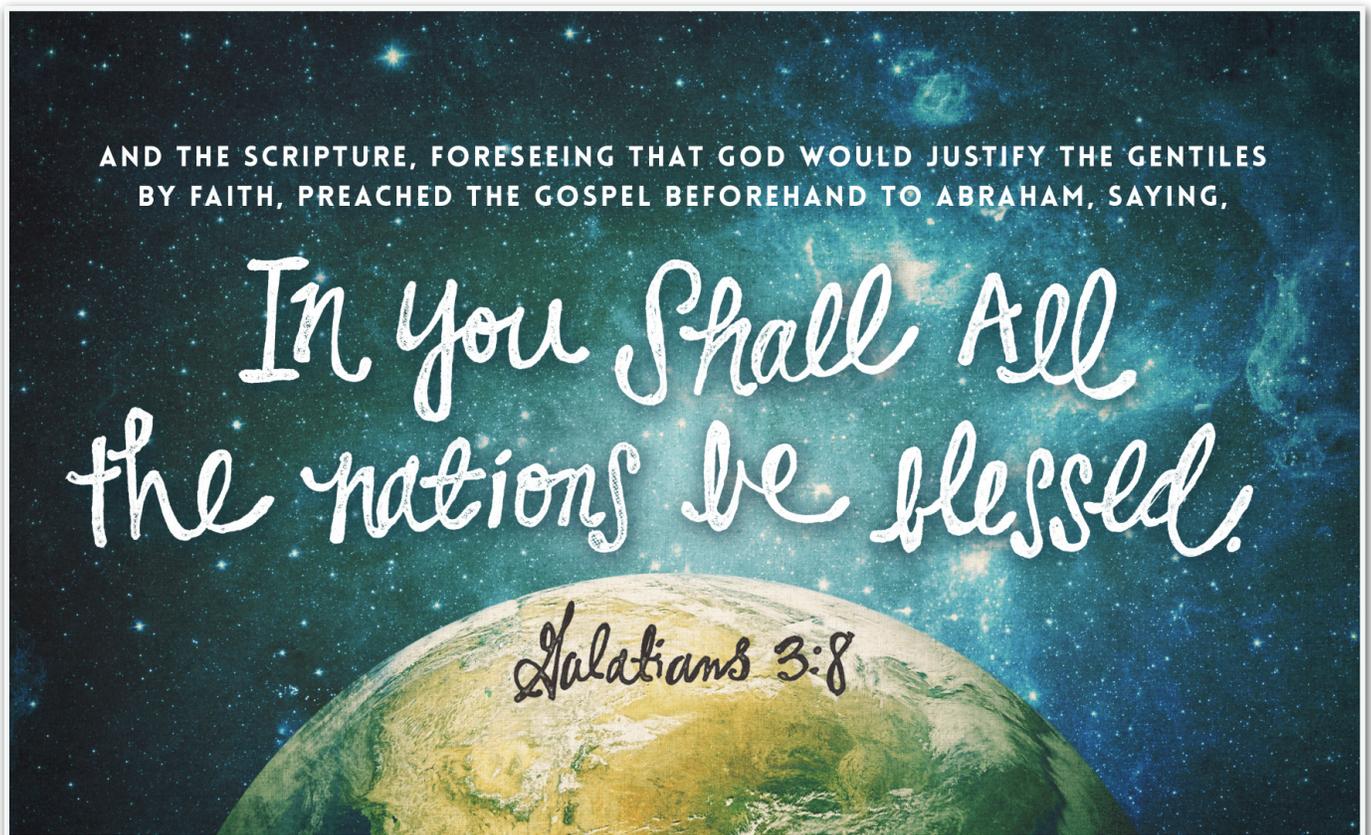


# ABRAHAM

*FAITH COUNTED AS RIGHTEOUSNESS*



*"And [Abram] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."*

*(Genesis 15:6, ESV)*

# Historical Background and Setting

## **<sup>1</sup>Beginning of the Nations (Genesis 10)**

**A**s mankind begins to disperse throughout the earth, families begin to divide into clans, and the clans develop into nations. The earliest known account of the geographical, national, and dialectical divisions among the human family is contained in the Genesis record. This tabulation begins with Shem, Ham, and Japheth, three generations before the great division at Babel. In this record there is first of all a brief tracing of Japheth's seven sons and seven grandsons, particularly the descendants through Japheth's son Javan, whose people begin to spread north to the coastal areas of the Caspian, Black, and Mediterranean seas. The reference to the Japhethites may be as brief as it is because these Indo-Europeans will be among the latest to develop and will have the least contact with the theocratic concerns of the Hebrew people, upon whom the biblical text will soon focus.

The table of nations gives more attention to the descendants of Ham, perhaps because they will develop early and be founders of the first empires, and perhaps also because it is with these peoples that the Hebrew nation will have both its closest association and many of its conflicts. Ham's descendants will settle in the warmer climates of the southern portions of the earth and will populate the Egyptian, Canaanite, and Arabian nations. Of particular note among Ham's descendants is the great warrior Nimrod, who is the first leader of record to establish a monarchy. His rule over several tribes apparently comes through the power of conquest and not because he is their natural patriarchal head. It is Nimrod who establishes Babylon (from the city of Babel) in southern Mesopotamia, and later the city of Nineveh, further north in Assyria.

