

1. Human-kind is not able to rise above its own sinfulness

This section of Genesis now moves rapidly to Abraham who will be the main character in Genesis and whose story will occupy a third of its space. We notice (1) that **thousands of years produced no great change in the human race.** In Genesis 11:10–26 we have a record of the family line leading from Shem to Abraham. It covers thousands of years, and people have been given a second chance to find a way of righteousness after the flood, but the second chance does not produce salvation. Humankind is not able to rise above its own sinfulness. Generation after generation comes and goes but no deliverance is found within humankind. At the end of the chapter we have a new name: Abraham! ¹

¹ 11:27

2. God's new initiative is a matter of grace

Abraham is God's answer to human wickedness. But we note (2) **Abraham came from a pagan family; God's new initiative was a matter of grace.**

Abraham's genealogy is like the one in Genesis 5, in that it has ten sections, with ten names, Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, Abraham. It is probable that names sometimes stand for segments of the family line. They are probably not overlapping except maybe at certain points of special interest. This means that a section of the line can be read as follows: **A** lived for **x** number of years and had a son leading to the family of **B**. The family records show that there were **y** number of years before **B** was reached. This would mean that Genesis 11:14 really means 'There was a man in the family tree called Salah. When he was 30 years old he had a son and that son's line was to lead eventually to Eber'. Genesis 11:15 means: 'The line of Salah continued for a further 403 years. Then Eber was the next significant figure in this family-tree'.

• **Genealogy**

If this is a correct way to read the genealogy, then it covers a period of nearly 3000 years. If we put Abraham's birth at about 2000 BC, the segments of genealogy would run from about 5000 BC to about 2000 BC.

• **Abraham born about 2000BC**

This assumes that there are not **large** omissions in the genealogy. If there are largish gaps, the date of the flood could be pushed much further back. It could for example be as far back as the end of the ice-age at about 10,000 BC. Yet it is hard to imagine gaps in genealogy as big as this, so a later date is more likely than an earlier date. The flood was well-known within Mesopotamian memory. Apparently it was an extremely severe but local flood. 'The earth' of Genesis 6–9 appears to be the Mesopotamian valley-territory in which the entire ecological system was destroyed.

• **The flood**

• **Promises kept**

This genealogy first shows the connection between Shem and Abraham; the promises of Genesis 9:26 and 27 are being kept. It shows too that the human race had plenty of time to save itself if it could. But it could not lift itself out of its wickedness and out of the dominion of death. God had to start doing something – and He started with Abraham.

• **A new start**

Abraham's family background

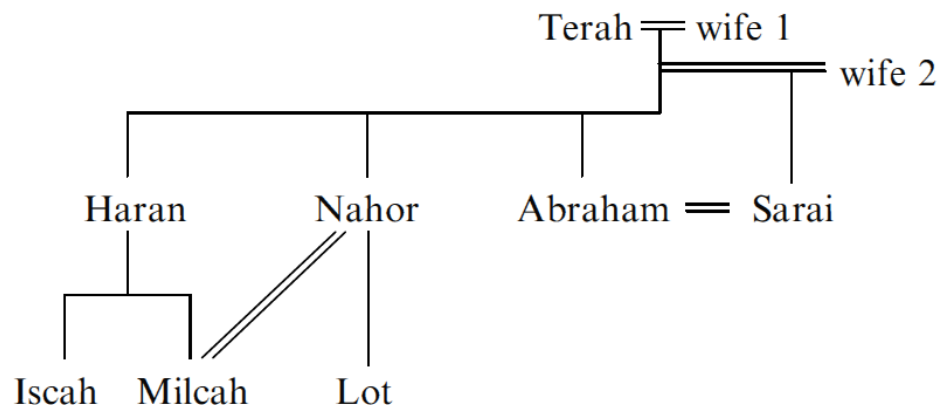
• Father

Terah married at least two wives. ^{☐1} He must have been born about 135 years before Abraham was born. (The ages are difficult to understand. Either the family's years are 'carried forward' in some way so the ages accumulate from previous generations. Or we have miraculous extensions of people's ages. When these ages are better understood I suspect it will turn out that more than one factor will be involved in the explanation. For the moment we shall take the ages as they stand and not worry too much about their strangeness.)

