

Genesis 11:10–32

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[0 : 00] That's Genesis 11, verses 10 to 32. Please stand for the reading of God's word. These are the generations of Shem.

When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad, two years after the flood. And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he fathered Shela. And Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shela 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

When Shela had lived 30 years, he fathered Eber. And Shela lived after he fathered Eber 403 years and had other sons and daughters. When Eber had lived 34 years, he fathered Peleg.

And Eber lived after he fathered Peleg 430 years and had other sons and daughters. When Pelag had lived 30 years, he fathered Ry■. And Pelag lived after he fathered Ry■ 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

[1 : 05] When Ry■ had lived 32 years, he fathered Saru. And Ry■ lived after he fathered Saru 207 years and had other sons and daughters. When Saru had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor.

And Saru lived after he fathered Nahor 200 years and had other sons and daughters. When Nahor had lived 29 years, he fathered Terah. And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah 219 years and had other sons and daughters.

When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

And Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives.

The name of Abram's wife was Sarai and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren. She had no child.

[2 : 08] Terah took Abram, his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai, his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife.

And they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. You may be seated.

Good morning. It's a joy to be together on this lovely Chicago summer day.

And I'll do my best to not keep us out here longer than we ought to be. Let me just pray as we open the Bible together.

[3 : 30] Father, as we come to your word, we ask for your help. That we would see the beauty of your son in it.

That we would see our need for you. And that we would be compelled to live for you. And so go with us in these next moments, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. In the world of professional athletics, each year, teams are given an opportunity to improve themselves in what is called the draft.

The draft. The National Football League has it. The National Basketball Association has it. Major League Baseball has it. It's an opportunity for teams to select up-and-coming international players or emerging stars from the college ranks with the hope of improving their team's chances at winning.

Millions of dollars are spent on scouts, on analysis, on tests to determine how each team should select an individual.

[4 : 41] Certainly physical and performance tests are conducted. Cognitive and mental tests are conducted. And emotional and social background tests are also considered because an athlete's character matters.

The value of an individual determines their desirability. The value of the individual determines their desirability.

The better they do, the more they're worth. The more they can bring to the table, the more coveted they will be. This is how our professional world operates as well.

The most qualified are hired. The brightest and the most intelligent are granted admission. The most beautiful are paraded.

Though it's certainly not survival of the fittest, it is certainly selection of the finest. And this is what makes the Christian faith quite scandalous.

[5 : 49] God subverts and inverts this notion entirely. Contrary to selecting the finest, he tends to pick failures.

Instead of selecting what the world deems best, he is drawn more toward the broken. Though people would align with those in power, God tends to draw near to those who are poor.

One writer has said that as we come to this section in Genesis, there is no section more important in the book of Genesis than this week and next week's texts.

For it will introduce to us, to you and I, the reader, how the whole world would be blessed by God.

There is no other text more valuable, this writer says, to Genesis than this one. Because it introduces to you and I how the whole world would be blessed by God.

[6 : 54] It is so significant. I would argue for you to even understand the global world, the global religious world. You must understand these texts.

Because all three monotheistic religions emerge out of this text, this one single individual. This passage this morning highlights God's unusual election.

God's unusual election. Genesis up to this point has been concerned about the whole world. The universal, all people, its creation. Not only the creation of the world, the deconstruction of the world. The populating of the world. The formation of human settlements within the world. And God's covenant with the world. The concern has been captured by iterations you see throughout these first 11 chapters of all the earth, all the earth, all the earth.

God's concern up to this point has been the whole world. How he would provide and care and sustain and maintain it. He is moving, according to chapter 12, verse 3, to bless the world.

[8 : 03] And he would accomplish it through one unlikely individual. One unlikely individual. After the flood. If you and I were to appoint a person or to identify an individual to birth a nation.

Most likely you and I would have elected Nimrod. Who is found in the preceding chapter there in chapter 10, verse 9. He is a mighty hunter before the Lord.

Powerful. Prestigious. Noble. We would think he would be the most suitable and the most qualified. Yet this is not what we find. On the contrary, we find God's eye locked on an insignificant, irrelevant individual.

It would be to this one individual, God would focus his affection, his attention, and his grace. He would use this unlikely individual to birth his people, his nation.

This is why Genesis, for the next 12 chapters, will dedicate the chapters to him. The theological term that many use here is for God's selection is simply election.

[9 : 20] God's election. Behind God's heart is his election. Here in North America or in the United States, within a democracy, we often think about democratic elections.

