

What's Holding You Back? Genesis 11:10-32

It happens to me every day and it happens multiple times each day. I don't mean for it to happen, but it does. If I were a betting man, I'd bet you and like me you don't mean for it to happen either, but also like me, it does. It's not intentional. Most of the time the results have no consequences other than not getting some things accomplished. Yet at other times it can create problems. It can cause you to burn dinner or worse yet get into an accident while driving. It delays meeting a goal or deadline. It can keep us from finishing a thought or forget what we were going to do next or why we went into a room.

It's a simple word really. If you haven't guessed it by now, it's the word, does it seem a bit chilly in here? Now what was I talking about? Oh, yeah, it's the word distraction. It's been defined as something that prevents us from finishing something else.

Now as we come to our passage today in **Genesis 11:10-32** we have yet another list of names, another genealogy. **Verses 1-9** seem better suited to begin **chapter 10** than appearing in **chapter 11**. As we discovered last week, those verses help us understand the why and how each of the different descendants of Noah's sons came to live where they did. The end of **chapter 10** seems a more natural segue into **verses 10-32** by focusing on the one son of Noah, that being Shem. But Moses, who authored Genesis, put it here being divinely inspired because it is from this point on that we begin to see the plan of God unfold in keeping His promise given back in **3:15** that a redeemer would come who would crush the head of the serpent. Since that time, the serpent, Satan, has been doing all he could to bruise the heel. In **chapter 6** we saw how wicked man had gotten, but God had one faithful and righteous follower in Noah who would preserve the line of Seth. It would be through Noah that the righteous line would continue. By the time we get to **chapter 11** the world had once again deviated from following God. Man wanted to become independent from God by banding together instead

of spreading out as God commanded. They built a town and a tower in defiance. They were settling in with no intention of moving. That it reached to the heavens shows man's pursuit again at becoming godlike. It's the same kind of delusion Satan told Eve in the garden, that they could be like God. Mankind still wants to be his own god today.

We notice in these verses that it is the record of two individuals.

Verses 10-26 give us the account of Shem.

Verses 27-32 give us the account of Terah.

In this brief section we have two of the ten toledoths or generations recorded in Genesis. So the first thing we see in this passage is a list of descendants.

I. A LIST OF DESCENDANTS – vs. 10-30

We learn that Shem was 100 years old when he became a father and had a son. It occurred two years after the flood. So that would put Noah at 602 when he became a grandfather. A little math tells us that Shem was born two years after construction on the Ark began. Shem had a son whose name was Arphaxad. Shem then lived to be 600 years old and we have a parenthetical note here that he had other sons and daughters the names of which are not mentioned for us so we don't know who they are or how many he had. Moses is primarily interested in preserving the Messianic line only.

If you compare this list of names with chapter 5, two things stand out.

The first is that in **chapter 11** you will notice that it does not mention that these individuals died, although we know that to be the case for each of them. **Hebrews 9:27** tells us that man is destined to die once. But we can tell how old they were by adding the age they were when they had their firstborn son and how long they lived after the birth of that child.

Why is it important that this passage does not mention that they died? It is possible that under the inspiration of God's Spirit superintending the writing of this sacred text that He wanted to show that in **chapter 5** death was and is the consequence of sin as God warned Adam and Eve in Eden. In

chapter 11 He is showing us the beginning of the promise of redemption. Through this lineage would come the Messiah. Through this lineage would come the hope of overturning the curse of death.

Henry Morris writes: “In this new genealogy we are to remember that God henceforth bears with the sins of men, and it is not agreeable to this thought to announce the death of any man.”

But we will also see that God will deal more strictly and directly with individual nations for their sin, especially with His covenant people, Israel.

We need to look at this list as more than just a list of unpronounceable names, but instead that this is the Messianic line of promise, of God keeping His unchangeable word.

The second thing you will notice in these verses is that we begin to see a decrease in how long people lived and that they were starting families a lot earlier. They didn't wait till they were 100 as in the case of Shem or even 500 like Noah.

Arphaxad was 35 and lived to be 438

Shelah was 30 and lived to be 433

Eber was 34 and lived to be 464

Remember Eber in Hebrew is the word Hebrew.

