

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Call: Leaving It All Behind

Genesis 12:1–9

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This first lesson sets the foundation for the entire study, and it carries more weight than its quiet narrative might suggest. Genesis 12:1–9 is the hinge of the whole Bible. After eleven chapters that move from creation to fall to the scattering at Babel, God narrows His redemptive work to one man and one promise, and from this promise the rest of Scripture unfolds. Abram lives around two thousand years before Christ, in a world of household gods and ancestral religion; Joshua 24:2 tells us plainly that his own family served other gods. The call, then, is an act of sheer grace breaking into an idolatrous world. Help the class feel both the cost of the command (leave country, kindred, father's house) and the breathtaking scope of the promise (a nation, a name, and blessing for all the families of the earth, which Galatians 3:8 identifies as the gospel preached in advance).

Doctrinally, two matters need a careful hand. First, guard against reading Calvinistic unconditional election into God's choice of Abram. God did sovereignly take the initiative, and Abram earned nothing, but the call was to a covenant role and purpose through which the whole world would be blessed, and it summoned a real, obedient response. The text underlines this with the simple words, "so Abram went." Second, let the promise point forward. The blessing to all nations is not finally about national or political greatness; it reaches its fulfillment in Christ and His church, a theme this study will return to in Lesson 12. Resist any drift toward a future earthly, political kingdom; the promise is fulfilled in the gospel.

Yet this lesson aims at more than correct doctrine about the call. It aims at the heart of every student. Each person in the room has a Haran, a place of comfort and security and familiar idols that God may be asking them to leave. The goal is that students walk out not merely admiring Abram's faith but examining their own, willing to name the thing they are clutching and to take one concrete step of obedient trust. Keep both targets in view: clear truth about the God who calls and promises, and a genuine summons to follow Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (v. 1). What exactly did God ask Abram to leave, and what did He promise in return (vv. 1–3)? What does this opening call reveal about how God works and about the kind of faith He is asking Abram to have?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the class feel the weight of what God asked Abram to surrender. The command moves in widening circles of cost: country, then kindred, then father's house. In the ancient world these were not incidental attachments; they were a person's identity, security, inheritance, and protection. To leave your father's house was to cut yourself off from the social and economic safety net that made survival possible. God asked Abram to let go of everything that anchored him.

Notice, too, what God deliberately withheld: the destination. He said go "to the land that I will show you," not "to the land of Canaan." The route would be revealed only as Abram walked. This is how God often works. He gives enough light for the next step and asks us to trust Him for the rest. Faith of this kind is not a leap into the dark; it is a walk into the light God provides one step at a time, anchored in the character of the One who calls.

Then turn to the promise, because the call is never bare command. God wraps the demand in grace: I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed. The God who asks Abram to give up everything promises to give him immeasurably more. This is the pattern of all discipleship; whatever we leave for God, we never lose, because He is no one's debtor (compare Mark 10:29–30).

Help the class see the kind of faith being asked for. It is not mere intellectual agreement that God exists. It is a trust that acts, that packs the wagons and walks out the door. The promise gives faith its ground, and obedience gives faith its proof. That union of trusting and obeying is the very thing for which Abram will be called the father of the faithful.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's call as a gracious initiative breaking into an idolatrous world (Joshua 24:2)
- Faith as trust that obeys before it can see the whole picture
- The pattern of God giving light for the next step rather than the entire map
- Command and promise held together; God asks much and promises more
- The cost of discipleship and the certainty that God is no one's debtor

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between believing God exists and trusting Him enough to obey?
- Why do you think God revealed the destination only as Abram walked?
- Where in your life has God given you light for the next step but not the whole road?

Question 2

Student Question:

God called Abram to leave the familiar and the secure for a destination he could not yet see. What is the “country and kindred and father’s house” in your own life, the comfort or security you cling to most tightly, that God may be calling you to hold loosely in order to follow Him? Name it as specifically as you can.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and the aim is honesty, not new information. Every person in the room has a Haran, a place of comfort, belonging, and security that feels too costly to leave. For one it is a job that pays well but pulls them away from God. For another it is a relationship, a hometown, a reputation, a level of control over the future. The goal is to help each student name their own specific thing rather than nodding at the idea in general.