When the collective casts ballots to vote for a particular person to put them into office and power. This is not how God's election works. It's not democratic.

God, within himself, casts a ballot and he picks a person and votes them unto salvation.

Theologically, it can simply be defined as God's divine selection of a person out of his free, generous favor.

It's unconstrained and unconditional, not merited by any of those who are its subjects. These individuals don't achieve it or acquire it. Rather, they find themselves undeserving recipients of it. Undeserving recipients of God's favor and special affection. And if I were to title this morning's message, well, let me just title it this. It's called God's Unlikely Choice.

[10 : 31] God's Unlikely Choice. This morning, I want to give you a snapshot of God's heart. God's heart is tender to the broken.

He is one who seeks to mend what is messed up. Redeem what is irreparable. Correct the corrupt. In other words, God can take brokenness and transform it and bring blessing.

Despite human brokenness in the world, God would still continue to bless. Well, I've been tasked with bringing two genealogies before us this morning.

I'm going to spend little time on the first one and spend the rest of my time on the second. But let me just say something about the first genealogy, verses 10 through 26.

I've titled this section, A Prosperous Family. A Prosperous Family. The first genealogy traces Shem's descendants. It builds off of chapter 10, verse 21, bringing it to a greater fullness.

[11 : 38] It describes the familial line of Shem. It demonstrates Shem's prosperity. The author wants us to know that Shem's family was blessed like he had highlighted in chapter 9, verse 27.

It was within Shem's tents that his brothers would dwell. He was not only prosperous in terms of reproductively, but he was certainly prosperous materially.

The repeated refrain in each of Shem's descendants was that one phrase. You might have caught it as Marjorie read it. They had other sons and daughters. Other sons and daughters.

Other sons and daughters. Other sons and daughters. The picture you're supposed to get is they were fulfilling. Shem's family was fulfilling the divine mandate to be fruitful and multiply.

You may recall about a month ago, we visited another genealogy in Genesis chapter 5. And the refrain there was, and so he died. And he died.

[12 : 41] And he died. This genealogy doesn't have that refrain. Well, certainly they died. But the author's intention is to demonstrate the proliferation of Shem's family.

Though the figureheads live shorter lives, there is diminishing lifespans compared to those who live pre-flood. The genealogy is teeming with life and blessing.

The family is immensely fruitful and multiplying over the face of the earth. There's a sense of continuation. God is preserving people. The writer wants us to sense life, its fullness, its proliferation, and prosperity.

Shem was uniquely favored among his brothers. That family was uniquely blessed by God. But the text is doing something more.

It's doing what you and I do when we open up our devices and go to the Maps app. You know, perhaps you just type in Chicago. And there you see it, a giant region of 77 neighborhoods with a lake on its east side.

[13 : 51] And you want to zoom into a particular location. And there you take your two fingers and you zoom and it gets closer. And you begin to see larger streets and monuments. And then you zoom a little bit closer.

And you begin to see neighborhoods and houses. And you zoom in a little bit closer. And you begin to see particular streets and addresses and objects. And if you zoom into my house, you'll see my minivan parked across the street.

And this is what the text is doing. The text is actually giving us the snapshot of Shem. And then it is pinching in and zooming us in.

Because it wants us to look at a singular individual. Namely, Abram. Coming out of these first 16 verses, we see a prosperous family.

But then, in these last five verses, we see a peculiar family. Peculiar family. Here begins the emergence of the family of God.

[14 : 56] People born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God. God would soon commence the birth of a nation. And these short verses give us that background.

As nations, as we've already seen earlier in Genesis, are emerging and growing power and settling in fixed spaces.

God would forge his own nation. But in the most unexpected way. I take the word peculiar from the King James Version translation. For its meaning is twofold.

It's unusual. And it's unlikely God's family should come from here. Following the flood and the repopulation. This is the first note that we have.

Noteworthy mention of death. After the flood, there's been chapters of genealogies and life and settling and nations being established.

[15 : 58] And it's all about life. Descendant after descendant. Settlement upon settlement. Despite the flood and the lingering sinfulness, people are still populating the earth.

Life was prevalent and persistent. But we're reminded here that death still reigns. The world that we live in is still marred and broken.

And I want you to observe three things about Tara's family. Abram's family. The first thing to note is this. There is bereavement.

Bereavement. The narrator wants us to know, according to verse 28, that sometimes children die before their parents. As Adam had lost his son Abel to violence and murder, Tara lost his son Haran.

Besides Cain and Abel, every expectation up to this point leaves us with the belief that sons outlive their fathers.

