

BESTSELLING Annual Bible Commentary

# Standard LESSON COMMENTARY®

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**2022–2023**  
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®

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Volume 29

**Standard**®  
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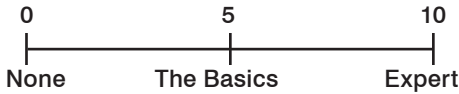
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# Asking the Right Questions

by Ronald L. Nickelson

Do this right now: rate yourself on your level of Bible knowledge on the following point-scale:



Next, suppose that you had to take the following essay test in order to justify a ranking of no less than “5”:

1. Describe the person and work of Christ.
2. Define repentance from sin and give examples.
3. Explain the significance of baptism.
4. List situations that call for laying on of hands.
5. Relate resurrection to eternal judgment.

To justify a “5” ranking, you must answer all five test items correctly. Were you to take this test, would you be able to get that “5”?

## What Excuses Tempt You?

If you’re now feeling uncomfortable by the possibility (or likelihood) of not being able to justify claiming at least a “5,” perhaps you’re beginning to think of excuses—excuses such as *I haven’t been to Bible college, and I’m not a theologian*. But Hebrews 5:11–6:3 won’t allow you that easy way out. That text describes all the subjects covered in the above test as foundational to faith (5:12; 6:1); they fall in the category of “milk” rather than “solid food” (5:12-13). Milk is important for babies (compare 1 Peter 2:2), but milk is to be a temporary staple in one’s growth process, whether physical or spiritual.

## Why Are You Stalled?

There are many enticing answers to this question. There are so many, in fact, that you might be tempted to put the excuses in categories such as issues of the church’s fault, your family situation, etc. But all blame-shifting aside, it boils down to one thing: *priorities*. The reason you’re not a “5”—let alone being a “10”—is that you have prioritized your time elsewhere. And the reason you’ve done

so is that you have rationalized your level of Bible knowledge as being adequate. (If you had not so-deemed it, then your priorities would have been different.)

That was my own problem for about the first 16 years after accepting Christ at age 10. When my church started a challenge for everyone to read the entire Bible through in a year, I (age 26) rationalized that in all the years I had attended Sunday school, surely I had read the entire Bible in that span of time.

But I eventually realized that I was fooling no one but myself. We’re good at doing that, aren’t we? Do the math. There are 31,102 verses in the Bible. For me to have read every verse over the course of 52 Sundays for 16 years would have required lessons of about 38 words each, with no verses repeated. In short, I had pledged my life to value the words of a book that I had not even read!

## What Can Must We Be Better At?

You won’t prioritize your time toward intensive, comprehensive Bible study until you’re convinced of the need to do so. A good starting point is to consider the lives of those who did just that along with their reasons (see Ezra 7:10; Psalm 119:11; Hosea 4:6; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; 3:14-17; 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:15; Titus 2:1; etc.). Be open to the Spirit’s leading you to seek this knowledge (John 16:13; etc.).

As you begin the road to greater Bible knowledge, trust that God desires not only to work *within* you but also *through* you. That means not keeping your task private to yourself. When my church began that through-the-Bible-in-a-year program, the enthusiasm in January was high. But by late February, about half the people had dropped out. Each succeeding month saw more drop outs. By December 31, probably no more than 20 percent had finished the task. Accountability partners would have helped. Recruit one—

and be one! The stakes are too high to do otherwise (2 Timothy 4:10a; Jude 23).

### Is This a Mentor-Protégé Relationship?

No. The accountability partner concept differs from that of a mentor-protégé relationship in that the latter involves a novice being guided by an expert. But two people who agree to hold each other accountable can be at the same level of spiritual growth. The idea is to function as a source of encouragement to stay on track. And the roles must continually be reversed as the encourager becomes the one encouraged in a reciprocal way.

The distinction between the two kinds of relationships can be illustrated by how family life works. Ten-year-old twin girls can cheer each other on in a game of baseball as each gives her best effort, knowing that the other is watching. But that's not a mentor-protégé relationship since neither has more expertise than the other. A mentor appears when their baseball-wise father steps in as their personal coach.

### Which Relationship Should I Seek?

Eventually, you will reap benefits from both an accountability partner and a mentor-protégé relationship in your spiritual growth. The apostle Paul recognized this. On the one hand, he functioned as an encourager of encouragers (1 Thessalonians 3:2; 4:18; 5:11, 14; etc.), recognizing in the process the value of himself being encouraged (3:7). On the other hand, he also functioned as a mentor, using an analogy to family life (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).

### What Else Will Foster Spiritual Growth?

Everything we've talked about so far boils down to a two-word phrase: *behavior modification*. In our faith context, modifying our behavior must begin with asking the Spirit to guide and bless our efforts. These efforts can be summarized with three techniques, each of which starts with the letter *M*. One of those three is *Make a commitment to another*, which is the accountability partner approach just discussed.

The second *M* is *Monitor your behavior*. Someone who is trying to lose weight might keep a daily log of "calories in vs. calories out" and bathroom-scale weighings. Monitoring one's own behavior for the purpose of spiritual growth could involve having a daily Bible-study listing for the year with boxes to check off as readings are completed.

The third *M* is *Modify your environment*. This can involve inclusion as well as exclusion. I'm very much an out of sight, out of mind person. So I include in my living space a set of weights where I see them frequently. Thus I have a daily, visual reminder to lift weights for exercise. In the same way, seeing my Bible out and waiting nudges me to open its pages and study.

### Why Is This Important?

Spiritual growth is connected with increasing knowledge; spiritual backsliding, however, goes hand in hand with the opposite (see Hosea 4:6; Matthew 13:18-23; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-4:5; 2 Peter 1:5-9; etc.). Marvelous tools exist online for helping one grow in the knowledge of the Word of God. But for every one such tool, there also seems to be a tool, forum, video channel, etc., that opposes the truth of Christianity.

*You won't prioritize your time toward . . . Bible study until you're convinced of the need to do so.*

The painful irony here is that the current Information Age in which we live is just as rightly called the Disinformation Age (compare Colossians 2:8; Revelation 2:24). This calls for being "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16) as we seek tools for Bible study. Such godly wisdom not only is able to recognize and reject anti-Christian material, it also resists the old problem known as *means/end reversal*. That problem arises when we get so enamored with a tool that it becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end.

Such are the challenges of growing in Christ. But overcoming these challenges will reap eternal dividends. May the Spirit guide you in your seeking.

# On Divine Discontent

*by Ronald L. Nickelson*

With this edition of the Standard Lesson Commentary, my status changed from that of Senior Editor to being Senior Editor Emeritus. That's a fancy way of saying that I have elected retirement from my 20-year ministry in curriculum publishing. The lower energy level that advancing age brings, as complicated by Parkinson's disease, was the main driver of this decision.