Peleg was 30 and lived to be 239

Reu was 32 and lived to be 239

Serug was 30 and lived to be 230

Nahor was 29 and lived to be 148

Terah was 70 and lived to be 207

Assuming that there are no gaps in the genealogical record here (and I believe there are not), Shem was still living in the time of Terah. The generations from Shem to Abram are a brief look at the span of time from the flood to the call of Abram. This chapter shows us the steps God took to preserve the Messianic line. The life span of man was getting shorter.

Now the second account is of Terah. It leads us to the man who will take up some 25% of the book of Genesis. Terah was 70 years old when he had his first son. Now I don't believe that he fathered triplets, but, like Noah, we see that he had three

sons. Abram was not the firstborn even though he is listed first. As we noted with Noah's sons, the Bible will often record the person of importance first. Japheth was the oldest, but Shem is listed first because it is his lineage that is important in the Messianic line. Abram is listed first because he is the focus.

There are a couple other things to note in our passage. Haran is the father of Lot who then is Abram's nephew. We learn that Haran died in his homeland, Ur and so Abram became Lot's guardian. We also learn that Milcah was Haran's daughter and that his brother Nahor married her. Scholars believe that just as Abram became Lot's guardian so Nahor became Milcah's guardian. When his niece was old enough, he married her. It wouldn't be until the Law given to Moses that this kind of marriage arrangement would be unlawful. We are introduced to Nahor because later on he would become important in the Messianic narrative as the grandfather of Laban and Rebekah, the same Rebekah that Abram's grandson, Jacob, would marry.

We also learn that Abram married Sarai. We learn from **Genesis 20** that she is his half-sister. Terah then had at least one other wife. We also read that Sarai was barren and if this is the Messianic line through Abram, it shows us that the redeemer would not come naturally, but through a supernatural intervention by God in Sarai's life. This would be important in the development of faith and the call of God in the life of Abram. In spite of man's lack of interest in God, He was working to preserve the Messianic line.

It's not just another list of descendants but an important step toward the coming Messiah and the people God used to make that happen as well as to show us the faith required along the way. The remaining verses show us that sometimes there can be a long distraction.

II. A LONG DISTRACTION – vs. 31-32

I want to begin here by interjecting a thought from the writings of Henry Morris. This is the only place

I read this and I have never heard it before. Now he's not dogmatic on it, but he suggests from what is written here that Terah and Abraham may have received the same call from God to leave Ur and travel to Canaan. We read in **verse 31** that **“Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of Abram and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.”**

Let me just back up a moment and talk about Ur. There is some debate among scholars as to its location. Some think it was up near Haran. There is some archeological evidence to suggest there was a town by that name in the north. But it seems more likely that the place was in the south along the Euphrates River because that was the place of Chaldeans.

If you live in Brighton, you might tell a person from England that you live in Brighton, Michigan so he doesn't assume you are referring to Brighton, England. Saying that they lived in Ur of the Chaldeans distinguishes it from any other city that had the same name.

The best indication is that Ur was in the south region, but that leaves us with another question. If they were traveling to Canaan, which was to the west, why did they travel north to Haran, especially when it was about the same distance away? The topography of the land probably had a good deal to do with taking that route. Traveling north to Haran would take them along the Euphrates river which was a major source of water that ran the entire length of their route. Second, this was also a major trade route between the northwest and southeast, so it was well traveled. Third, if they traveled through the region of Arabia directly to Canaan, they would have had a limited water supply, they would have had to navigate over or around some mountainous areas as well as travel through a large desert region. It seems natural that they would have chosen to travel north in order to get to Canaan.

Ruins of that region have been discovered revealing that in the time Abram lived Ur was a thriving

civilization and culture that was quite advanced including idolatrous worship. When the people were scattered after Babel apostasy continued to spread. With each passing generation, even in the Messianic lineage, there was an increasing distance between man and God. We might even say that the godly line was polluted. At Ur there was a 3-stage ziggurat where worship was centered. The top had a shrine to Nanna, the moon god. This was the culture and the religious activity in which Abram's family worshipped and a religion that Abram left. It's even possible that Abram stood on top of one of these ziggurats worshipping the moon.

Even some of the names in our text have reference to moon worship which shows that the family was steeped in this religion.

Terah is related to two words for moon and lunar month.

Sarai was equivalent to Akkadian *sarratu* or queen and was the name of the wife of the moon god.