Of great historical significance is the record of Ham's descendants through Canaan, Ham's son upon whom Noah pronounced a curse. The land which will eventually be occupied by the Canaanites is known as the land of Canaan or, more modernly, Israel. Its original Canaanite inhabitants, including the Hittite, Jebusites, and Amorites, will come into conflict with the descendants of Shem, principally those of the Hebrew nation. That conflict, bearing out the prophetic nature of Noah's curse on Canaan, will continue even to modern times.

As for Shem's descendants, the table of nations concentrates on the lineage through Shem's son Arphaxad. The principal reason undoubtedly lies in the theological significance of the descent through Arphaxad. It is through his branch of the Shemites that (after eight generations) the father of the Hebrew nation, Abraham, will come. The Shemites, later to be known as Semites, will initially settle primarily in the region of Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. From the earliest

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary from The Daily Bible, New International Version. Smith, F. LaGard, Pg. 18. Harvest House.

Semite descendants will eventually come the Syrians, Assyrian, Joktanite Arabs and, most importantly, the Hebrews.

## **<sup>2</sup>Descendants from Shem to Abram (Genesis 11:10-26; 1659-1758 A.C.)**

**F**ollowing this tabulation of the nations, the Genesis record falls mostly silent upon the earth's inhabitants except for the descendants of Shem through Arphaxad: Shelah, Eber, Peleg, and others down to Abram, who, known later as Abraham, will become the father of the Hebrews. This is the family of promise through whom God will preserve religious and moral truth. It will be through the Hebrew nation that God will ultimately speak to the whole world. Therefore it is important for the Genesis record to trace Abram's ancestry back to Shem, who through his father, Noah, descends from the first man, Adam.

It is interesting to observe in this account that there is a gradual decline in the longevity of Shem's descendants. Shem himself will live for 600 years, but by the time of Abram the typical age at death is about 200. Also noteworthy is the fact that the first child is born much earlier than ever before. Except for Shem and Abram, most of the men in this lineage are in their thirties when their first son is born. The combined result of earlier longevity and now-decreasing lifespans is that there are surprisingly few links in the chain from Adam to Abram. Adam lived even beyond Methuselah's birth, and Methuselah was still living when Shem was born. Assuming that Abram was not Terah's firstborn son but, as other Scripture seems to indicate, was born when Terah was 130 years old, Shem will predecease Abram by only 25 years. So the ties between Adam and Abram in the first 2000 years from creation are indeed close ones.

The Genesis record pauses briefly at this point to give a special account of Terah's family. Included in the account is an introduction to Abram's nephew, Lot, who will become a central character in events to follow. Equally significant is the fact that Abram's wife, Sarai, has not yet given birth to a child. Amidst a culture in which the woman's role in bearing children, especially sons, is of vital importance, Sarai's barrenness will take on increased significance.

Of major importance at this point is the record of Terah's journey from Ur of the Chaldeans, located somewhere south of the lower Euphrates, to the city of Haran, some 600 miles north. Taking Abram, Sarai, and Lot, Terah sets out from Ur toward the land of Canaan by the route of the Fertile Crescent, which would bypass the Arabian Desert. Why Terah leaves Ur is a matter of some speculation as far as the Genesis record is concerned. Later Scripture provides a more complete answer when it records that Abram, and presumably Terah, were directed by God to leave Ur for a land that God would show

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<sup>2</sup> Commentary from The Daily Bible, New International Version. Smith, F. LaGard, Pg. 20-21. Harvest House.

them. Therefore this account of Terah and his journey to Haran is important in that it sets the stage for an even more significant journey for Abram in fulfilling the purpose that God has in mind.

### **<sup>3</sup>The Call of Abram**

**W**ith the life of Abram a new chapter in the history of God's dealings with mankind begins. God's presence in Abram's life does not appear to be based upon any special meritorious qualities that Abram himself might possess, but simply because God chooses him as the man through whom he will bless all of mankind.

Abram lives at a time when in the western part of the Fertile Crescent the Egyptian Empire is in its golden age during the Twelfth Dynasty. In the eastern part of the crescent, the Sumerians have controlled the area from their capital at Ur. Somewhere around 1950 B.C., however, the Sumerians are overthrown by the Elamites, who come from east of the Tigris River. The Elamite invasion causes such confusion and turmoil in this once-stable area that hordes of people from the Arabian desert are drawn into the more fertile area. These descendants of Ham from the west (or Amorites, as they are known) decisively take over the land and establish various capitals, the most notable of which is at Mari on the northern Euphrates River. This Amorite culture will flourish until about 1700 B.C., when it will be overrun by King Hammurabi of the Babylonians, who is remembered principally because of the code of laws which bears his name.

It is this Amorite culture with which Abram is most closely associated while in Haran. However, Abram himself is an Aramean and a descendant of Shem. Although the details are sketchy, it appears that Abram belongs to a rootless, unsettled, and seminomadic people who wander about among more settled people in search of food and water for the flocks which they tend. As the Genesis record continues, Abram and his clan will be seen wandering throughout Canaan in this very fashion.