Be ready to lead gently here. People will not name what they are clinging to if they feel judged for it. The point is not that homes and families and security are evil; they are good gifts. The danger is when a good gift becomes the thing we trust instead of God, the thing we will not release even when He calls. Help the class distinguish between enjoying God’s gifts and clutching them.

Press toward the heart issue: our grip on these things reveals where our security actually rests. Abram’s willingness to let go showed that his trust had shifted from his father’s house to his Father in heaven. The transforming question for the student is not merely what they would leave, but what their reluctance exposes about the true object of their faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between enjoying God’s gifts and clinging to them as security
- Idols of comfort, belonging, control, and reputation
- Where our true trust rests is revealed by what we refuse to release
- Discipleship as ongoing surrender, not a one-time decision

Discussion Prompts

- What good gift in your life is most in danger of becoming the thing you trust instead of God?
- How can a person tell the difference between stewarding a blessing and clutching it?
- What would it look like this week to hold one of those things with an open hand?

Question 3

Student Question:

Trace the threefold promise God made: a great nation, a great name, and blessing to all the families of the earth (vv. 2–3). How do these promises reach far beyond Abram to people like us, and how does the New Testament show them coming true in Christ (Galatians 3:8)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk the class slowly through the promise, because it is the seed from which the rest of the Bible grows. God promises Abram descendants (a great nation), a name and standing (a great name), and, most sweeping of all, that in him all the families of the earth will be blessed. The first two promises center on Abram and his line; the third bursts every boundary and reaches the whole human race.

Show how the New Testament reads this. Paul says in Galatians 3:8 that God “preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham” in this very promise. The blessing to all nations was never merely about land or political greatness; it was about the gospel of Christ flowing out to the whole world. The promised Seed, Paul argues, is ultimately Christ Himself (Galatians 3:16), and in Him people of every nation receive the blessing of Abraham.

This is the place to gently set a doctrinal guardrail. The promise is not pointing toward a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel. Its fulfillment is spiritual and worldwide, realized in Christ and His church, where believers from every family of the earth become Abraham’s offspring by faith (Galatians 3:29). Lesson 12 will develop this fully; here simply plant the seed.

Bring it home to the student. We are sitting inside the third promise. The blessing that reached “all the families of the earth” reached our family, our town, our own hearts. The call of one old man in Haran is the reason the gospel ever came to us. That should move the class to worship and to a sense of being swept up into a story far larger than themselves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The threefold promise: descendants, name, and blessing to all nations
- Galatians 3:8, the gospel preached in advance to Abraham
- Christ as the promised Seed in whom all nations are blessed (Galatians 3:16)
- Guarding against a future earthly, political fulfillment (against premillennial and dispensational readings)
- Believers as Abraham’s offspring by faith (Galatians 3:29)
- Our own salvation as the overflow of the promise to Abraham

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change your reading of Genesis to know the gospel is already present in 12:1–3?
- In what sense are you personally a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham?
- Why is it important that the blessing reaches all nations and not one nation only?

Question 4

Student Question:

God promised to make Abram's name great, yet the world constantly urges us to make our own names great by our own efforts. In what area of life are you most tempted to build your own reputation and standing rather than trusting God to bless you in His way and His time?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw the sharp contrast at the heart of this question. At Babel, just one chapter earlier, humanity said, "let us make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4), and God scattered them. Here God says to Abram, "I will make your name great." The difference is everything. One is self-exaltation; the other is a name received as a gift from God. The lesson for the student is that greatness is God's to give, not ours to seize.

Help students locate the specific arenas where the Babel impulse still operates in them: career advancement pursued at any cost, the curated image on social media, the quiet competitiveness in friendships or even in church, the hunger to be seen as successful or impressive. The drive to build our own name is rarely loud; it usually hides inside ordinary ambition.