Milcah is the same name for the goddess Malkatu, the title of Ishtar, daughter of the moon god.

After conquering much of the land, Joshua reminds the Israelites of their history with these words:

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.’” (Joshua 24:2)

In **12:1** we will consider that God had called Abram from this idolatrous background to go to Canaan leaving his family to separate himself from his pagan past.

Listen to what Herbert Lockyer has to say in his book All the Men of the Bible. **“It was God's purpose to separate Abraham from his kindred, but Terah and Lot left with him, an exodus, perhaps, Abraham could not prevent.”**

I'll tell you now in case I forget next week, that I believe Abram should not have taken Lot along on this journey to Canaan and that Terah shouldn't have been the leader of the band. Lockyer explains it this way: **“Why did Terah die at Haran? Was it not his intention to go to Canaan?...Lot, although he**

reached Canaan, was a constant grief to his uncle. The death of Terah seems to suggest that complete separation unto God often means the severance of some of earth's dearest ties. Terah is also a type of many who step out for Christ but whose hopes of discipleship die half way. Beginning in the Spirit they end in the flesh. Halfway converts never make wholehearted saints. Are you at Haran or is yours the joy of living in Canaan?"

The last verse tells us that Terah died while in Haran. Now we don't know how long they lived there before Terah's death. In **12:4** we read that Abram was 75 years old. In **Acts 7:2-4** we discover that he was in Mesopotamia or Ur of the Chaldeas when he received the call of God before going to Haran where Terah died. After that he went to Canaan.

Once again Henry Morris suggests that the text may not be speaking of the physical death of Terah but of something else. In referring to Stephen's sermon to the Sanhedrin Morris suggest that Terah had become "dead" to the will of God for his life if in fact Terah was a part of the original call back in Ur. But once they arrived in Haran, the comfort of the city along with the familiar worship of the moon god, which they also honored in Haran, wooed Terah away from the primary purpose of going to Canaan. Now, that is speculation on the part of Morris in suggesting this. Perhaps Abram felt a measure of responsibility to care for his father. But what we do know for sure is this, and again it comes from the pen of Henry Morris: This example serves as "a sobering warning to any in later times who would allow ease or comfort to hinder them from following Christ."

Luke 14:15-20

And so it is there that I wish to leave our discussion about a long distraction and conclude with a look at discipleship.

III.A LOOK AT DISCIPLESHIP

It should be our desire to finish strong in faith, instead of just coasting Christians.

Now let me come back for a moment to our opening discussion on distractions. Whether or not Morris's theory is correct that Terah was a part of this call in Ur one thing is absolutely certain and that is Abram was distracted from the original call for a lengthy period of time.

We have all been there, being distracted that is. You're cleaning the living room and taking something to another room where it belongs only to find something there that needs to be cleaned so you start cleaning there even though you haven't finished in the living room.

You're cooking dinner when the phone rings. You answer it and get lost in deep conversation only to end up with what now becomes a burnt offering.

You're studying for a test and remember that you forgot to do something for another class and become distracted by that.

You're in the middle of a project and your spouse asks you to do something and it takes your mind off your task.

You're driving along and something catches your eye – a cool looking car, a new store, a beautiful house, a herd of deer – and you're distracted from driving.

It happens to all of us. The reality is that have distractions all the time, all day long and no matter what Steven Covey says in his book First Things First or what you learn at those daily planner seminars, there will always be distractions that vie for our time and attention pulling us from whatever it is we're doing in the moment.

Even more troubling is that it's no different in the Christian life. Anything and everything can become a distraction in doing what God wants us to do. We'll read next week in **12:1** that God told Abram to leave his family and go to Canaan. For some reason the family joined him and they got distracted in Haran and **11:31** says they settled there.

Maybe God has been speaking to you. Maybe He's been speaking to you for quite some time and you

have allowed things or people to distract you.

You've settled into what has become your Haran.

What is it that has distracted you from going where or doing what God wants you to do?

Let me suggest a number of things that can become distractions from God's intent and purpose for our lives.

1. Money

Not just having it, but also pursuing it. Now there's nothing wrong with having money. Abraham and Job were quite wealthy. But if it keeps us from what God wants us to do then it's a distraction and it's wrong

Matthew 6:19-33

Luke 12:16-21

The pursuit of money can distract us from doing what or going where God wants.

