

Letter From the Editors

September 2023

Dear Teacher,

We can grow in our relationship with God as we study and share the scriptures with our students! This quarter we will learn about “God’s Covenants with People.” We will learn about how God’s covenant promises were made and kept with people throughout the Bible. Following God can be challenging because there are so many distractions. As we go through the lessons this quarter, we should ask ourselves: who are we following?

We will begin by learning about God. Then we will learn about God’s relationships with Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Israel, Joshua, King David, King Josiah, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job. We will see that God keeps His promises even when we don’t keep ours. God is loyal and calls us to follow Him.

This quarter highlights the message: let’s follow God! Our love for God and other people can change our world. Finally, we end the quarter remembering that following God doesn’t mean everything will go our way. It means that even when we feel sad, we turn to God. When we make bad choices, we turn back to God. When good things happen, we thank God. As you go through this quarter, we pray that you will get to know God better and help your students get to know Him just like the people in the Bible did!

Grace & Peace,

UMI Editorial Team

Uncovering the Benefits of Direction: The Entire Bible in One Year

It is a great privilege to participate in Christian education and play a significant role in the spiritual formation of fellow Christians. This year, the September Quarter of *Direction*® is part one of a four-part series that will guide you in reading the entire Bible in one year. To that end, please take full advantage of the substantive offerings provided to you in this publication.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

To best take advantage of this study series, start each week by reading the **Weekly Bible Study Guide**. This guide offers scripture in KJV. It also offers, “The People, Places, and Times,” “Background,” “In Depth,” and “More Light on the Text” sections to help provide insight and understanding of the text. In each lesson, you will also see “In Focus” stories and “Liberating Lesson” sections serving as catalysts for applying the biblical text to life situations.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

On the last page of each of the Weekly Study Guides you’ll see a box titled **Daily Bible Readings**. The scriptures are there to guide you through your Bible reading for the rest of the week.

QR CODES

Next to the In Focus stories each week, you will see **QR Codes**. The codes will lead you to additional content, including videos of our In Focus stories and Teaching Tips. To use the

QR Code, open the camera app on your mobile device to scan the QR Code. Then click on the link to access the videos and teaching tips. Need additional help accessing these resources? Please call 1-800-860-8642 for assistance.



HOLIDAY FEATURES

Starting on page 132 you will see the **Holiday Features** section. This section includes articles that highlight liturgical and cultural holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Juneteenth. Many of the articles inspire the reader to reflect on the spiritual and historical foundation of the holidays, and give us a commission to remember why we celebrate.

BLACK HISTORY PROFILES

There are three **Black History Profiles** starting on page 5. These profiles feature African and African American leaders who used their God-given gifts and talents to help their communities. They are testaments to how God can use a person to make a positive impact locally, nationally, and globally.

We believe *Direction*® is a great tool to help form fully devoted followers of Christ, and we invite you to wholeheartedly partake in all of the resources provided each quarter.

The Entire Bible in One Year

Quarter At-A-Glance – September 2023

September 3, 2023: Week 1 Genesis **Blessing for All Nations** **Genesis 12:1–9**

The Lord instructs Abram to take his family to another country and promises to make him a great name and nation. Abram obeyed the Lord and went toward the Land of Canaan.

September 10, 2023: Week 2 Exodus **Obeying God's Law** **Exodus 20:18–26**

Without obedience to the law, people live in chaos, hurting themselves, others, and their environment. God delivered the commandments to the Israelites while showing divine and holy power that tested them to convince them to obey the laws of the covenant.

September 17, 2023: Week 3 Leviticus **Living as God's Just People** **Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37**

This chapter begins with a call to reflect on the nature of God: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (v. 2, NKJV).

September 24, 2023: Week 4 Numbers **People Grumble** **Numbers 11:1–6, 10–15**

During times of trouble, what happens when we forget our blessings? When God brought the people out of slavery in Egypt and provided for them in the desert, Moses and the people complained repeatedly, loudly, and often about their hardships. They had forgotten what God had done for them.

