

# Youth Teaching Resources

March 8, 2020



## Lent / Easter / Pentecost—All Things New

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 —“A New Choice”

**Genesis 12:1-4a—“A New Start”**

Psalm 95—“A New Song”

1 Samuel 16:1-13—“A New King”

Ezekiel 37:1-14—“A New Life”

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# A New Start

## Genesis 12:1-4a

### YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

#### PARENT PREP

Each week at the end of the large group session, the leader will lead the students through a spiritual discipline to help them engage with scripture in a new way. Ask your student about the experience that they had with the spiritual discipline. Even, take time throughout the week and allow your student to lead your family through the spiritual discipline that they learned in the large group session.

#### TEACHING THE LESSON

##### Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Cold Calling from *The Pursuit of Happyness*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Where did he get his list to call people?
- 2) What was his reaction when he got hung up on?
- 3) Why did he continue to press on?
- 4) What was his reaction when he finally got a positive result?
- 5) Have you ever received a call or text from someone you weren't expecting? How did it go?

## Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Genesis 12.1-4a. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What does God call Abram to do?
- 2) What did Abram have to give up to follow his call from God?
- 3) What promises does God make to Abram for following God's call?
- 4) How was Abram a blessing to others by following God's call?
- 5) What questions would you have had of God if you were Abram?
- 6) What is the significance of Lot going with Abram?
- 7) How does this call story influence the future stories of when Jesus calls his disciples?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What Abram blessed or a blessing?
- 2) Where did Abram follow God's call?
- 3) How does this call story influence to property battles still going on in Israel?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": Where was Ur of the Chaldees?

## Transformation

During this season of Lent each session will conclude with a spiritual discipline that the students can use throughout the week. This week, lead your students through the spiritual discipline of *Centering Prayer*. If you have not led a group through this spiritual practice, familiarize yourself with the practice before leading the group. Once you have led the group through practice, allow the students time to share with the larger group what they experience.

Close with a prayer when you give thanks that God continues to call us today and ask for openness to respond to what God is calling you to do.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Haran**—The city of Haran was settled no later than the Late Bronze Age, and probably earlier: tablets from Ebla mention it as early as 2300 BCE. It was located on a major north-south trade route from Mesopotamia or Egypt into Anatolia. As a result, it developed into a large cosmopolitan city.

**Be blessed, or bless themselves?**—While the NRSV translates God’s promise to suggest that other nations would be blessed (passive tense) through Abraham, the *nifal* form of the verb can also be translated in a reflexive sense, as in “bless themselves.”

As it turns out, according to a note in the New English Translation (NETBible), the *nifal* form of the verb for blessing “is only used in formulations of the Abrahamic covenant” (Gen. 12:2; 18:18; 28:14).

Though the passive interpretation seems to be more apt in 12:3, some later texts regarding God’s covenant with Abraham use the *hithpael* form of the verb instead of the *nifal* (Gen. 22:18, 26:4). The *hitpael* is by definition reflexive, suggesting the idea that other nations would pronounce blessings on themselves in the name of Abraham, seeing him as a prime example of divine blessing.

**By stages**—Where did Abram go following God’s call? Genesis 12:4-9 provides a very brief overview of Abram’s journey from Haran to the promised land. The long and difficult expedition is passed over in a single clause (“When they had come to the land of Canaan. . .”, v. 5b). At Shechem, in the heart of the land, the Lord appeared to Abram again and confirmed that this was the land of promise: “To your offspring I will give this land” (v. 7a). Abram built an altar there to commemorate the event, then moved on to Bethel, where he built another altar (v. 8). Building altars was not only an act of worship, but possibly a way of remembering God’s promise and claiming the land.

These moves from place to place lead to an interesting observation: “And Abram journeyed on *by stages* toward the Negeb” (v. 9). The Negeb was the large area comprising the southern part of Canaan. Though desert-like now, it was a populous place of pastures and small cities during the Middle Bronze Age, the era of the patriarchs. It was a most suitable place to provide pastureage for Abram’s considerable flocks, and so it became his home.

Note that Abram moved *by stages* toward the Negeb. How can this observation serve as a helpful metaphor for our own journey toward spiritual maturity and the experience of God’s blessings?