Reflecting on those 20 years, I can hardly think of any job or ministry that would have been more fulfilling to me than to be in a position to influence the eternal destinies of many thousands of people! The old saying "Find a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life" certainly applies here. But what brought me to this ministry was a series of jobs and events that I did not especially love or was otherwise ill-suited for. I call these my "series of divine discontents." I share that series on the possibility—even likelihood—that it may inspire others who are themselves in the throes of divine discontent.

## **Divine Discontent 1**

Armed with a bachelor's degree in accounting, my post-college working days began with me on active duty in the US Air Force, crunching numbers. Finding my then-future wife was the brightest spot during those seven years, during which I became discontent with my occupation—I was bored. I also came under conviction during that time that, although I accepted the Bible as the Word of God, I had never actually read it! Thus began a journey to read the Bible cover-to-cover in a year—which I ended up doing every year for at least a dozen years.

## **Divine Discontents 2 & 3**

I quit the Air Force and enrolled in seminary. My goal was to reenter the Air Force as a chaplain after graduation. That I did, but as a part-time Reservist, not full-time active duty. So I

took a pulpit ministry to wait for an opening. After about two years, however, I sensed divine discontents two and three: seeing the kinds of pressures that active-duty chaplains were under and being somewhat ill-suited for pulpit ministry dissuaded me from both. So I enrolled in a post-graduate program with intent to eventually teach in a Bible college, which I did.

## **Divine Discontents 4 & 5**

At the same time, my job as a USAF Reservist changed: I transitioned out of base-level ministry to become one of two Reservist historians working at the Air Staff to document policy and procedure changes within the USAF Chaplain Service. But after several years at both that part-time job and the full-time teaching ministry, I again began to feel that itch—neither seemed to be what I thought God was preparing me for. On top of all that, the college where I taught needed someone with different credentials for accrediting purposes.

Then something startling happened: without researching ministry openings, doing personal networking, or otherwise beating the bushes, a new opportunity appeared out of nowhere, from an unlikely source: the manager of the college bookstore informed me that a sales rep had told her that Standard Publishing needed an editor on the Standard Lesson Commentary. I instantly knew that was the task that God had been preparing me for all those years.

## **Divine Contentment**

I am amazed anew whenever I reflect on the multi-decade chain of events and experiences that prepared me for this position. They all seemed rather random as I faced them at the time. But hindsight reveals a sequence of preparation in God's providential time line. And so it may be with you!

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# God's Exceptional Choice

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## Lessons

### Unit 1: God Calls Abraham's Family

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| November 27 | God Gives Tools for Our Protection ..... | <i>Ephesians 6:10-18</i> | 105 |

# Quarterly Quiz

Use these questions as a pretest or as a review. The answers are on page iv of *This Quarter in the Word*.

## Lesson 1

1. Lot was Abram's \_\_\_\_\_? (father, brother, nephew) *Genesis 12:5*
2. Who did Abram think might become his heir? (Ebed, Ehud, Eliezer)? *Genesis 15:2*

## Lesson 2

1. Esau grabbed Jacob's heel at birth. T/F. *Genesis 25:26*
2. What did Esau sell to his brother for a meal? (birthright, servant, wild game) *Genesis 25:33*

## Lesson 3

1. After wrestling a man, Jacob's name was changed to \_\_\_\_\_. *Genesis 32:28*
2. What name did Jacob give to the location where he wrestled? (Pithom, Peniel, Pirathon) *Genesis 32:30*

## Lesson 4

1. Jacob's sons by Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. T/F. *Genesis 35:24*
2. Judah proclaimed that Tamar was "more \_\_\_\_\_ than I." *Genesis 38:26*

## Lesson 5

1. Moses' father was from the tribe of \_\_\_\_\_. *Exodus 2:1*
2. Pharaoh's daughter named the child Moses because she "drew him out of the \_\_\_\_\_." *Exodus 2:10*

## Lesson 6

1. The song describes God as what? (the Sea, the Rock, the Sky) *Deuteronomy 32:4*
2. The song likens God's care to an eagle caring for its young. T/F. *Deuteronomy 32:11-12*

## Lesson 7

1. God handed Israel over to be ruled by whom? (Moabites, Midianites, Medes) *Judges 6:1-2*

2. Under what did the angel of the Lord sit while visiting Gideon? (an oak, a shelter, a winepress) *Judges 6:11*

## Lesson 8

1. Samuel was pleased to hear that Israel desired a king. T/F. *1 Samuel 8:6*
2. According to Samuel, Israel had \_\_\_\_\_ God. *1 Samuel 10:19*

## Lesson 9

1. From whose sons did the Lord choose Israel's next king? (Samuel, Saul, Jesse) *1 Samuel 16:1*
2. Upon further questioning it was found that David was working with \_\_\_\_\_. *1 Samuel 16:11*

## Lesson 10

1. Redemption and forgiveness come in accordance to the riches of God's \_\_\_\_\_. *Ephesians 1:7*
2. All people, regardless of their belief, are marked with the Holy Spirit. T/F. *Ephesians 1:13*

## Lesson 11

1. Paul gives thanks for the faith and love of the Ephesians. T/F. *Ephesians 1:15-16*
2. God placed Jesus to be the \_\_\_\_\_ over the church. *Ephesians 1:22*

## Lesson 12

1. God is described as being "rich" in what? (grace, mercy, love) *Ephesians 2:4*
2. Believers are created in Christ Jesus to do good works. T/F. *Ephesians 2:10*

## Lesson 13

1. The primary opponents of believers in spiritual struggle are flesh and blood. T/F. *Ephesians 6:12*
2. The sword of the Spirit is described as "the \_\_\_\_\_ of God." *Ephesians 6:17*

# Quarter at a Glance

by Christopher Cotten

From a mountain in the wilderness of Sinai, God told Moses, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. . . . You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6a). God’s words declare one of the central themes of Scripture: God’s freedom to choose a people to be his own.

Our limited understanding will not fully comprehend God’s choices. His selections may defy our standards for determining who is considered “choice.” Ultimately, he is in no way bound by our human standards. This quarter’s Scripture texts unpack the exceptional nature of God’s choice.

## An Obscure Choice

The quarter begins by looking at the narratives in Genesis set amid the nomadic life of the ancient Near East. God demonstrated his choice by calling a descendant of Noah to experience blessing and a new land (Genesis 12:1-7). God’s choice was demonstrated through this family as he chose certain individuals for service to his name (25:19b-34).

