

Prayers

To God

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

For myself

Ask yourself whether you are willing to let Christ be the Lord of this day. Think of any part which may not be true in this respect, and pray about it

For others

Weekly theme: your local neighbourhood

Pray for the people in your neighbourhood who do not believe as you do - they have no faith or they have a different 'faith'. Resolve to pray for them regularly if this is possible

Meditation

Dear brother and sister in Christ, the Lord is here.
He longs to lift your heart and make you glad!

To give you gifts for your eternal pleasure;
To heal the festering wounds of earthly life;
To forgive the sins you have confessed to Him;
To deliver you from the world's confusing stresses;
To protect You from the enemy's cruelest works;
To create a happiness that will glow within your soul;
To open up again a faith that has been closed to you.

Dear brother and sister in Christ. The Lord is here.
He longs to be with you and work with You.
Even though it may seem trite to say it now,
The greatest agonies of life can one day be your glory.

Bible Passage

Genesis 11:10-32

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

(the table below contains the information found in in verses 12 to 25)

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

²⁶ Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran after he was 70 years old.

²⁷ These are his descendants. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. ²⁸ Haran died before his father Terah in his native land of Ur, in Chaldea. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. Abram's wife was Sarai, and Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Sarai was barren; she had no children.

³¹ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, Abram's wife, and together they set out from Ur in Chaldea to go to Canaan; but when they came to Kharan, they settled there. ³² Terah lived to the age of 205 years, and he died in Kharan.

Review

Our reading today is the second half of Genesis 11, which gives us the final pieces of genealogical information required before we can begin on the story of Abram, the man chosen to be the ancestral father of the people of Israel (later renamed Abraham). The function of the genealogy in chapter 11 is to give us the link between Noah and Terah, the father of Abraham. In this way, it tracks the genealogical line by which God has chosen to bless the world, and rise above the terrible consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen 3) and its consequences (see chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6).

The story of Abraham begins in earnest after today's passage, in chapter 12, and this is hugely important for the whole Bible. However, our reading today is a passage most people avoid at all costs because it seems like just a list of names, but it is so much more than this for those who are willing to explore how and why God works as he does. God's ultimate choice of Abram is not just a random act of picking someone out of all the people living at the time. It is part of a specific plan to work through the people He has already chosen, from the line of Shem, the son of the righteous man Noah. Up to this point of time, the reasons for Scripture's focus on one line of Noah (that of Shem) is only general, for Shem represents the 'good' side of humanity, and as the Bible so often either presumes or suggests, godliness and 'righteousness' (see 6:9) are often passed

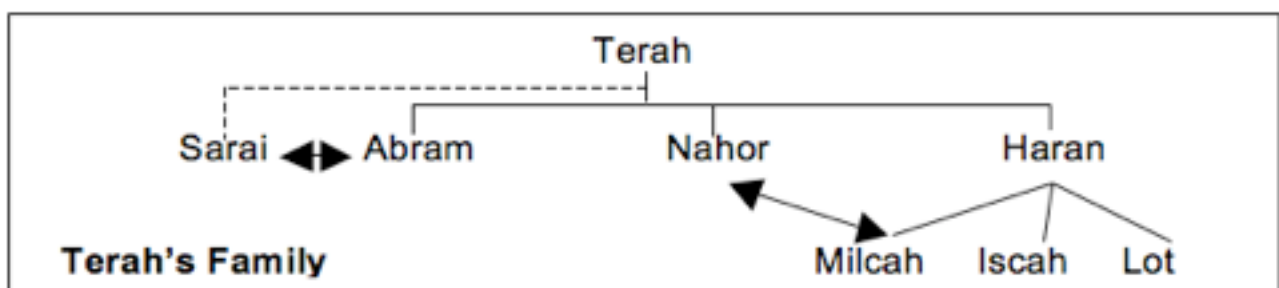
down through families (See Ex 20:6). Abraham was not merely chosen as from random, he was the 'elect' of God, but this is something he had yet to discover.

In our passage, the list of ten names from Shem to Abraham is not without either significance or controversy. The first thing to note is that the list has similarities to the earlier genealogy from Adam, through Seth, to Noah, found in Genesis 5. Both genealogies contain ten generations and both are the 'generations of blessing' chosen by God. But where the line of God's people through Seth (Gen 5) came to a heartbreaking end in corruption followed by the judgement of God in the Flood, Shem's generations (Gen 11) end with the choice of God of one man Abraham, and through one of his sons, the world would eventually be saved.