October 1, 2023: Week 5 Deuteronomy **The Heart of the Law** **Deuteronomy 10:12–22; 16:18–20**

The principle underlying justice in this passage does not originate in humankind, but in the nature of God. Loving God involves more than a sentimental response; it means serving God with one's heart and soul.

October 8, 2023: Week 6 Joshua **God Is Victorious** **Joshua 6:2–3, 4b, 12–20b**

At God's command, Joshua and the children of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days. On the final day as Israel conquered the city, God miraculously caused the walls to collapse.

October 15, 2023: Week 7 Judges - Ruth **Listen to God's Judges** **Judges 2:11–19**

This passage is an introduction to the book of Judges, which explains Israel's recurring cycles of national apostasy.

October 22, 2023: Week 8 1-2 Samuel **God's Covenant with David** **2 Samuel 7:1–13**

This lesson is based on the story of David's desire to build a permanent structure for the Ark of God, a house for the Lord. Instead, God promises to establish David's dynasty including a descendant who would build the temple and establish his kingdom forever.

October 29, 2023: Week 9 1-2 Kings

Josiah Brings Reform

2 Kings 22:8-10; 23:1-3, 21-23

During the repair of the temple, the Book of the Covenant was found and brought to King Josiah. Upon reading it and realizing God's Word was not being followed, Josiah called the people together, read the Book of the Covenant to them, and led them in a renewal of the covenant, pledging to follow the Lord and keep His commands.

November 5, 2023: Week 10 1-2 Chronicles

The Ark Comes to Jerusalem

1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-28

King David was seeking to deliver the Ark of the Covenant to a temporary tent where it would be housed. The ark itself is a symbol of the importance of worship in the lives of God's people.

November 12, 2023: Week 11 Ezra - Nehemiah

Nehemiah: The Captive Cupbearer Rebuilds a Nation

Nehemiah 2:11-20

People are often contemplative before they make major decisions. How does one or should one react after careful consideration of a major decision? Nehemiah set out to rebuild the wall after praying and surveying the ruins.

November 19, 2023: Week 12 Esther

A Time for Courage

Esther 3:2-3, 5-6a; 4:7-16

Haman was infuriated when Mordecai refused to bow down to him. In retaliation, he ordered not only that Mordecai be killed, but all the Jews of the kingdom. Mordecai gave this message to Esther, the queen, who was his cousin/niece. Mordecai told Esther to plead the cause of the Jewish people before the king.

November 26, 2023: Week 13 Job

When Tragedy Occurs

Job 1:14-15, 18-19, 22; 3:1-3, 11

These Scripture passages deal with the age-old question, "Why do Christians or good people suffer?" It acknowledges the fact that even God said that Job was "perfect, upright, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). However, these facts did not keep Job from being tried in the crucible of suffering.

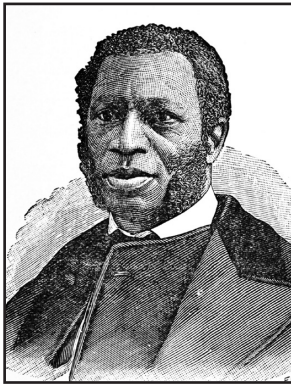
Worshipping With Their Talents – Black History Profile Social Justice – First Half of 20th Century

RICHARD CAIN

(1825 – 1887)

Minister | Abolitionist | U.S. Representative South Carolina (1873-1875)

Richard Cain was a Christian who lived out his beliefs, especially in the areas concerning social justice for African Americans. He was born in Virginia to a Cherokee mother and an African American father. When he was six years old, they moved to Ohio. Because he lived in a “free state” he was able to get an education, which was primarily through the Sunday School.