God’s choice is not reserved for the notable or the powerful. These Scripture texts show that he may choose people not widely recognized. His choice is not based on any criteria other than his desire and freedom to choose.

Sometimes our expectations do not align with God’s choice. We should practice humility and show attentiveness to God’s purposes—he might work in ways that catch us unaware. Are you in a position to notice?

## A Surprising Choice

Through the second unit of lessons, God’s choice is shown, even through the centuries. These lessons highlight the development of God’s choice of his people, from a child born of a slave (Exodus 2:1-10) to a shepherd turned king (1 Samuel 16:1-13). God’s call can be unexpected—he may even

choose people who are trying to avoid his call altogether (Judges 6:7-16a)!

God choice will often be in spite of human expectations. Moses’ path to fulfilling God’s choice was marked by uncertainty and risk (Exodus 2:3-4). Gideon had no reputation aligned with the tasks God called him to do (Judges 6:15). David’s fitness as king was overlooked by his own family (1 Samuel 16:7-12). Have you felt incompatible with God’s choice over your life? Remember that God is “the Rock, his works are perfect” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

## A Life-Changing Choice

The final unit of lessons highlights how God continues to choose people for his will. These four lessons explore Paul’s teaching to Christians in the city of Ephesus regarding the life-changing nature of God’s choice over their lives—and ours.

*God's choice is not reserved  
for the notable or the powerful.*

Paul explained the life-changing nature of God’s choice when he wrote that God’s people are blessed “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” (Ephesians 1:4). For God’s people, being chosen comes with responsibility. Their actions and choices will be changed in light of God’s choice.

God’s people must live with obedience and good works in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10). Evil in the world desires to tear down God’s chosen people. Therefore, God’s people must prepare (see 6:10-18)!

We can encourage and support other believers through prayer, preaching, teaching, discipleship, and mentoring. God’s exceptional choice can never be doubted. He desires that his people live in a manner that reflects his choice. Let us turn our eyes toward that goal.

# Get the Setting

*by Mark S. Krause*

Throughout Scripture, cities often served as the backdrop for God's work among his people. In some instances, God called people to leave a thriving city in order to follow him. However, in other instances God called people to live in these cities in order to serve him.

## **Ancient Wealth in Ur**

During the era of Abraham (about 2167–1992 BC), one of the largest cities in Mesopotamia was Ur. Archaeologists have identified the city's ruins located on the Euphrates River, about 220 miles southeast of modern-day Baghdad. The ruins provide evidence of human occupation dating back to approximately the third millennium BC.

Ur was one of the premier cities of its day. Its location near the Persian Gulf and the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers allowed the city to develop a thriving economy. Archaeological findings provide insight into the city's wealth. For example, the city's royal tombs have been found to have been filled with numerous riches, thus reflecting the wealth of the city and its inhabitants.

The city has been traditionally held as the ancestral home of Abraham's family (see Genesis 11:28, 31; compare Acts 7:2). However, the family did not stay in Ur—they traveled to Canaan. Scholars have tried to recreate their journey and estimate the exact route from Ur to Canaan. The most direct route would have taken the family directly up the Euphrates River valley. This route would have proven to be dangerous as the travelers would have forded tributaries, skirted marshlands, maneuvered through desert lands, and negotiated with hostile peoples.

The travels of Abraham's family were unusual during that time period. Many people stayed in the same geographic region for most of their lives. Cities, like Ur, were the home of much known wealth. That God promised blessing and greatness for Abraham (see Genesis 12:2-3) outside Ur

(15:7) would have been unparalleled. Abraham's contemporaries might have considered that he would find blessing in the thriving metropolis, not in unknown foreign lands.

## **Pagan Temples in Ephesus**

During the first century AD, thriving cities were situated on critical trade routes, shipping corridors, or both. These cities served as ideal locations for the gospel message to take root and spread throughout the Roman Empire. Ephesus, a city on the western coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), was no exception.

A large harbor provided the city access to key shipping routes in the Mediterranean Sea. Highways connected the city to the rest of Asia Minor and, thereby, the far reaches of the empire. Therefore, the city was crucial for trade across the region.

Further, Ephesus was also important for pagan religious practices. During the era of the apostle Paul, the city was home to a large temple dedicated to the pagan goddess Artemis (see Acts 19:35). The temple was more than a location for pagan rituals; it also provided a financial benefit for the city (see 19:24-27).

As a result, Ephesus was an ideal stop for the apostle Paul during his missionary journeys across the Mediterranean region (see Acts 18:19-21; 19:1-10). From this city, the message of Jesus Christ spread throughout the Roman Empire and, perhaps, through the known world.

## **Ambassadors to the World**

In some instances, God called his people to leave large cities—like he called the family of Abraham to leave the city of Ur. However, in other instances, God called people to live and serve in large, influential cities—like Paul in Ephesus. Each context provided God's people with unique challenges as they were to be his ambassadors to the world.

Mon, Nov. 14  
 Tue, Nov. 15  
 Wed, Nov. 16  
 Thu, Nov. 17  
 Fri, Nov. 18  
 Sat, Nov. 19  
 Sun, Nov. 20  
  
 Mon, Nov. 21  
 Tue, Nov. 22  
 Wed, Nov. 23  
 Thu, Nov. 24  
 Fri, Nov. 25  
 Sat, Nov. 26  
 Sun, Nov. 27

