a very common name.

Shelah lives 30 years, gives birth to Eber, from which the word "Hebrew" comes, lives another 403 years, total of 433 years, and has other sons and daughters. Then, verses 16 and 17, "Eber lived thirty-four years, became the father of Peleg; and Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and he had other sons and daughters."

That's just to tell you that the world is expanding, in terms of its population, even in this very important line of people. You remember that Peleg was an important individual. His birth signaled something very important. Back in chapter 10, we remember, in verse 25, the name of one son of Eber, Peleg, because, in his days, the earth was divided. His name means "divided," and that very likely signals that he was born at the time of the scattering at Babel.

This particular son of Eber is the chosen line. His brother, Joktan, fathered Arab tribes. But Peleg fathered the people of God. He lived 30 years, and it says, in verse 18, "became the father of Reu; and then lived two hundred and nine years after he became the father of Reu, and he had other sons

and daughters." Things keep expanding. He lived a total of 239 years. His father lived 464. And so time continues to diminish. Father 464, grandfather 433, and he's dead 200 years sooner.

Then Reu is discussed in verses 20 and 21. He "lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug; and Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug, and he had other sons and daughters." A total of 239 years.

Serug, then, verses 22 and 23, lived 30 years, fathered Nahor; "lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and had other sons and daughters." He lives for 230 years and fathers other children.

You also notice that they're having children younger now. And then you come to Nahor, in verse 24, who "lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah." Here's the key name. Nahor is Abram's grandfather. He lives 29 years. He fathers Terah. "Nahor lives one hundred and nineteen years after he becomes the father of Terah, he had other sons and daughters." So Nahor lives only 148 years. Actually, Abram lived only 175 years, so you can see it's beginning to shorten even more.

And Nahor, just a handful of generations down from Shem, only lives a quarter of the time of Shem's life. So the impact of sin, the impact of the flood on the environment, is shortening life. This, then, man, Nahor, is Abram's grandfather.

Now, later on you're going to see another Nahor, down in verse 26. That's Abram's brother, named after this grandfather, which may indicate that he was the firstborn son and was given the name of his grandfather.

Now, as we move down this genealogy and arrive at Nahor becoming the father of Terah, we come to Terah, in verse 26, who "lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." And there's the genealogy.

And may I say to you, there is no scientific data, radiocarbon or whatever, there is no historical record in existence in Sumerian antiquities or Egyptian antiquities, there is no other ancient Near Eastern material available, that forces gaps into this genealogy. So we take it at its face value. This is the way it really was.

Terah begins the Abrahamic record. By the way, there are names of people in the Old Testament and in this genealogy that are also the names of places, because very often they used names that were used both for towns and for people. That's not hard to understand. Towns were named after people. They still are, in some parts of the world. So that Terah, the name of Abram's father, was also a place in the northwestern upper Mesopotamian Valley.

Now, Terah lived 70 years, follow this very closely, Terah lived 70 years, became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And I want you to understand something here or you're going to be confused when you read other parts of the Scripture. He didn't become a father until he was 70. That's kind of unusual now, because people are having their sons earlier. But when it tells us that he had three sons when he was 70, it doesn't mean that they were triplets. It means that he began to have these sons at the age of 70.

And, if you look at the Biblical record, Abraham was not the firstborn son. He was born 60 years later, when Terah was 130 years old, just 18 years...just at 130 years, I should say. How do we know that? Well, in chapter 11, verse 32, it says the days of Terah were 205 years and he died. In chapter 12, verse 4, Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. After his father died, he left. That's what Acts 7:4 says. He didn't leave until his father died. So if his father died at 205 and he was 75, then he was born when his father was 130, right?

And so when he had his son at 70, it wasn't Abram. He was born in the 130th year of his father. He's not the firstborn son. But why is he listed first? Because he's important. Similar to the listing of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. The birth order was Japheth, Shem and Ham. But Shem is mentioned first because of his priority.