[17:07] And this is our expectation as well, isn't it? No parent should have to bury their child. And the text doesn't elaborate how it happened.

It doesn't tell us if it was illness or unnaturally through accident or violence. It simply records that a father had three sons and now only has two. We are shown that the world is broken because life is lost prematurely.

And death always has an impact. Doesn't it? It leaves people behind. Haran now has left three children. The text has identified them.

Lot, Milka, and Iska. His death left orphans. They are left with no provider, no protector, no preserver. The family was broken.

And there were cultural customs created to mend these circumstances. So you'll see it. Nahor took his niece, Milka, as his wife that was permitted in those days.

[18:10] Iska, the daughter, never re-merges in the narrative. So we're not sure what happens to her. And it's been argued that Lot actually was adopted by Abram. Given how the rest of the narrative unfolds.

The text tells us how the family was mended. But it won't let us forget that the world was broken.

Tara's family would be marked by bereavement.

The loss of a son. Fatherless children. Bereavement. Yet it's not only bereavement that strikes this family. The second observation is found in verse 30.

Barrenness. Sarai was barren. And the author goes out of his way to enunciate this fact.

Sarai was barren. She had no children. She had no child. And within the prosperous genealogy of Shem, in the preceding verses, this is so noteworthy.

[19:13] When the preceding text is teeming with life and fullness and abundance and prosperity. Here we have no prospect of life. No hope for a future.

When the chapter is repeatedly celebrating sons and daughters and sons and daughters. Sons and daughters. And here, no possibility for son or daughter.

As the chapter brags of progeny. Here we have an individual who was unable to propagate life.

Sarai at her holiday party was the one who was held suspect. As parents bragged about their child's achievements.

My little daughter so-and-so is reading at the age of blank. My son recently graduated and was granted admission to the University of Babel.

[20:15] As parents boasted of their children. Sarai would have no child. To show forth. Married. But no children.

What is wrong. With you, Sarai. Shame. The text tells us that she was barren.

One writer writes, Barrenness is an effective metaphor for hopelessness. There is no foreseeable future. There is no human power to invent a future.

And here we have it. The end of a genealogy. A couple. Left out. Forgotten.

Abandoned. Abandoned. By God. Taris family was bereaved. His son had passed. His daughter-in-law was barren.

[21:15] And the text doesn't tell us what compels him to pick up his family and migrate. But it records that he resolved to move from Ur of the Chaldeans all the way to Canaan. And on their way, they come to Haran, the city.

And the text tells us they settled there. They gave up on their original destination and they put down roots in Haran.

They changed their plans and anchored in Haran. What was possibly a layover became their dwelling for the long haul. Genesis doesn't tell us what held them up.

But it certainly leaves us with a hint that it wasn't desirable. This was not the intention. We already know this from chapter 11. Because the chapter opens up.

The peoples of the earth got together and they settled in Shinar. And here at the end of the chapter, you have Terah and his family settling in Haran.

[22 : 12] Terah, it shares the same sentiment. They were not supposed to do that. They were supposed to soldier not to settle.

And we don't have to find out long. We don't have to take long to find out what actually happened. Joshua 24 verse 2 tells us, Long ago your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates.

Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor. Served other gods. So here was the reason.

On their way to Canaan, Terah settled in Haran. And when he was supposed to be sojourning, he settles. And what happens? He starts serving other gods.

Extra-biblical sources attest to the worship of the moon there. Terah, on his way to his new home, gets entangled by a new god. In migration, he gets mesmerized by the moon.

[23 : 17] Terah, direct descendant of Noah. In the most promising line, the most prosperous line, now had found a new god. I just presumed beforehand he was a worshiper of the god that made the heavens and the earth.

Certainly, the story had been passed on from generation to generation. Let me tell you about the days of Noah when God spared our family.

And from generation to generation, Terah would have heard this story. Terah would have heard this story. But perhaps in Haran, he considered his life. God hasn't worked up to this point.

I'm bereaved. I've lost a son. My daughter-in-law is barren. My family is broken. And now I don't believe. And so he settles. Sadly, our passage ends.

The days of Terah were 205 years. And Terah died in Haran. Tragically, Terah died devoted to a false deity.

[24 : 21] And as I wrap up, imagine this. What a backdrop. What a background. Bereaved. Barren. Broken. Unbelieving.

Terrible family story. Does God actually care about this small, minuscule family? Bereaved by the loss of life. Does God actually care about a closed womb, unable to conceive and foster a child? Does God actually care about a family who doesn't believe? What could possibly God do with such a family? With such a background. With such hopelessness.