The life of Abram, however, is more than a historical narrative about a Semitic Aramean wandering throughout Canaan. It is a life which will later be praised as an outstanding example of faith in God. With his father, Terah, now dead, and himself middle-aged, Abram is called by God to leave his homeland, his tribe, and his father's family in order to journey 300 miles to a land about which he knows very little. Once Abram arrives in the land, God promises Abram that he will give the land not to Abram but to his offspring; and this is promised despite the fact that the land is already occupied by the Canaanites. Yet Abram believes God's promise and continually worships God.

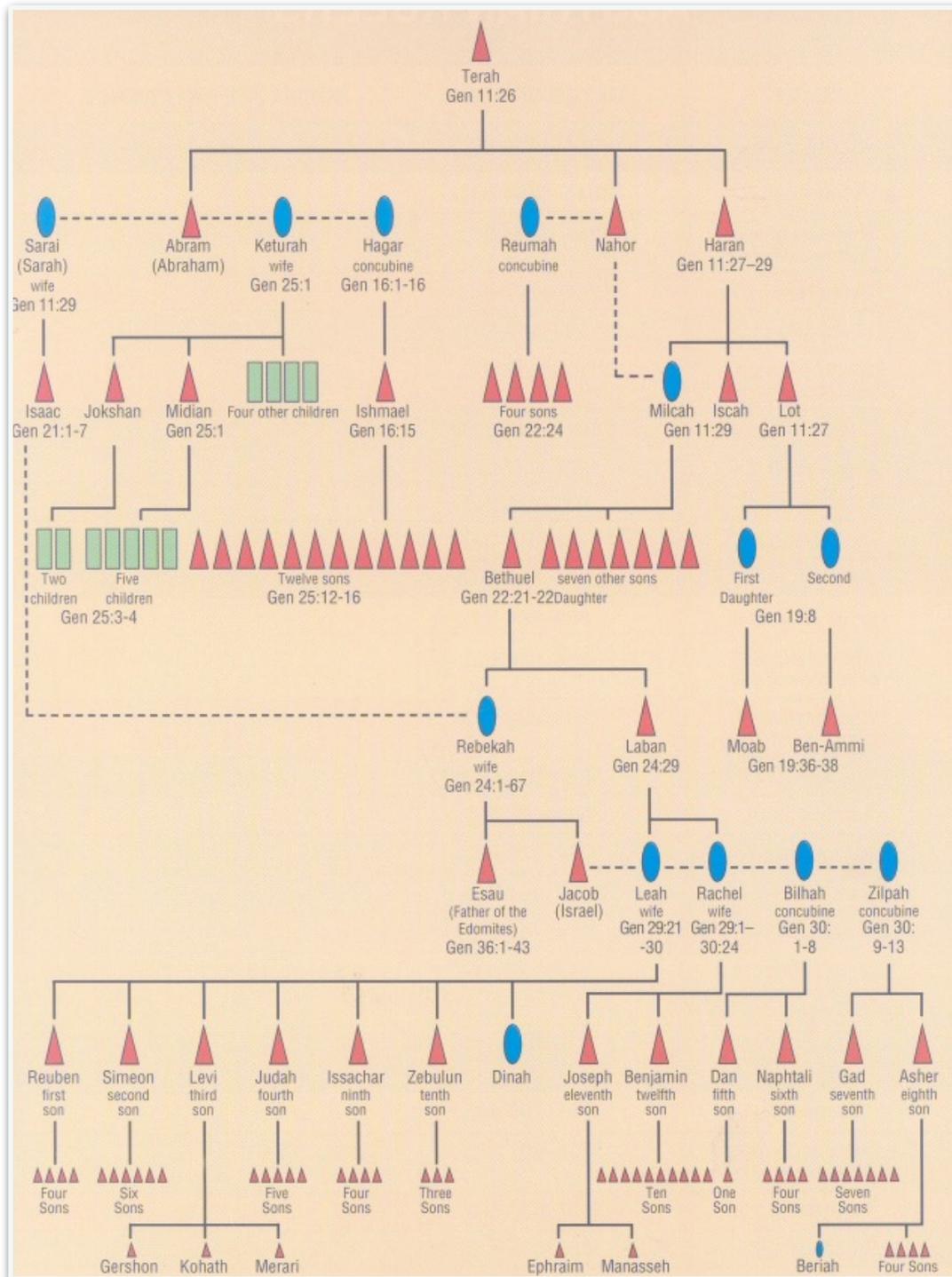
As the Genesis record continues, it appears that God had already called Abram at an earlier time, which other Scripture indicates had taken place when Abram was still in his former homeland. But here God

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<sup>3</sup> Commentary from The Daily Bible, New International Version. Smith, F. LaGard, Pg. 23-24. Harvest House.

reaffirms the call and covenants a sevenfold promise both to Abram and, through him, to all peoples of the world.

## Abraham's Family



*Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps, and Reconstructions. Pg. 43*

# Map of Abraham's Travels



Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps, and Reconstructions. Pg. 124