Then point them toward trust. Abram could afford to stop grasping for a name because God had promised to give him one. The antidote to self-promotion is not passivity but confidence that God sees, God rewards, and God lifts up in His time (1 Peter 5:6). Invite the class to name one place where they can stop striving for recognition and rest in God's timing instead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Babel's "make a name for ourselves" versus God's "I will make your name great"
- Greatness and honor as gifts received, not prizes seized
- Modern forms of self-promotion (career, image, comparison)
- Humbling ourselves under God's hand that He may lift us up (1 Peter 5:6)

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you feel the pull to make your own name great right now?
- What does it look like practically to trust God with your reputation?
- How does the contrast with Babel reframe healthy ambition?

Question 5

Student Question:

"So Abram went, as the LORD had told him" (v. 4). Scripture records no debate and no delay. What does this simple phrase, "so Abram went," teach us about the nature of real, saving faith, and how does it fit the way Scripture everywhere joins genuine faith to obedience?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Linger on the plainness of verse 4. After the soaring promises of verses 1 through 3, the narrative becomes utterly matter-of-fact: “So Abram went.” There is no recorded argument, no negotiation, no request for a sign. The greatness of Abram’s faith is shown not in a speech but in a departure. Faith, in the Bible, is something you can watch a person do.

This is the heartbeat of the whole study, so establish it clearly here. Hebrews 11:8 interprets this moment: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out.” Faith and obedience are not two separate things in Scripture; obedience is what faith looks like when it is real. James will later say the same of this very man (James 2:21–23), a theme Lesson 11 will treat in full. Abram believed God, and believing, he went.

Use this to set the doctrinal tone of the entire study without overloading the class so early. Saving faith is never bare mental agreement; it is a living trust that acts on what God says. This is exactly why Abram, and not a passive believer, is called the father of the faithful. The point is not that obedience earns the promise; the promise is grace. The point is that true faith always moves.

Apply it honestly. Many of us know far more of God’s will than we are doing. The gap between “so Abram went” and our own hesitation is not usually a gap in knowledge but a gap in trust. Invite the class to consider where their faith has stalled at agreement and never moved to action.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith and obedience as inseparable, not two separate steps (Hebrews 11:8)
- Saving faith as a living trust that acts, not bare mental agreement
- Obedience as the proof of faith, not the purchase price of grace
- The consistent biblical pattern that true faith always moves (foreshadowing James 2)
- The gap between knowing God’s will and doing it

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the Bible refuse to separate faith from obedience?
- What is the difference between obeying to earn God’s favor and obeying because we trust Him?
- Where has your own faith stalled at agreement without moving to action?

Question 6

Student Question:

Abram obeyed at seventy-five, an age when most people are settling down rather than setting out. What excuse have you used (your age, your season of life, your comfort, your fear) to tell yourself it is too late or too costly to obey God in some specific area? What would obedience look like instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make the most of Abram's age. Seventy-five is not the age at which people begin grand new adventures; it is the age at which they expect to be cared for, to rest, to coast toward the end. God's timing defies our assumptions about when a useful, obedient life is over. Abram's greatest chapter began when most would say his story was finished.

Help the class hear their own excuses. We all have them. I am too old, too young, too busy, too tired, too set in my ways, too far along to change. These excuses feel reasonable, and that is exactly why they are dangerous; they let us disobey while feeling justified. Naming the excuse out loud strips away some of its power.

Then move from excuse to obedience. The aim is not guilt but a concrete next step. If Abram could uproot his whole life at seventy-five, the student can take the smaller, specific step God is asking of them now. Encourage each person to replace the excuse with a single act of obedience they will actually do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's call does not expire with age or season of life
- Excuses as the comfortable disguise of disobedience
- Naming an excuse as the first step toward surrendering it
- Moving from justification to a concrete act of obedience

Discussion Prompts

- What excuse have you leaned on to avoid obeying God in some area?
- How does Abram's age challenge the way you think about your own usefulness to God?
- What is one specific, doable step of obedience you have been putting off?