There are many other parallels between Genesis 5 and this part of Genesis 11. The descendants of Adam through from Seth to Noah (Gen 5) are separate from Adam's descendants through Cain because of his murder of Abel. Similarly, the descendants of Noah through Shem to Abraham (Gen 11) are separate from Noah's descendants through Canaan (see Gen 10) because of Ham's sin after his father Noah became drunk (Gen 9:20f.). Each list, that in Genesis 5 and that in Genesis 11, defines a righteous list of ancestors who are '*blessed*' with '*other sons and daughters*' in fulfilment of God's blessing (1:28), but at each generation, only one of these sons is chosen as the bearer of the lineage, and we presume the elder son, though this is not said. The theme of succession from father to son now becomes a major theme in Genesis, which after Genesis 12 is focussed on the succession of Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob to Joseph and the creation of the people of Israel.

To us, this all this seems puzzling and over complex. Why should we have to know in detail the differences between the lineage of Cain and Seth, or of Shem and Canaan? Why should God work in this seemingly impenetrable and complex way? The point however is that once we spot what is going on, then we will pick up the right themes for the coming stories of Genesis, which is all about how God's choice takes precedence over human choice especially in the matter of who bears God's blessing from generation to generation. In particular, we are dealing here with the beginnings of God's story of salvation, which is not a story of logic but of surprise, driven by the will and choice of Almighty God and not by human choice, or as the New Testament puts it '*by the will of a father*' (John 1:13). Scripture is not a story of human experience but of divine planning and foresight.

The last few verses of our passage (11:26f.) describe the family relationships of Terah. At this point, the family becomes very complicated see the chart below:



Terah was the father of Abram, and Abram married Sarai, his half sister, according to Genesis 20:12, presumably by a different wife or concubine of Terah. The fact that Sarai proved to be barren (11:30) could be interpreted as God's disapproval for what could be called an incestuous marriage!

Some of Terah's descendants are also important for the stories of Genesis yet to come, for Abraham had two brothers, Haran and Nahor. Haran had two daughters, Iscah and Milcah, and one of them, Milcah, married her uncle Nahor; again, a rather incestuous affair. Haran then died and we hear no more of him or of Iscah, but the names Nahor

and Milcah crop up later on in Genesis as the grandparents of Rebekah, the young girl sought out to be the bride of Isaac (Genesis 22, 24).

In the last verses of this passage (11:31,32), we read that it was Terah who first heard God's call to leave the land of his birth, Ur, and travel to Canaan (11:31), not Abraham. In the light of all we have read today, we might consider that God was calling this man and his son Abram to travel to the lands of his evil relative Canaan. It is certainly an interesting aspect of the passage.

The epic journey from Ur in Chaldea (today's southern Iraq) was therefore undertaken by a strange collection, consisting of Terah, Abraham and Sarah (who were barren), and Terah's grandson Lot. The question we must ask is this; who do we think would carry forward Terah's lineage, the sterile pair of Abram and Sarah, or Terah's grandson and Abrams' nephew Lot? It seems obvious that in these circumstances, Terah would have treated Lot as his heir, for he was the nearest relative capable of bearing children (if he could get a wife). But as we know, God had other plans. Terah died before the journey to Canaan was complete, and Abraham assumed the leadership of this small group of nomads, about to embark on their own epic journey. Our appetites have been whetted for what is to come!

Discipleship

Application

The guiding hand of God

Much of the detail of today's study has been about names, and the way they go together in genealogies. It seems very pedantic, but I have attempted to persuade you that the writers of scripture wrote all this down because of their utter belief in the guiding hand of God over history. Even though we are left today with a few mysteries about some of the names and the numbers, the overriding sense of direction and purpose generated by this passage is that God works on a very large canvass to bring about His purposes. He was laying the foundations for a history of relationship with His chosen people that would one day bring a Saviour into the world who would deal with the consequences of the Fall and restore the broken relationship between Himself, all people, and all creation.

Anticipation!

The literary value of the final story today is considerable, for it makes us ask an important question 'what will God do next'. How will God's blessing be conveyed next after the 10th generation of the line of Shem? A similar question is implied all the way through the Old Testament; when Abraham initially failed to have a son and heir (Gen 16), when God's people become lost in Egypt (Ex 1,2), when king Saul fails to lead God's people (1 Sam 13ff), when David avoids leaving a clear successor to his throne (1 Kings 1,2), and when the Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Chron 36). At each stage of this history, the same question is asked, and ultimately the answer comes in the New Testament. The question 'what will God do next' is an important one for all scripture and is a vital tool for understanding the Old Testament in particular.

Ideas for what to do

- *If you look back over a long time, how has God led you, spiritually, to where you are today? It may be impossible for you to be clear about some of the details, but nevertheless, try to look at the broader picture.*

- *Choose a great Christian leader, and read about them using books, or by researching on the internet. Try to discern the means of revelation the Lord has used to guide this person. How does this compare with what God has done in your own life?*

Questions (for use in groups)

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

Final Prayer

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