^{☐1} Genesis 20:12

• Brothers

Haran and Nahor were, it seems, Abraham's elder brothers. At some time before Abraham was 75 years old, Terah left Ur. The son Haran married in Ur and had two daughters, but then died at a time when the family were still living in Ur. Nahor married one of his nieces. Abraham married his half-sister, Sarai.



• Move to Haran

At some time before Abraham's seventy-fifth year the family moved to Haran (the two words 'Haran' are not the same; in Hebrew they are spelled differently). Then Terah died at 205 years. Abraham was about 75 years old. ^{☐1} Abraham had been called to leave Ur ^{☐2} ^{☐3}, but it was only after Terah's death that there was opportunity for him to follow God's summons.¹ Abraham was called to keep travelling. He took with him Sarai and Lot.

^{☐1} Genesis 12:4
^{☐2} see Acts 7:4
^{☐3} see Genesis 15:6

If Abraham was born at about 2000 BC, Terah's dates are 2135–1925 BC, and Abraham lived about 2000–1850 BC. It seems that their ages were miraculously extended.

• Brothers

But the significance of all of this is that we can see Abraham came from a pagan family. Ur and Haran were well-known as centres of moon-worship. Abraham's family and no doubt Abraham himself in his childhood '*worshipped other gods*'. ^{☐1}

^{☐1} Josh 24:2

Abraham's great importance

• Spiritual Father, model believer and pattern of faith

Abraham is the most important figure in the Bible after Jesus. Christians are the '*children of Abraham*' ^{☐1}, and Abraham is the father of all believers, Jewish and Gentile.

^{☐1} Galatians 3:29

• His seed

Abraham is important because he is the model 'believer', the pattern of faith that God wants from us. Christians believe God in the same way that Abraham believed God. Abraham is God's answer to sin. Humankind was excluded from paradise and had experienced the judgement of the flood. Neither would ever be repeated. But man is still rising up in rebellion against God. Does God have any other answer? Yes, He will send a Saviour, and the Saviour will be '*the seed of Abraham*'.

• **God's answer is Jesus**

God's answer is Jesus! Jesus will be the answer to this rising rebellion. Jesus will be the answer to Nimrod, the answer to man's hatred of God. Jesus will be the one who unites, the answer to multinational apostasy. Jesus will bring forgiveness of sins, and will make possible a change in the hearts of men and women. It will be Jesus who brings men and women together. By His death and resurrection and heavenly throne He still is the answer.

• **God's plan**

The fall brought alienation from God, and hatred among men and women. Soon demonic strongholds were found in the human race. The flood wiped out a major civilisation and gave Noah's seed a second chance, but the godly examples of Enoch and Noah and the terrible deterrent of the flood brought no lasting change. So God sent Abraham, God's model-believer. He was used by God to demonstrate what it would mean to come to saving faith. He would persist in faith and so inherit God's promises to him. He would obey God without the Mosaic law or any other law, hearing God's voice directly. Eventually God would take an oath and say *'Now I know that you fear me; I will indeed bless you'*. And from that point on God would *'remember His holy covenant, the oath He swore to ... Abraham'*, until Abraham's seed should come, *'to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days'*. ¹

¹ see Luke 1:72-75

Footnote

¹ Acts 7:4 says that Abraham left after Terah's death. Genesis 11:26, 32; 12:4 contradicts this only if Abraham is reckoned as the eldest son, but Abraham is probably mentioned first because of importance not because of his being the oldest. In Acts 7 God appears first to Abraham in Ur ¹; Genesis 12 does not say when the first call came. Modern people tend to read ancient books more in chronological order than they really were and so we tend to take Genesis 12 as meaning that the call came in Haran. But the text does not say that and it is a modern way of reading a text. Ancient readers (picking up a hint from Genesis 15:6!) placed the call in Ur, as does Stephen (in Acts 7:2-4), Philo (in *De Migratione Abrahami*, 176-177) and Josephus (in *Antiquities*, 1:154). Joshua 24:2-3 and Nehemiah 9:7 give a similar impression. Genesis 15:7 says *'I brought you . . . out of Ur'*, not 'out of Haran'.

¹ 7:2

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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