Question 7

Student Question:

Twice in this passage Abram built an altar and "called upon the name of the LORD" (vv. 7–8). Why is it significant that worship marked his journey from the very beginning, even in a strange land surrounded by Canaanites? What does altar-building teach about the place of worship in a life of faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Point out the rhythm of Abram's journey. He arrives in Canaan, and the first thing recorded is that he builds an altar. He moves on, and he builds another. The pilgrim of faith leaves a trail of altars behind him. Worship is not an interruption of his journey; it is the marking of it. Wherever God appears or speaks, Abram responds with worship.

Notice the setting. The text pointedly says, “At that time the Canaanites were in the land” (v. 6). Abram worships the LORD openly in a land full of other gods and other altars. His worship is a quiet confession of faith, a public stake in the ground declaring whom he serves. Faith that follows God will also worship God, and not only in safe and private places.

Draw out the meaning of “called upon the name of the LORD.” This phrase speaks of public, deliberate worship and prayer, the calling on God by name in trust and dependence. Abram does not merely think pious thoughts; he builds, he calls, he worships in a tangible way. Faith expresses itself in concrete acts of devotion.

Apply it to the student’s journey. A life of faith without regular worship soon withers. The altars of our lives are the deliberate places and rhythms where we stop, remember God, and give Him our devotion: the Lord’s Day assembly, the Lord’s Supper, daily prayer, the Scriptures. Ask whether the student’s journey is marked by such altars or whether worship has become an occasional afterthought.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship as the natural response of faith to God’s appearing and speaking
- Public confession of God in the midst of a culture of other gods
- “Calling on the name of the LORD” as deliberate worship and dependence
- The need for regular rhythms of worship in a life of faith
- Tangible acts of devotion rather than merely private sentiment

Discussion Prompts

- What are the “altars” in your life, the deliberate places where you stop and worship God?
- Why does Abram’s open worship among the Canaanites matter for us today?
- What happens to faith over time when worship becomes occasional?

Question 8

Student Question:

Abram pitched a tent, not a fortress, and lived as a sojourner trusting a promise he could not yet hold in his hands (Hebrews 11:8–10). In what ways are you living for permanence and security here, as though this world were your final home, rather than as a pilgrim whose deepest hope is set on God’s promise?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Highlight the image of the tent. Abram owned no land in Canaan except, eventually, a burial plot. He lived in tents in the very land God had promised him, holding the promise by faith rather than by deed. Hebrews 11:9–10 explains that he did so because “he was looking forward

to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” His true hope was anchored beyond this life.

Help the class feel the contrast with our instincts. We are builders of fortresses. We crave permanence, security, a settled and protected life. None of those desires is wicked, but they can quietly persuade us that this world is our home and that our hope is here. The pilgrim holds his possessions and plans more loosely, because his deepest treasure is elsewhere.

Be careful not to make this abstract. A pilgrim mindset shows up in concrete ways: in how tightly we grip money and possessions, how devastated we are by changed plans, how we respond to aging and loss, whether our calendars and bank accounts reveal a hope set on heaven or on here. Invite the student to examine where they have settled down as if this were the final country.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living as sojourners and pilgrims whose hope is set beyond this world (Hebrews 11:9–10)
- Holding possessions and plans loosely in light of God’s promise
- The good desire for security that can become a misplaced hope
- Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also (Matthew 6:19–21)

Discussion Prompts

- In what concrete ways do your calendar and finances reveal where your hope is set?
- What does it mean to enjoy good things here without making them your final home?
- How does the hope of the city with foundations change the way you face loss?

Question 9

Student Question:

God’s call of Abram was pure grace; Abram had done nothing to earn it, and his own ancestors had served other gods (Joshua 24:2). Yet this call was not an unconditional, irresistible selection of one individual for salvation apart from any response; it was a call to a covenant purpose that required Abram’s obedient, walking faith. How does this passage hold together God’s gracious initiative and Abram’s real, responsible obedience? And how does the promise that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” point forward to the gospel and to Christ Himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, so give it room. Begin with the grace of the call. God came to Abram first; Abram did not seek God. Joshua 24:2 tells us Abram’s own family served other gods, and there is no hint that Abram was chosen for any merit. The initiative is entirely God’s, and that is grace. Establish this clearly, because the whole of Abram’s story, and ours, begins with God reaching down.