Now, as I told you, Terah was not a believer in the true God. Joshua 24:2 says he served other gods. He was an idolatrous pagan. So these three boys, Abram, Nahor and Haran, mentioned there in verse 26, were born into a pagan family. And I want you to understand something about their paganism. Influenced by the astrology of Babel, it appears that they worshipped the moon god.

Terah has been related by Hebrew scholars to the Hebrew word yarah, which is the word for moon. And it indicates that he was actually named, perhaps, for the moon god by his father Nahor, who was perhaps a worshipper of the moon god, as well. It is also interesting to note that the birthplace of Abram, the town of Ur, was known, and is known by archaeologists and historians, as the major center of the worship of the moon god in ancient Mesopotamia.

Now, Abram, later Abraham in chapter 17, verse 5, Abram means "exalted father." But Abraham means "father of many nations." He was named "exalted father." He ended up being named "the father of many nations" by God.

Nahor was named after his grandfather, and that's why I kind of think he may have been the first one born. And there's more about his family in chapter 22. I won't tell you the whole story, but chapter 22 indicates that Nahor had 12 sons, 12 sons. All of them, then, would be Abraham's nephews, right? His brother's sons.

One of his brother's sons was Bethuel, the father of, are you ready for this, Rebecca, who married Abraham's son, Isaac, and became the mother of Jacob and Esau. It's a small, small world in ancient times. Marrying your second cousin was certainly in order.

The third one named, besides Abram and Nahor, was Haran. Haran is also the name of a town in Moab, Beth Haran, mentioned in Numbers 32:36 and Joshua13:27. It may have been where he had an influence or settled or just may be coincidental.

Now, all three of these names are well known in Jewish history. They all appear in the Biblical record as you go through Genesis. And so they are noted for us here. Abraham lived for 175 years. He died, as I said, just a couple of years after the death of Noah, and was likely, listen to this, survived by Shem, outliving Abram. He was probably survived by Shelah and also by Eber.

But Abram is the key person here, because Abram believed in the true God. God in glory appeared to him, as I read for you from Acts, chapter 7. Let me read just further down the Book of Genesis to chapter 15 for a moment. It isn't to say that at that time Abram was a regenerate, justified man. It is in chapter 15 that God says, "'Look toward the heavens, count the stars, if you are able to count them,' and He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." His actual justification is there described.

But Abram was a believer in the true God, apparently. And the glory of God appeared to him. Romans 4:3 says, "Abram believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." I think that actual conversion of Abram came at the time there described in the 15th chapter of Genesis. But I'm convinced that when God approached this man, when he was still down in Ur, you can go back to Genesis at this point, he was one who was certainly at least seeking to worship the true God.

So starting in verse 27, you had a new toledoth, a new generation, the generations of Terah. They culminate the generations of Shem. They inaugurate the generations of Terah. Verse 27, he repeats he "became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran," and this is an interesting note, "Haran became the father of Lot."

Why introduce one son? Why pick Haran and mention that he had a son named Lot? Why is he the only son mentioned? Well, read the next verse. "Haran died in the presence of his father," literally died in his father's face, died while his father was alive. And because this one of the three sons died, his son had to take his place in the line of primogeniture. He had to take his father's place.

And so Lot is mentioned because he takes the place of his father, who dies. He then is treated more like a son than a grandson. In fact, Abram himself, who is his uncle, takes him under his wing, doesn't he, and takes him into the land of Canaan with him. So since Haran died before his father,

Terah, died, his son, Lot, took his place as if he were a son.

Now, notice at the end of verse 28, all this is going on in a town called Ur, Ur. We are familiar with that, if we know anything about the Bible, Ur of the Chaldees. Familiar name, familiar place. The best location, archaeologically, at least the one that I would lean toward, is that Ur is located on the northwest corner of the Persian Gulf.

If you were to go south from the land of Israel and east, down toward the Persian Gulf, you know the top of the Persian Gulf has kind of a straight line from west to east, the northwest corner of the Persian Gulf, just a little up from there, would be the location of ancient Ur, in the southern Mesopotamian Valley. It was one of the most important centers of Sumerian culture, ancient culture.