2. Attachments

I'm talking about the accumulation of things. But it doesn't even have to be owning things, it can be in the desire for things. They can distract us. Now, like money, having things, even having nice things isn't wrong, but if they distract from God...

3. Media

My Mom used to say the devil knew what he was doing when the Walk Disney show aired Sunday nights at 7 because more families started staying home from church.

From binge watching your favorite TV series to the time you spend on social media to playing video games to reading a favorite author, some of which can be good, but are they distracting you from time with God? If we are more concerned about your status on Facebook by constantly looking at how many likes or shares a recent posting has, then we are distracted.

Entertainment that keep us from doing what God wants us to do tell Him He's not as important.

Do we let different kinds of media sources distract us from doing what God wants us to do?

4. Church

Now you might think that's a bit odd to list as a distraction from doing what God wants, but think about it for a moment. **What's the reason we gather together? Isn't it for worship? What if church became a distraction? What if your service or involvement at church became a distraction?** We might think that God is really pleased with what we're doing for Him in church when it is really a distraction from what He really wants us to do.

When my folks started seriously considering moving to Barakel because they believed God was calling them to a life of ministry there, some well meaning church folks talked to them about all the stuff they were doing at church, things that others would have to start doing – Deacon, teachers, Jr. church superintendent, choir members, janitors. Some thought they were already doing what God wanted.

Busying ourselves in church activity can keep us from doing what God really wants us to do.

If church is just so you can check off a box, then it's a distraction from hearing or obeying God. If you are so busy in the doing that you ignore the hearing you're distracted. Church may be a Haran where we can get quite comfortable and settle down.

5. Relationships

Through Camp I met a man who was one of the godliest men I knew. Early in life he wanted to be a missionary to China, but instead he was a high school science teacher. After he got married his wife made it clear that she did not want to go and so a relationship kept him from Canaan. I think that's what happened to Abram. Family relationships for a time kept him in Haran. It can be a spouse, a child, a co-worker, a classmate. Relationships, good or bad, can distract us from doing God's will.

Psalm 1:1

Have you allowed relationships to distract you?

6. Routine

Doing the same thing can become a distraction. It can squeeze God out. We fill our schedule with more routine. We drink our instant coffee while we eat our instant oatmeal made in our microwave ovens so we can pack more into the day and all those compounded activities serve not to get more done but to keep us from meeting with God and going where God wants.

7. Work

The demands of work can distract us from God. Instead of leaving work at work we bring it home. **Luke 10:38-42** – Martha was distracted by work.

8. Hobbies

9. Ourselves

We can let sin distract us. **Romans 6:12** tells us not to let sin reign in our lives that we should obey it.

10. The world

Romans 12:2

I John 2:15-16

The question is this: what has you stuck in Haran when God wants you to be in Canaan?

Luke 10:27 tells us we are to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Luke 9:23 says we are to count the cost dying to self so that we can follow Him.

John 14:15, 21 say that if we love the Lord we will obey His commands and show we are His followers.

We read in **Jeremiah 29:11** that God has specific plans for us, but there are all kinds of things that can become distractions keeping us from doing what and going where God wants us to go.

God's plan for Abram was to go to Canaan. It was the beginning of his journey of faith. Maybe we'd like to cut Abram a little slack, after all, we argue, he is new to faith, to following God. But if there is one thing we learn throughout Scripture is this: faith is obedient. Faith doesn't use the excuse of distractions. Faith and obedience are inseparable in man's relationship with God. Faith acts in complete obedience. In the ensuing chapters we will see how

Abram's faith continues to grow.

So, are you headed to Canaan in faith, or has something distracted you along the way in Haran? Will you step out in faith and get moving trusting God to lead you?

Communion is a good time to take stock of your faith and relationship with God, to see if there is something that has you stuck in Haran, stalled in doing what He wants. Join in David's prayer by asking God to search your heart and thoughts. To reveal any offensive way that might be in you and lead you in the way everlasting. (**Psalm 139:23-24**)

Before we take communion, would you turn to Hymn #657 and let's sing stanzas 1 and 3 as we prepare our hearts to take the bread and cup.
Hymn #657 – Cleanse Me

What will it take for you to get moving on the way to the Canaan where God wants you to be?

Communion slide