Then guard the truth carefully against a Calvinistic misreading. Some would take God's sovereign choice of Abram as a proof text for unconditional, individual election to salvation by an irresistible grace that bypasses human response. But that is not what the text describes. God chose Abram for a covenant purpose and role, that through him all nations would be blessed, and that calling summoned a genuine response. The proof is in the text itself: God said go, and "so Abram went." Had Abram refused, the narrative would read very differently. God's grace is the initiative; Abram's obedient faith is the real, responsible answer. The two are not rivals.

Make the larger biblical point. The gospel call is gracious and it is also genuinely offered to all and genuinely able to be answered. God does not coerce; He calls, and He looks for the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). Abram is the pattern, not the exception. We are saved by grace, and we receive that grace through a faith that trusts and obeys, never by earning and never by passive selection.

Now turn to Christ, because the promise is finally about Him. "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" is, Paul says, the gospel announced in advance (Galatians 3:8). The blessing flows to the world through Abram's offspring, and that offspring is ultimately Christ (Galatians 3:16). Standing invisibly inside this promise to one old man is the cross, the empty tomb, and the worldwide invitation of the gospel. Let the class see that the God who called Abram was already, in that moment, setting in motion the plan to save them.

Finally, connect it to how we come into the blessing. We are not Abram, living before the Law and before Christ. We live under the New Covenant, and we enter Abraham's blessing through faith in Christ, a faith that obeys the gospel. Lesson 12 will develop this fully from Galatians 3:26–29; here it is enough to show that the same God who graciously called and saved through an obedient faith then graciously calls and saves through an obedient faith now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's gracious initiative; Abram earned nothing and sought nothing first (Joshua 24:2)
- Election to a covenant purpose and role, not Calvinistic unconditional individual election to salvation
- Grace received through an obedient, responsible faith, not irresistible coercion
- The obedience of faith as the consistent biblical pattern (Romans 1:5; 16:26)
- "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" as the gospel preached beforehand (Galatians 3:8)
- Christ as the promised Seed in whom the blessing reaches the world (Galatians 3:16)
- We enter Abraham's blessing through faith in Christ under the New Covenant

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage show both God's grace and Abram's genuine responsibility at the same time?

- How would you kindly answer someone who says God simply selects individuals for salvation regardless of any response?
- Where do you see the gospel hidden inside the promise to Abram?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. You have watched God call an old man to leave everything, wrap the call in an enormous promise, and lead him out by faith one step at a time. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to step out in obedient faith right now, leaving something behind and trusting a promise you cannot yet fully see. What is the single step you most need to take this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole lesson and turns it on the student's own life. Resist the urge to let answers stay general. The aim is one specific step, named out loud, that the student will actually take. Abram's faith was concrete; he walked out a door. The student's response should be concrete too.

Help the class connect their step to Jesus specifically. This is a study of Abraham, but the God who called Abram is the same God who calls us in Christ, and the blessing promised to Abram has come to us through Jesus. Frame the step as following the One who Himself left the comfort of heaven, set His face toward a costly obedience, and trusted His Father completely.

Close with encouragement, not pressure. The God who led Abram one step at a time will lead them. They do not need the whole map; they need the next step and the willingness to take it. Consider letting the room sit quietly for a moment so each person can name their step honestly before God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from admiration of Abram's faith to imitation of it
- Discipleship as a concrete, nameable next step
- Following Jesus, who left heaven and trusted the Father, as the pattern of obedient faith
- Trusting God for the next step without needing the whole map

Discussion Prompts

- What single step of obedient faith is God asking of you this week?
- What is the "something left behind" that step will require?
- How does Jesus' own obedience give you courage to take it?