

THE LESSON EXPLAINED

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Time and Place—About B.C. 2300; Ur of the Chaldees, now called Mugheir, on the west bank of the Euphrates, 140 miles southeast of Babylon; Haran, Abram's home for a few years, 500 miles northwest of Ur, 60 miles east of the great ford of the Euphrates at Carchemish, the starting point of the great caravan route to the Mediterranean; Shechem and Bethel in Palestine.

Foreword—The title, Genesis, for the first book of the Bible is derived from the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament made in Alexandria about B.C. 200), in which it is called, *The Origin (Genesis) of the World*. Another title, *The Book of Origins*, is most appropriate since Genesis is preeminently *The Book of Hebrew Origins*. It traces the history of Israel from three epochs: (1) The Creation (chs. 1-5); (2) The Flood (chs. 6 to 11); (3) The Call of Abraham. The first eleven chapters show how Israel was related to the other nations of the earth, through its descent from the first man and from Noah, the second head of the human race. With the present lesson the study of the third epoch is begun, and we shall see how Israel gradually developed into a separate and distinct nation amongst the peoples of the world.

I. God's Command, 1.

V. 1. *Now the Lord said* (Rev. Ver.); not necessarily in words, but by bringing home to Abram his duty. "God's voice is to be thought of not as something external, but as heard within Abram's inmost soul" (Delitzsch). After a manner common in scripture, Abram's experience is dramatized to make it vivid. *Unto Abram*. Read ch. 11:10-32. The name means "The father (a divine title) is exalted." *Get thee out*; from Haran (see ch. 11:31). Abram had dwelt, until he was probably 70 years old, in Ur of the Chaldees (see Geography Lesson), a city noted for its worship of the moon god and for its worldliness and immorality. His removal from Ur to Haran, like that from Haran to Canaan, was under divine direction. We are to think of the episode in the lesson, as not merely the

travels of a childless couple with their nephew and servants, but the migration of wandering tribes, which afterwards became Israel, Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc. In ch. 14:14 Abram appears as the leader of 318 fighting men, which would imply a following of some 2,000 persons. Such migrations were a feature of that time in the Euphrates valley. Abram's case was peculiar in that he was influenced by a religious motive, perhaps the desire to escape from idolatry or from persecution because of his refusal to countenance idolatrous practices. *Country . . . kindred . . . father's house*. These expressions are heaped up to show the greatness of the demand made upon Abram. *Unto a land*; not named, and therefore the trial of Abram's faith would be intensified. "There is intentional pathos in the lingering description of the things he is to leave, and a corresponding significance in the vagueness with which the goal is indicated" (Skinner).

II. God's Promise, 2, 3.

Vs. 2, 3. *A great nation*. Amongst the ancients a numerous posterity was greatly desired; but to be the father of a people was a destiny almost surpassing hope. The first promise, like the summons from Haran, was a severe test of Abram's faith, for he was a childless old man. *I will bless thee . . . thy name great*; a second promise,—prosperity and happiness through the favor of God and honor among men. *Be thou a blessing* (Rev. Ver.); the incarnation of blessing, most blessed. Or, the meaning may be that Abram's blessedness is to become a proverb, so that people will say: "May you be as blessed as Abram." This is the third promise. *Bless them . . . curse him*; the fourth promise. Abram will become indirectly a source of blessing to others. His friends will be God's friends, his enemies, God's enemies. *All the families* (Rev. Ver.); nations. *Be blessed*; the fifth promise. If the ordinary translation is right, the reference is to the extension of the religious privileges of Abram and his descendants to the Gentiles. But the correct translation may be "bless themselves," meaning that all peoples would look upon Abram as the most blessed of men and seek to be like him.