In the year 1922, there was discovered there a place called Tell el Muqqayar, an Arabic name for a tell. A tell is a mound that reveals a location where civilization has been...one civilization on another on another on another on another creates a tell, as they build and build and build and one goes out of existence, and they build on it, and another one goes, and they build. That's what they call a tell, or a mountain. That tell was excavated from 1922 to 1933. It is believed to be the ancient location of Ur.

Some archaeologists feel that at the time of Terah and the birth of his sons, it had reached its zenith and was starting to decline as a great city, and that may explain why Terah and his family wanted to leave. But that would be a very human explanation.

It is called Ur of the Chaldeans even though technically, at the time of Abraham, it wouldn't have been Ur of the Chaldeans. Moses, remember, is reading Genesis to the children of Israel, who are entering the Promised Land. This is a long time after these events take place. And they know it as Ur of the Chaldeans. Chaldean tribes, through its history, were later associated with it, and so it was that way known to Moses' people.

Terah and his family lived there, and it was known, and archaeologists have supported this, as a center for the worship of the moon god. Verse 29, "Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran," different Haran, not same Haran, who had died, who was Abram's brother. Same name, different man. How do you know that? Because it says, "the daughter of Haran," not the son of Terach, but Haran, "the father of Milcah and Iscah." It identifies him as somebody else.

So they took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, later changed to Sarah, chapter 17, verse 15. Sarai means "my princess." You know what Sarah means? "Princess." Drop the "my." Why did God do that? Because she wasn't going to be somebody's princess. She was going to literally be the mother of nations. So her name was changed from Sarai to Sarah.

Her name, in the ancient language, is Sarat. Sarat means "queen," and Sarat was one of the gods in the ancient pantheon, the Babylonian pantheon. In fact, Sarat was one of the names for the god Ishtar, and Isthar was the goddess of the planet Venus. So here we are back to the astrology again, indicating these people were all mingled in this Mesopotamian astrological cult.

It tells us that Nahor had a wife named Milcah, the daughter of a different Haran, who had two daughters, Milcah and Iscah. Milcah is a word, malcah. It means "queen," again. And Malcah was another Acadian title for the goddess Ishtar. Ishtar was the goddess of Venus. Ishtar was the queen of heaven, the queen of heaven. So they were naming their daughters after astrological, Babylonian goddesses. They were calling their daughters "queen," and naming them after these deities.

There's an interesting corollary to this. I'm just going to just read you a couple things. Jeremiah addresses this in Jeremiah, chapter 7, verse 18. "The children gather wood," he's saying this in Jerusalem's going on, "the children gather wood and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out libations to other gods in order to spite me." God says, "My people in my city of Jerusalem are worshipping the queen of heaven." Milcah, that's exactly what Milcah is. She was Melakay tasa Mayim, the queen of heaven. She was named after this goddess of heaven.

Jeremiah also mentions here in the 44th chapter of his prophecy, verse 17, again, he talks about sacrifices to the queen of heaven. Repeats it again in verse 18, sacrifices to the queen of heaven. Repeats it in verse 19, burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven, pouring out libations to her, etc.

What happened was, when, later on, the people of Israel got into the land of Canaan, they were still profoundly influenced by the worship of the queen of heaven, that terrible idolatry that had begun so long ago at Babel and was refined both in Babylon and in Egypt, and when the children of Israel were in Egypt had come to influence them so greatly. So again we can see the astrological orientation of these people.

Now, as far as Iscah goes, I tried to find something on what that name means. The best I could do, it means "perfumed oil." That's somebody's educated guess.

When we move away from all of those people, we come to verse 30, and we read something very important. "And Sarai was barren; she had no child." The worst possible situation a woman could face, but absolutely crucial to the faith of Abraham, right? Because here is what launches the story of Abram. He becomes the example of faith for all who will ever believe.