**Grace Overflowed for Service**

**Live in Peace and Godliness**

**Qualifications for God's Servants**

**Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly**

**Trust in God and Do Good**

**A Prayer for Boldness**

**Created for Good Works**

**Remembrance and Repentance**

**The Mystery of Christ**

**Build Up the Body of Christ**

**Put On the New Self**

**God Is Our Refuge**

**God Rebuilds the Afflicted**

**Strength in the Lord**

1 Timothy 1:1-4, 12-17

1 Timothy 2:1-8

1 Timothy 3:1-13

Micah 6:1-8

Psalms 37:1-9, 37-40

Acts 4:23-31

Ephesians 2:1-10

Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesians 3:1-13

Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16

Ephesians 4:17-27

Psalms 91

Isaiah 54:6-17

Ephesians 6:10-24

# This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Aug. 29

Tue, Aug. 30

Wed, Aug. 31

Thu, Sep. 1

Fri, Sep. 2

Sat, Sep. 3

Sun, Sep. 4

**The Faith of Abraham**

**Blessed Are They Who Dwell in Your House!**

**God Reckons Righteousness**

**A Promised Inheritance**

**Abraham Rejoiced in the Day**

**First Steps of Faith**

**Called to Be a Blessing**

Hebrews 11:8-19

Psalms 84

Romans 4:1-12

Romans 4:13-25

John 8:51-59

Genesis 11:27-32

Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7

Mon, Sep. 5

Tue, Sep. 6

Wed, Sep. 7

Thu, Sep. 8

Fri, Sep. 9

Sat, Sep. 10

Sun, Sep. 11

**The First Will Be Last**

**God Is Great and Gracious**

**God Judges Rightly**

**God's Word Does Not Fail**

**Who Can Argue with God?**

**God Blesses Jacob**

**God Is Free to Choose**

Luke 13:23-30

Psalms 147:1-6, 12-20

Psalms 75

Romans 9:6-16

Romans 9:17-29

Genesis 28:10-22

Genesis 25:19-34

Mon, Sep. 12

Tue, Sep. 13

Wed, Sep. 14

Thu, Sep. 15

Fri, Sep. 16

Sat, Sep. 17

Sun, Sep. 18

**Partake in God's Holiness**

**A Blessing Bestowed**

**A Blessing Forsaken**

**God Will Be Merciful to All**

**Praise for God's Wonderful Works**

**Seeking Favor in God's Sight**

**Wrestling for a Blessing**

Hebrews 12:7-17

Genesis 27:18-29

Genesis 27:30-41

Romans 11:25-32

Psalms 105:1-11

Genesis 32:3-12

Genesis 32:22-32

## Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 2

- Lesson 1** —1. nephew. 2. Eliezer. **Lesson 2** —1. false. 2. birthright. **Lesson 3** —1. Israel. 2. Peniel. **Lesson 4** —1. true. 2. righteous. **Lesson 5** —1. Levi. 2. water. **Lesson 6** —1. the Rock. 2. true. **Lesson 7** —1. Midianites. 2. an oak. **Lesson 8** —1. false. 2. rejected. **Lesson 9** —1. Jesse. 2. sheep. **Lesson 10** —1. grace. 2. false. **Lesson 11** —1. true. 2. head. **Lesson 12** —1. mercy. 2. true. **Lesson 13** —1. false. 2. word.

|              |  |                             |
|--------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Mon, Sep. 19 | <b>Tamar Asserts Her Rights</b>            | Genesis 38:12-19, 24-26     |
| Tue, Sep. 20 | <b>Ruth Gives Birth to Obed</b>            | Ruth 4:9-17                 |
| Wed, Sep. 21 | <b>God's Blessings for Israel</b>          | Numbers 23:18-26            |
| Thu, Sep. 22 | <b>A Scepter Shall Rise from Israel</b>    | Numbers 24:2-9, 15-17       |
| Fri, Sep. 23 | <b>The Heavenly Throne</b>                 | Revelation 4                |
| Sat, Sep. 24 | <b>The Conquering Lion of Judah</b>        | Revelation 5                |
| Sun, Sep. 25 | <b>Judah Destined to Reign</b>             | Genesis 49:8-12             |
| Mon, Sep. 26 | <b>God Preserves the People</b>            | Psalms 105:12-25            |
| Tue, Sep. 27 | <b>From Lack to Abundance</b>              | Genesis 47:1-12             |
| Wed, Sep. 28 | <b>Thriving in Spite of Adversity</b>      | Exodus 1:8-22               |
| Thu, Sep. 29 | <b>God Prepares Moses</b>                  | Acts 7:17-29                |
| Fri, Sep. 30 | <b>Challenges of Heeding God's Call</b>    | Acts 7:30-41                |
| Sat, Oct. 1  | <b>A Faithful Life</b>                     | Hebrews 11:23-29            |
| Sun, Oct. 2  | <b>God Raises Up a Deliverer</b>           | Exodus 2:1-15               |
| Mon, Oct. 3  | <b>God Calls and Equips</b>                | Exodus 3:1-15               |
| Tue, Oct. 4  | <b>God Brings Victory</b>                  | Exodus 14:21-31             |
| Wed, Oct. 5  | <b>God Remembers His Promises</b>          | Psalms 105:26-27, 37-45     |
| Thu, Oct. 6  | <b>God Expects Obedience</b>               | Hebrews 3:7-19              |
| Fri, Oct. 7  | <b>God Offers Eternal Rest</b>             | Hebrews 4:1-11              |
| Sat, Oct. 8  | <b>God Promises a Homeland</b>             | Deuteronomy 1:1-8           |
| Sun, Oct. 9  | <b>God Is Perfect and Just</b>             | Deuteronomy 32:3-14, 18     |
| Mon, Oct. 10 | <b>God Is My Portion Forever</b>           | Psalms 73:1-5, 16-17, 21-28 |
| Tue, Oct. 11 | <b>Israel Struggles to Remain Faithful</b> | Judges 2:7-8, 11-19         |
| Wed, Oct. 12 | <b>God's Power Is a Treasure</b>           | 2 Corinthians 4:1-7         |
| Thu, Oct. 13 | <b>Afflicted but Renewed Daily</b>         | 2 Corinthians 4:8-18        |
| Fri, Oct. 14 | <b>God's Grace Is Sufficient</b>           | 2 Corinthians 12:1-10       |
| Sat, Oct. 15 | <b>Deliverance Comes from God's Hand</b>   | Judges 7:1-8, 16-22         |
| Sun, Oct. 16 | <b>God Calls Gideon</b>                    | Judges 6:1-2, 7-16a         |