Is it even redeemable? This is our thinking today. Right? Does my background?

Do my experiences? Does my inability to meet standards? Does my family circumstance that's in shambles?

[25 : 29] Does the non-existent faith of my father? Does the fact that my womb is barren, literally or metaphorically? Does it actually matter to God?

Is it redeemable? Is it? Is it? Repairable? Is it lovable?

And you and I, we commence our own building efforts. I'm going to make something of myself. I will prove to the world that I'm worth something.

Science may assert that the fittest survive. But society asserts that the finest are selected.

Therefore, I will make myself the finest.

My marketability. My qualifications. My desirability. My potential. I'm going to make something of myself.

[26 : 33] And in human brokenness, we try to build. Let me make myself the best thing I can be. Yet to be honest, the text tells us our best achievements actually lead to God's rejection.

Babel attests to the truth. That regardless of how hard you try to make yourself something. It's divinely rejected. Instead, the answer God will provide is brokenness in election.

You see, it's the brokenness, the waywardness, the hopelessness, the bereavement, the barrenness, the unbelief. That in all this is ripe with the possibility of God's election.

Under God's sovereign rule, blessing can come from brokenness. Brokenness would be the tapestry of God's redemptive plan.

Listen carefully. God did not start his nation with the most powerful, the most mighty, and the most wealthy.

[27 : 45] He birthed a nation out of bereavement, barrenness, and unbelief. And if he did it here, he can certainly do it with your life.

Regardless of your status or potentiality, God elects out of his kindness and love. No background is too broken.

No life is too lost for God to seize and bless. We are all like Abraham. Abram. This is our testimony.

This is our witness. Undeserved, unearned, yet elected by God. We are. We can and we ought to affirm this statement.

We are God's unlikely choice. We are a peculiar people. The whole Bible attests to this.

[28 : 47] When God goes, or Jesus goes and picks disciples, he doesn't go and pick the one who has the most potential. That's who you may pick when you go dating for a romantic affection.

Who has the most potential? I can marry that person because they have potential. God doesn't select based on potential. God selects out of love.

God selected his 12 because they were the most suitable platforms to demonstrate his saving power. God didn't choose me or you because you were perfect or had potential.

God chose to redeem you so that your life would be a platform to demonstrate his saving power. And what is left here is the fledgling family of Abram.

This is the background where God's people would emerge. Here would begin God's nation. And to put it frankly, this is where the church begins. Despite bereavement.

[29 : 55] Despite bareness. Despite unbelief. And soon we'll see, despite Abram's doubt, God would make something out of Abram.

God would pick a man and make much of himself through him. He would become the father of many nations. In Christ, God would redeem a people who are without hope in the world.

Abram had no idea what God would make of him. Out of Sarai's barrenness would emerge not only a nation, but emerge a redeemer. One who would reverse all brokenness in the Lord Jesus.

The redeemer's name is Jesus. And Matthew tells us he's the son of Abram. But Sarai was barren.

Jesus, the son of Abram. The son of God. Jesus would experience the brokenness of the world.

And he himself would take it upon himself to bear the sins of the world.

[31 : 03] Upon the cross, he would purchase for himself a people. Those who hear the call of God and follow him. And those are the gracious recipients of God's election.

A peculiar people. A broken people. An undeserving people. This morning, we have an opportunity to take communion together.

It's a commemorative act for those of us who have received the saving work of Jesus as our own. It is for those, only those, who call themselves Christian.

As you walked in, hopefully you received the elements. If not, feel free to slip up your hand. And Drew will approach you and pass it to you. But we're going to just close with communion together.

It's an appropriate way to close. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. That on the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread.

[32 : 10] And when he had given thanks, he broke it. And he said, this is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, he took the cup after supper.

And he said, this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. We're going to pause.

And feel free to unwrap the elements. And we will partake together. All right.

As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's pray. And as I pray, I'm going to invite the musicians up to close our service. Father, we come to you. And we are broken people.

[33 : 39] We have backgrounds that if people actually knew, would certainly not befriend us. But in the mystery and the kindness and the generosity and the love of God, that you called out and we answered.

You picked us. Out of all the people in the world, you picked us. And Father, we pray that we would respond with great humility and gratitude.

That though we are the least likely, here we are. Before you. Assembled. In you. And walking toward you.

So help us to this end. Help us to love the Lord Jesus. To follow after him. And to live unto him. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.