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**A perpetual deed?**—Many Zionists hold that the modern state of Israel should have rights to the entire land without ceding any of it to the Palestinian residents whose families have lived there for more than a thousand years. Supporters of annexing Palestinian lands often cite these promises to Abraham as justification for the belief. Even tour guides sometimes tell their groups “God gave us this land, and no one can take it from us.”

Others take note that, despite God’s promise of the land, Israel’s own scriptures suggest that it was conditional, and that the Hebrews lost the land through centuries of faithlessness and going after other gods, resulting in the exile. Prophetic promises of a full return anticipate an eschatological future, not a decision by the United Nations to establish a Jewish homeland.

While we can rejoice that it is possible once again for Jewish people to have a homeland, we should be cautious in ascribing it to the promises of Genesis, as if God granted to Abraham a perpetual deed to the land.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Where was “Ur of the Chaldees”?

Most readers have long assumed that Abraham’s birthplace, “Ur of the Chaldees,” should be identified with the great city of Ur, located in southern Mesopotamia, an area known in ancient times as Sumer. In fact, from the time of Leonard Wooley’s productive excavations in Ur, his claims that the Sumerian Ur was a city “worthy of Abraham” led to that location becoming near orthodoxy in scholarly circles.

There are a number of problems with this identification, however.

The Bible makes several references to God bringing Abraham from ‘Ur-Kasdim, translated as “Ur of the Chaldees” (Gen. 11:27, 31; 15:7; Neh. 9:7). Some of the texts imply that Abraham went straight from Ur to Canaan, but the story in Gen. 11:27-32 says that he moved with his father Terah from Ur-Kasdim to Haran, but stopped there, remaining until Terah died. Genesis 12 (our text for today) picks up there, with God’s call for Abraham to proceed to “the land that I will show you” (12:1).

We know that there were Chaldeans in southern Mesopotamia by 1000 BCE, and the Neo-Babylonians also became popularly known as Chaldeans. Some ancient sources, however, suggest that the Chaldeans’ original home was in Anatolia, now a part of Turkey, before some of them migrated south.

A cuneiform tablet found at Ugarit contains a letter from a Hittite king named Hattusili III, also located in Turkey. The king of Ugarit had complained about the activities of certain merchants from a city named Ura—which would come into Hebrew as ‘Ur, and the Hittite king pledged to regulate them.

This is likely the same city, in southern Turkey, that is now called Urfa. Local Islamic tradition has considered it the birthplace of Abraham for more than a thousand years. Christian literature written in Syriac spelled it Orhai.

Could this be Abraham’s ‘Ur-Kasdim?

Consider also that Genesis 24:4, 7, 10, and 29 describe Abraham’s birthplace as being in Aram-Naharayim (“Beyond the River”), a region defined as being east of the Euphrates River. The northern Ur was in that area, but the southern city of Ur was built on the west side of the river.

Another geographical problem is this: if Abraham’s father Terah had set out for Canaan from the Sumerian Ur, he would have gone north along the Euphrates, bearing west around the top of the fertile crescent, then turning south and traveling through Syria until reaching Canaan. But Terah wound up in Haran—which means he would have had to make a sharp

## The Hardest Question *continued*

right turn at the Balik River and travel many miles upstream to reach Haran.

If they had departed from the northern Ur, however, Haran would have been right along the way south to Canaan.

Cyrus Gordon, who dug at the Sumerian Ur with Leonard Wooley, never accepted Wooley's identification of the southern Ur as Abraham's "Ur of the Chaldees," consistently arguing for the northern location. The later discovery of inscriptions pointing to a northern city of Ur appear to have confirmed the validity of his arguments.

I have often repeated the scholarly consensus that Abraham grew up in the great Sumerian city of Ur, but also considered the location problematic. I am finding the arguments for a northern location more and more convincing, and perhaps our readers should, too.

For further reading, consider these articles: Cyrus Gordon's "Where Is Abraham's Ur" (<http://www.michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/Where%20Is%20Abrahams%20Ur.pdf>), and Gary Rentdorf's "Ur Kasdim: Where Is Abraham's Birthplace?" from Torah.com (<https://www.thetorah.com/article/ur-kasdim-where-is-abrahams-birthplace>).