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|              |  |                             |
|--------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Mon, Oct. 17 | <b>Speak, for Your Servant Is Listening</b>      | 1 Samuel 3:1-10             |
| Tue, Oct. 18 | <b>A Desire to Be Like Others</b>                | 1 Samuel 8:1-9              |
| Wed, Oct. 19 | <b>God Is the King of Nations</b>                | Revelation 11:15-19, 15:2-4 |
| Thu, Oct. 20 | <b>The Lord Is Clothed in Majesty</b>            | Psalms 93                   |
| Fri, Oct. 21 | <b>God Chooses Saul</b>                          | 1 Samuel 9:3-17             |
| Sat, Oct. 22 | <b>God's Spirit Will Possess You</b>             | 1 Samuel 9:27-10:8          |
| Sun, Oct. 23 | <b>Behold Your King!</b>                         | 1 Samuel 10:17-27           |
| Mon, Oct. 24 | <b>God Rejects Saul</b>                          | 1 Samuel 15:1-11            |
| Tue, Oct. 25 | <b>God's Kindness and Severity</b>               | Romans 11:13-24             |
| Wed, Oct. 26 | <b>God's Begotten Son</b>                        | Psalms 2                    |
| Thu, Oct. 27 | <b>Jesus the Heir of David</b>                   | Acts 13:21-31               |
| Fri, Oct. 28 | <b>The Bright Morning Star</b>                   | Revelation 22:12-17         |
| Sat, Oct. 29 | <b>Making Melody to God</b>                      | Psalms 89:20-29, 34-37      |
| Sun, Oct. 30 | <b>A Higher Perspective</b>                      | 1 Samuel 16:1-13            |
| Mon, Oct. 31 | <b>Receive the Holy Spirit</b>                   | Acts 19:1-12                |
| Tue, Nov. 1  | <b>Renounce Sinful Practices</b>                 | Acts 19:13-20               |
| Wed, Nov. 2  | <b>God Is My Light and Salvation</b>             | Psalms 27                   |
| Thu, Nov. 3  | <b>Chosen in God's Providence</b>                | Esther 4:5-17               |
| Fri, Nov. 4  | <b>You Are God's Chosen People</b>               | Deuteronomy 7:1-11          |
| Sat, Nov. 5  | <b>The Way, the Truth, the Life</b>              | John 14:1-14                |
| Sun, Nov. 6  | <b>God's Eternal Plan of Salvation</b>           | Ephesians 1:1-14            |
| Mon, Nov. 7  | <b>The Gospel Threatens Vested Interests</b>     | Acts 19:21-31               |
| Tue, Nov. 8  | <b>Encouraging Disciples and Saying Farewell</b> | Acts 19:32-20:1             |
| Wed, Nov. 9  | <b>The Gospel Bestows an Inheritance</b>         | Acts 20:17-21, 26-35        |
| Thu, Nov. 10 | <b>The Lord Is My Portion</b>                    | Psalms 16                   |
| Fri, Nov. 11 | <b>Be Strong and Courageous</b>                  | Joshua 1:1-9                |
| Sat, Nov. 12 | <b>Rejoice in God's Salvation</b>                | Isaiah 25                   |
| Sun, Nov. 13 | <b>A Glorious Inheritance</b>                    | Ephesians 1:15-23           |

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# Lesson Cycle Chart

*International Sunday School Lesson Cycle, September 2022–August 2026*

| Year          | Fall Quarter<br>(Sep, Oct, Nov)  | Winter Quarter<br>(Dec, Jan, Feb)   | Spring Quarter<br>(Mar, Apr, May)   | Summer Quarter<br>(Jun, Jul, Aug)   |
|---------------|--|---|---|---|
| 2022–<br>2023 | <b>God's Exceptional Choice</b><br>Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians                           | <b>From Darkness to Light</b><br>2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter       | <b>Jesus Calls Us</b><br>Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts  | <b>The Righteous Reign of God</b><br>Prophets, Matthew, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians                        |
| 2023–<br>2024 | <b>God's Law Is Love</b><br>Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians                             | <b>Faith That Pleases God</b><br>Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Prophets, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews | <b>Examining Our Faith</b><br>Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude                                     | <b>Hope in the Lord</b><br>Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Epistles   |
| 2024–<br>2025 | <b>Worship in the Covenant Community</b><br>Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, John | <b>A King Forever and Ever</b><br>Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke   | <b>Costly Sacrifices</b><br>Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Matthew, Hebrews, 1 John, Revelation | <b>Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings</b><br>Genesis, Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter |
| 2025–<br>2026 | <b>Judah, From Isaiah to Exile</b><br>2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel                                 | <b>Enduring Beliefs of the Church</b><br>Exodus, Psalms, Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation                      | <b>Social Teachings of the Church</b><br>Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Epistles        | <b>Faithful Witnesses</b><br>Judges, 1 Samuel, Amos, Gospels, Acts, 2 Timothy, Philemon                         |

# The Power of Acrostics

*Teacher Tips by Mary T. Lederleitner*

Because adult learners live busy, distracted lives, you may find it challenging to make a memorable teaching point. Further, many adults are convinced that they are not good at memorization, so they don't make any attempt to improve in that regard.

The use of acrostics can be an effective way for teachers to make a lasting impression with students. An acrostic is a piece of writing in which the first letter of each word, line, or paragraph spells out another word or phrase. By remembering one specific word or phrase, students are able to then remember other words and phrases. Acrostics engage the mind in unique ways, thus making memorization more accessible.

## Neural Pathways

Neuroscientists who study the human nervous system in regard to human learning have found a connection between learning and neural pathways. These pathways serve as connections between different parts of the human nervous system. The more utilized the connections, the stronger the pathways might become.

Through the repetitive use of these pathways, memory and learning are established and strengthened. Various memory devices, like acrostics, are helpful for teachers to use because these devices build on learners' existing neural pathways and serve to reinforce teaching points.

## A Useful Example

Acrostics have been used to educate believers on ways to share their faith. Some believers feel ill-prepared to share their faith—perhaps due to a sense of intimidation or fear. To encourage and strengthen believers in this regard, the following model of evangelism was created.

The *BLESS* model utilizes an acrostic to highlight five steps to help believers share their faith. *B* stands for “begin with prayer.” The work of evan-

gelism all begins with God. *L* stands for “listen.” Active listening is an important aspect in building evangelistic relationships. *E* stands for “eat.” Finding space to share a meal with a person is a way by which the evangelistic relationship can grow. *S* stands for “serve.” Evangelism involves service: the willingness to serve others or let them serve you. The final *S* stands for “share.” Evangelism culminates when believers share the story of how their lives changed because of Jesus.

This acrostic helps believers learn and internalize the steps of evangelism. What could be an elaborate approach is streamlined as believers learn to bless others via the *BLESS* approach.

## The Power of Linking

An acrostic's power lies in its ability to link one word with other words. *BLESS* links a single, easy-to-remember word to the activities of evangelism.

However, acrostics can be more potent for your class when the acrostic links Scripture texts to your teaching points. In this quarter, as you teach on God's choice of his people, what acrostics can you create based on the word *CHOICE*?

## Playing with Words

To help spur your creativity in using acrostics, consider the following questions: What words do learners use in your context? What phrases might your learners consider to be commonplace, funny, or serious? Are there ways to employ frequently used key words or phrases? At the end of the day, what do you want learners to remember?

Pray and ask God for creativity and wisdom regarding the use of acrostics in your teaching. You will not want to use acrostics all the time, lest they start to feel recycled and stale. However, the timely use of acrostics will cause learners to perk up and pay attention. While developing acrostics may take some effort on your part, the long-term impact for your learners is worth the investment!



# The Call of Abram

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 11:8-19  
Background Scripture: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7

## Genesis 12:1-5, 7

<sup>1</sup> The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

<sup>2</sup> “I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

## Genesis 15:1-7

<sup>1</sup> After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.  
I am your shield,  
your very great reward.”