Because she couldn't have a child, and God comes to Abram and says, "I'm going to make out of you a great nation," he's got a huge dilemma. "I'm supposed to be the father of a great nation, and I've

got a wife who's barren. It's just not going to happen." This situation gave opportunity for Abraham to exercise faith in the promise of God, faith by which he evidenced his belief in God, through which God justified him, and made him to be the prototype of faith.

Verse 31, "And 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 out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there."

Why did they do that? I mean, they're comfortable, they're living down there. That's their home. That's their place. Their people are there, in Ur. Why did they leave that place? The answer comes back to Acts 7. The glory of God, "the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran," so that would be in Ur, "and said, 'Depart from your country and your relatives, come to the land that I will show you.' And he departed from the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran." It was because God came to Abram and said, "Get out."

And God told him, "Go to Canaan." You say, "Well, why did he go to Haran?" Well, the objective was Canaan. By divine revelation he was to go to Canaan. That's what God told him from the very outset. That's what God desired of him. In fact, in chapter 15, verse 7, God reminds him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it." It was God who moved him out, and with him his father and his wife and his nephew. It was God who did it.

They were going to Canaan, but they took a strange route. Instead of going this way, to Canaan, they went north, going along the Euphrates, and probably that can be explained by the fact that they would have a very difficult time with their entourage crossing the barren desert between Ur, down at the Persian Gulf, and the coastal land of Canaan. And so rather than do that, they went north, along the Euphrates, to the high country, the beautiful, well-watered mountains, to cross over the mountains and drop down into Canaan from the north.

But it says they went only as far as Haran. Well, why did they stop there? Because, archaeologists tell us, Haran was the second chief center of worship for the moon god. By the way, the moon god's name was Sin, S-I-N. Terah got up there, and he got a sniff of familiar worship. "Let's settle right here. Right here. Let's not go over the river and down into Canaan. This is our place. Here is the second great center of worship for the moon god." So they settled there.

"The days of Terah," verse 32, "were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran." You know what? He died a pagan. It's really sad. He died a pagan. It was then chapter 12 says that "the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, from your relatives, from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, I will bless you, make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

"So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh."

And so forth and so forth, journeying, verse 9 says, all the way down to the Negev. There was a famine in the land, and he kept right on going, down to Egypt. That's the beginning of the story of Abram. Abram followed the Word of God and received the promise. His father died, tragically, a pagan. But the promise came to and through Abram.

And that's how it is for everybody. Man, idolatrous and pagan, follows the path of unbelief, follows the path of false religion, follows the path of rebellion and disobedience against God and sinks into hell. Or, man, believing in the Word of the Living God, escapes paganism and is delivered to eternal realms of divine promise and salvation.

So here begins the story of Abram, and the story of redemption, finally culminates in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, I hope you got a little of that, if not all of it. Let's pray.

Father, working through this certainly has its technical aspects, but it also is so compelling to know how constant, unflagging, unrelenting, indomitable, is your sovereign, providential control of every life and every event, to bring about your glorious will.

We thank you that you are the God of history, that history is His story. It's your story. You wrote it before it happened. You are writing it, unfolding it, even now, in perfect accord with your design.

Father, we know that we don't have to trust in men and their speculations to understand history. Your Word lays it out. There is paganism and there is promise. There is cursing and there is blessing. There is hopelessness and there is hope. There is judgment and there is reward.

Father, we know that you have told us that those who turn to you in faith receive the promise of eternal blessing. Those who don't receive the punishment of eternal cursing. And this is always the way it has been. So many millions of souls have gone on into eternal judgment, but always there has been a remnant who embrace the promise.

We thank you that you, by your grace, have made us part of that reward. We thank you that we stand with faithful Abraham, who believed you, believed in your Son, and His gospel, and it was counted to us for righteousness.

Use us, Lord, to take this message as your witnessing people to the pagan world, who so desperately need to hear it. We pray for strength do that, and faithfulness, in Christ's name. Amen.

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