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” <sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

<sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

## Key Text

*The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. —Genesis 12:7*

# God's Exceptional Choice

## Unit 1: God Calls Abraham's Family

Lessons 1–4

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List key features of Abraham's call and subsequent covenant vision.
2. Explain the relationship between that call and vision.
3. Identify one or more ways that Abraham's obedience will serve as a model to his or her obedience under the new covenant.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Answering the Call
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. The Call Announced (Genesis 12:1-5, 7)

- A. God's Declaration, Part 1 (vv. 1-3)  
*Grieving and Going*
- B. Abram's Response (vv. 4-5)
- C. God's Declaration, Part 2 (v. 7)

#### II. The Call Affirmed (Genesis 15:1-7)

- A. Protection Pledged (v. 1)  
*"But Jesus Is with You!"*
- B. Challenge Offered (vv. 2-3)
- C. Promise Confirmed (vv. 4-5)
- D. Righteousness Reckoned (vv. 6-7)

#### Conclusion

- A. Abram Answered. Will You?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Answering the Call

"When 'the Mouse' offers you a job, you say yes," an executive chef on a Disney cruise declared. Prior to his work with Disney, the chef had worked in an executive capacity at several successful restaurants. He enjoyed the line of work but had not considered doing so on the seas.

However, his name was suggested to the cruise line for a position. Eventually someone from the company called him, conducted an interview, and made an offer. The chef accepted, and for over a decade he has served in several upscale restaurants at sea. The chef answered the call, and the decision changed his life forever.

How much more so with God! When he calls, he expects a faith-filled response. His call may feel rather demanding, even overwhelming. In today's lesson, God called someone to a new context so that God's promises could be fulfilled.

### B. Lesson Context

The first 11 chapters of Genesis look at humanity broadly—from their creation and fall (Genesis 1–3), to their acts of violence (4:2-12) and wickedness (6:5-6, 11-12), to their judgment and rescue (6:7–9:17). Despite all this, people still made vain attempts to focus attention on themselves (11:1-9).

As Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament, such a broad focus is understandable. This prepares readers of all eras to hear how God worked through humanity generally and specifically through one family.

After the flood narrative (Genesis 6–10), the text lists the descendants of Noah's son Shem (11:10-25). This genealogy culminated with Terah, the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran (11:26).

Terah outlived Haran, the father of Lot (Genesis 11:27-28). Terah's other sons, Abram and Nahor, were both married. However, Abram and his wife Sarai were unable to conceive (11:29-30).

The family lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11:31). This ancient Mesopotamian city was located on the banks of the Euphrates River. Modern archaeological discoveries have provided insight into the city's wealth, culture, and pagan religious

practices. The family's connections to the city likely ran deep, and at one time they took part in the city's pagan religious practices (see Joshua 24:2).

However, the family did not stay in Ur. Terah led Abram, Sarai, and Lot toward Canaan, a land bordering the western edges of the Mediterranean Sea (see Genesis 10:19). But Terah did not complete the journey. He settled and died in Harran (11:31b-32), an important city on a major trade route between Mesopotamia and Canaan.

Today's Scripture text continues narrowing the focus as it highlights the family of Abram. (Note that Abram is the same man who later had his name changed to Abraham; see Genesis 17:5.)

## I. The Call Announced

(Genesis 12:1-5, 7)

### A. God's Declaration, Part 1 (vv. 1-3)

**1. The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."**

As the Lord addressed Abram, the focus of the text turns to the life of this man. The text gives no clues regarding the way through which God spoke. All that is noted is that God called to Abram.

That God told Abram to *go* emphasized that God expected his imperative to be followed. Toward the end of Abram's narrative, God would show similar urgency by telling Abram to "go to" a certain place to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:2).

If Abram had stayed in Harran, the livelihood of his *people* could have been jeopardized. In a culture of polytheism (meaning "many gods"), the act of worshipping the one true God could have required Abram to detach from the larger community. This may be part of the reason that God ordered Abram to leave everything behind and proceed to a new *country*.

In the ancient world, a person's identity and social standing were attached to family and ancestry. For this reason, genealogies and ancestral records were of great importance (examples: Genesis 5; 11:10-32; Nehemiah 7:6-64). Additionally, inheritance claims and family responsibilities were tied to a person's family lineage.

By calling Abram to leave his *father's household*,

God called him to a new identity. As he followed God's imperative, Abram would demonstrate trust, even if uncertainties remained (see Hebrews 11:8).

## Grieving and Going

As the child of a military service member, I learned to relocate every few years. This constant churn is one reason why moving to a new country sounded appealing. I didn't have a strong attachment to any particular "home"—or so I thought.

Recently, I found myself weeping at my parents' house. My wife and I were staying with my parents before leaving to become missionaries abroad. I was emotional because I realized that my nuclear family—regardless of their location—had always been my "home." They were a stabilizing force during every move. As I prepared to move abroad, I felt the significance of not living near my family.

Perhaps Abram experienced similar grief as he left his family to follow God's call. He might have never seen them again. When God calls you to follow him, will you go no matter the cost? —N. G.

**2. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing."**

Blessing would result if Abram obeyed God: the childless Abram would become *a great nation*. Nothing from this promise indicated human power. Abram's descendants would become great only because of the Lord's steadfast love and promises (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

His descendants were not to be like other nations. Instead, they were to be "a people holy to the Lord" and "his treasured possession" (Deuteronomy 14:2; compare Leviticus 20:26). Their unique establishment would cause God's name to be glorified and

## How to Say It

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|           |                      |
|-----------|----------------------|
| Chaldeans | Kal-dee-unz.         |
| Eliezer   | El-ih-ee-zer.        |
| Harran    | Hair-un.             |
| Moreh     | Moe-reh.             |
| Nahor     | Nay-hor.             |
| Shechem   | Shee-kem or Shek-em. |
| Terah     | Tair-uh.             |

made great among the peoples of the earth (see Isaiah 29:23; 60:21-22; Ezekiel 36:23).

Abram and his descendants were tasked with living among other nations in a manner that would result in the *blessing* of both groups. In a way, Abram's descendants were to serve as a "kingdom of priests" for the whole world (Exodus 19:5-6).

**3. "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**

Abram would not have to face trials alone—God would give protection as he would *curse* all people that cursed Abram. As a result, God's blessing would continue for generations (compare Exodus 23:22).

God's choice was not to the exclusion and rejection of other people. The apostle Paul interpreted God's promise of blessing to apply also to people who expressed faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 4; Galatians 3:7-9, 14). Further, this blessing included making salvation available to all people, regardless of ancestry, through Abram's seed (see 3:26-29).

As Abram followed God, he would be a witness of God's grace and mercy to the world. As *all peoples on earth* saw how Abram's descendants obeyed God and saw the blessings that resulted, they would want to follow the same God and *be blessed* themselves (Acts 3:25).

### What Do You Think?

In what ways has God provided blessings for you?

### Digging Deeper

How might believers live in a way that blesses their unbelieving family and friends?

## B. Abram's Response (vv. 4-5)

**4. So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.**

One might expect *Abram* to have discussed the issue with God or provided pushback. (Compare Abraham's discussion with God regarding Sod-

om's pending judgment, Genesis 18:16-33.) But there is no record that Abram did so. He obeyed and *set out from Harran*. Abram showed faith in God and trusted that God would not renounce his promises.

By allowing *Lot* to go *with him*, Abram acted honorably by caring for his nephew (see Genesis 11:27-28). Given this act, combined with Abram's advanced age (*seventy-five years old*) and his childless reality (11:30), one might expect the promised blessing to come through Lot. However, that was not the case (see 17:19). In fact, the inclusion of Lot would cause great difficulty and heartache for Abram (see 13:2-13; 14:1-16).

### What Do You Think?

How can believers ensure their obedience to God's commands?

### Digging Deeper

What is the connection, if any, between obedience to God and resulting blessing from him?

**5. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.**

While God called Abram specifically, the call apparently included more than him alone. Thus we see him taking his wealth (Genesis 13:2) and extended household on the trip.

Abram's journey *for the land of Canaan* brought the travelers to Moreh at Shechem (Genesis 12:6, not in our printed text). This region would become a significant place for Abram's descendants (see 35:4; Joshua 24:25). Its importance among Abram's descendants resulted from his obedience.

## C. God's Declaration, Part 2 (v. 7)

### 7a. The LORD appeared to Abram

Abram's obedience brought him to a new land and to a new interaction with *the Lord*. Several other times he experienced God's self-disclosure (see Genesis 17:1; 18:1). Other patriarchs had similar experiences (see 26:2; 35:1; 46:2; 48:3). The means by which God appeared is not the most

important aspect. Instead, most important is his desire to reveal and the content of his words.

**7b. and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”**

The content of God’s declaration reveals a new aspect of the previously given promises. The manner through which Abram would become “a great nation” (Genesis 12:2, above) would be through his descendants (his *offspring*) and *this land* of Canaan. These two are often mentioned in discussion of God’s promises to his Old Testament people (see Genesis 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7; 48:4; Exodus 32:13; 33:1; etc.).

**7c. So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.**

Abram’s act of building *an altar* in response to God’s words was of significance. Other cultures built altars to their pagan gods (see Deuteronomy 12:2-3). But Abram did not reuse a pagan altar.

Instead, Abram built a new altar *to the Lord*. By doing so, Abram announced the focus of his worship to the one true God. This altar served as a tangible reminder of God’s faithfulness and presence (compare Genesis 8:18-20; 13:14-18; 35:7; Exodus 17:15; 24:3-4; etc.).

### What Do You Think?

How can believers tangibly remember and celebrate God’s work?

### Digging Deeper

How might Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-18; Joshua 4; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 provide believers with examples of tangible remembrance?

## II. The Call Affirmed

(Genesis 15:1-7)

### A. Protection Pledged (v. 1)

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

Abram’s first interactions in the land were challenging. For a time, Abram and Lot lived separately (Genesis 13:10-18). Eventually, the two were reunited when Abram saved Lot from captivity (14:11-16). Additionally, Abram met with a



Visual for Lesson 1. Show this map as you teach on the locations, events, and people of the first unit of lessons.

mysterious king and offered him a tithe (14:18-20; Hebrews 7:1-10). It was *after this* that *the Lord* appeared again to Abram.

The underlying Hebrew translated here as *vision* occurs only three other times in the Old Testament. The word’s stress is not necessarily on the revelation’s visual component, but that a specific utterance from God had arrived (see Numbers 24:4; 24:16).

It was the vision’s content that was most important for Abram. That God promised to be Abram’s *shield* is indicative of God’s care and protection for his people (see Deuteronomy 33:29; 2 Samuel 22:3, 31; Psalms 3:3; 28:7; 84:11; 115:9-11). In a dangerous new land, Abram could take comfort in God’s protection.

During an encounter with the king of Sodom, Abram refused riches and financial gain from the king (Genesis 14:22-24). Abram did not want to depend on the wealth of others. Instead, he trusted that the Lord himself would be a *very great reward*.

### “But Jesus Is with You!”

“Come see this really cool thing!” I heard my 8-year-old implore his 4-year-old brother. The older son is frequently afraid to go upstairs by himself. He often comes up with creative ruses to entice his younger brother to accompany him up the stairs. Most of the time the ruses work, and the younger brother happily complies.

However, if my older son revealed his fear, the younger son would answer, “But Jesus is with you!” The 4-year-old is unwavering on this point. He explains he isn’t afraid because “Jesus is with me!”

Our youngest seems to grasp the truth of God’s exhortation to Abram: “Do not be afraid” (Genesis 15:1). What are you most afraid of right now? Can you say with confidence “Jesus is with me”—and let him be your shield? —N. G.

## B. Challenge Offered (vv. 2-3)

**2. But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”**

For the first time, we have a record of *Abram* responding directly to the *Lord*. The response was filled with concern. God’s promises would not come to fruition unless Abram had a child of his own. His words reflected an awareness of the Lord’s promise to make of him “a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). Yet at this point Abram remained *childless*, and his wife was past the age of child-bearing (see 12:4; 17:17). How could God truly be Abram’s “very great reward” (15:1) under these circumstances?

The act of transferring the heir’s rights to a servant in Abram’s *estate* would have been a last resort to ensure Abram’s legacy. The transference of an heir’s blessing from a firstborn to another person was not unusual in the narrative of Abram’s descendants (see Genesis 25:31-33; 48:13-14; 49:3-4).

*Eliezer* may have joined the journey during travel from Harran to Canaan (Genesis 12:4-5) since *Damascus* is situated between the two locations.

**3. And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”**

Ancient adoption practices allowed for a childless couple to adopt another man as household *servant*. This person would then care for the couple in their old age and provide a proper burial when they died. As a result, this person would then inherit the family property. This allowed for an *heir* and continuation of the family line.

Familial love and care, while possible, were not

the primary reason for many ancient adoptions. Instead, this relationship was more like a business contract between adults. Considering the likelihood of this result, Abram vented his frustrations to God. How could the God who promised so much also provide *no children* to Abram?

### What Do You Think?

What circumstances have left you feeling angry or frustrated with God?

### Digging Deeper

How can you comfort another believer who may experience these feelings?

## C. Promise Confirmed (vv. 4-5)

**4. Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”**

In response to Abram’s frustration, *the Lord* spoke to him with assurance. God’s promises would not be diverted—*this man*, *Eliezer*, would *not* become Abram’s *heir*. God declared that a child from Abram’s *own flesh and blood* would instead be his heir. When God makes a promise, he will keep it, although its fulfillment may not align with earthly expectations. This heir would be the first of many “children of promise” (see Galatians 4:28).

**5. He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”**

God had previously compared the number of Abram’s descendants to “the dust of the earth” (Genesis 13:16). The numerous *stars* in *the sky* also served to illustrate God’s promise. The assertion that Abram’s descendants would be as numerous as the stars is one of the most prevalent promises in Scripture (see Genesis 22:17; 26:4; Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chronicles 27:23; Nehemiah 9:23; Hebrews 11:12).

God did not dismiss Abram’s frustration, nor did he give an explanation. Instead, God merely reaffirmed his promises. If God had kept his promises thus far, Abram could trust that God would keep his promises in full.

## D. Righteousness Reckoned (vv. 6-7)

### 6a. Abram believed the LORD,

That Abram *believed* did not simply mean he felt good about his relationship with God. Rather Abram demonstrated faith when he trusted that these promises would come to pass; he trusted in the guarantor of those promises. Abram knew what his descendants would someday find out: *the Lord* is faithful and keeps his promises (Deuteronomy 7:9).

### 6b. and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Abram's belief did not go unnoticed—it would become the model for all others who believe (see Hebrews 11:8-10, 12). His belief led to his being *credited . . . as righteousness*—being viewed in right standing with God.

Because God's own nature is righteous and perfect (see Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 103:6, 17; Zephaniah 3:5; Zechariah 8:8; etc.), he desires that his people be righteous as well. They could live righteously and justly, with God and with others, as they did “what is just and right” (Ezekiel 18:5).

The text utilizes an accounting metaphor: God counted Abram's faith as the foundation for righteousness. The underlying Hebrew verb gets at the idea of regarding something or someone as having a certain characteristic, although that thing or person may not actually have that characteristic (compare Genesis 31:15; Numbers 18:27; Job 18:3; Proverbs 17:28; etc.). Abram's faith was enough for God to consider Abram in right standing with him.

For the apostle Paul, this verse provided background on the nature of salvation. As righteousness came to Abraham (Abram's later name) through his faith, all people who follow his example and demonstrate faith will be counted as righteous (Romans 4:1-8, 13-15, 22). People who demonstrate faith in God are considered “children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7) regardless of their ancestry (3:8-9).

The apostle James further the narrative regarding the faith of Abram. Not only was he counted righteous, but “he was called God's friend” (James 2:23). His words and deeds exhibited the presence of his faith.

### What Do You Think?

What is the relationship between belief and right action (see James 2:14-24)?

### Digging Deeper

How would you explain righteousness to a person unfamiliar with Scripture?

**7. He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”**

*The Lord* brought Abram from his homeland in *Ur* to the *land* that he promised. Abram could be encouraged because the one who would declare himself “*I am*” (Exodus 3:14) was guiding him.

## Conclusion

### A. Abram Answered. Will You?

Abram had to answer a difficult call with boldness, courage, and faith. God had placed the call, and Abram answered by way of relocating his family. This decision would radically change his life and the lives of others for centuries.

There will be times in the life of a believer when the challenge is not to *find* God's will but to *follow* God's call. This call may lead to a different job, a new neighborhood, or even to an unknown land. Yet if we remain faithful to God and trust in his steadfast promises, he will bless us deeply.

### B. Prayer

God, throughout history you have shown yourself to be faithful. Give us faith to follow your call and patience to trust you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God calls us—we only need to follow his directions!

## Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 13) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. Order No. 1629122 from your supplier.

# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Begin class by saying, “You have been faced with a call and offered a prestigious job. How will you answer?” Instruct participants to give a thumbs-up sign if they would accept or a thumbs-down sign if they would decline.

Continue adding conditions to the job offer: “You will have to move away from family and friends.” “You can expect to work an average of 65 hours a week.” “You will be 100 percent vested in company stock options at the beginning of the job.” After stating each condition, allow time for students to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down sign.

After the activity ask for volunteers to discuss why they accepted or declined the call and what conditions affected their decision in this regard. Transition to Bible study by saying, “In today’s lesson we will see how God placed a call on the life of Abram. The conditions of God’s call required life-changing decisions from Abram.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups, giving each group a handout (you prepare) according to the following: **Nation Group:** Genesis 12:1-2; 15:1 / **Blessing Group:** Genesis 12:3-4; 15:2-4 / **Provision Group:** Genesis 12:5, 7; 15:5-7.

Ask the group to read their assigned Scripture passages and answer the following questions: 1—Identify the promise(s) that God made to Abram. 2—How did God fulfill the promise(s) during Abram’s life? 3—How would the fulfilled promise(s) affect Abram’s descendants? 4—How would the fulfilled promise(s) affect the world?

After 10 minutes, reconvene the class and have a volunteer from each group read their responses.

Transition to the second part of the activity by saying, “God’s promises and Abram’s responses were seen as important by the New Testament writers. Let’s see how the apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews refer to the events of today’s lesson.”

Have students remain in the same groups as before, and assign one of the following New Testament passages to each group: Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 11:8-12.

Have each group answer the following questions on a handout that you prepare beforehand: 1—What promise does the New Testament passage highlight? 2—How does the New Testament writer interpret God’s promise(s)? 3—How does the New Testament writer interpret Abram’s (Abraham’s) response(s)?

After 10 minutes have a volunteer from each group read the group’s responses for each question.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “God’s Promises Fulfilled” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have students work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated. After 10 minutes, ask volunteers to share their conclusions.

After either activity, make the transition to Into Life by saying, “The narrative of Abram can inform us greatly regarding obedience and emboldened faith. The next practice will demonstrate how today’s Scripture passage is more than a good story for us to read.”

## Into Life

Write two headers on the board: “Abram” and “Us.” Through whole-class discussion, have students work together to make a list under the “Abram” header regarding how Abram lived in obedience, faith, trust, and right action regarding the commands of God. Through the same discussion model, have students work together to make a list under the “Us” header of how believers might live in obedience, faith, trust, and right action regarding the commands of God. These answers should be based on Scripture and personal testimony.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Emboldened and Obedient” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the activity individually in a minute.