Pastor Cain was both a great speaker and a great writer. In order to spread his strong views, particularly in regard to granting land to the newly freed slaves, he began writing and publishing a newspaper, *The South Carolina Leader*, in 1866. Between his church and his newspaper, he was building a strong political group. First he served on the South Carolina group that

fashioned a new state constitution. Then he went on to be elected a state senator.

He was always interested in the ministry, but he had a variety of job experiences. He worked on the steamboats that chugged up and down the Ohio River as one of his first jobs. By 1844 he had entered the Methodist ministry as a pastor, but four years later left that denomination because of its segregated worship practices. He then joined the African Methodist Episcopal church and served as a deacon and then a pastor in Muscatine, Iowa. He desired an education to better prepare himself for the ministry, so he attended Wilberforce University, the first American college founded by African Americans.

When land for former slaves still was not made available, he himself purchased land to sell. Unfortunately, that project eventually went bankrupt. After this unsuccessful attempt, he ran for a seat in the United States Congress and won it. His biggest effort was geared toward the passage of the Civil Rights Bill. As a member of Congress, he was able to make several very stirring speeches on its behalf. He went on to found Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas, and served as its president until 1884. He returned to Washington D.C. and served as the bishop of the AME conference until he died in 1887.

When Pastor Cain was assigned to a church in Brooklyn, New York, he soon became involved in supporting the vote for all men. After the Civil War, Pastor Cain was assigned to a church in Charleston, which had been closed due to a slave revolt in 1822. But under his leadership, the congregation grew to be the largest in the state by 1871.

Profile Written by Judy Hull

Source:

History, Art & Archives – Richard Harvey Cain, Representative from South Carolina. <https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/10470>.

Worshipping With Their Talents – Black History Profile Social Justice – Civil Rights Era

REVEREND WILLIE BARROW

(1924 – 2015)

Civil Rights Leader | Minister | Co-Founder of Operation PUSH

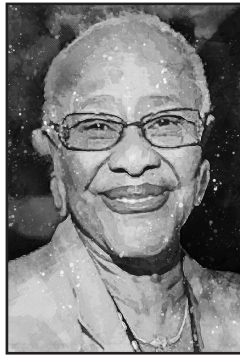
Willie Taplin Barrow was born on December 7, 1924, in Burton, Texas on a farm with her six siblings. Her father, Nelson Taplin, was a local pastor. She was called to ministry when she was sixteen. As a student in the 1940s, she led a demonstration of rural Black schoolchildren against a segregated school system that refused them bus service because of their race. The success of that early campaign taught Barrow that determination and organization could bring about positive social change.

Barrow attended Warner-Pacific Theological Seminary in Portland, Oregon, and as a student, built a church in that city. After graduation, she was ordained as a minister and began her career as both a spiritual and social activist. She was also a welder in a shipyard, where she became involved in the labor movement and met Clyde Barrow, whom she married. They enjoyed more than 50 years of marriage. They had two children, Keith and Patricia.

The family moved to Chicago in 1943, where Barrow studied at the Moody Bible Institute and the Central Conservatory of Music.

In the 1950s and 1960s she became active in the civil rights movement, working with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as a field organizer for marches and demonstrations, which includes the 1965 March on Selma, Alabama.

During the 1960s, Barrow helped found Operation Breadbasket in Chicago, which grew



into Operation PUSH, a program that provided spiritual guidance and practical assistance to communities in need. Barrow was a key “lieutenant” of Jesse Jackson in much of his Chicago-based activism, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. When Jackson ran for president in the 1984 election, she was his campaign manager.

Barrow also worked against US involvement in the Vietnam War. In 1968, she led a three-person delegation to North Vietnam and participated in the negotiation of the Vietnam Peace Treaty.

Barrow was the first woman to serve as a national vice president of Operation PUSH, and in 1986, became the president of Operation PUSH, retiring in 1989. She served as a co-chairperson of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition (RPC) and in 2009, was the RPC chairperson, emeritus. Barrow also served as associate minister of the Vernon Park Church of God in Chicago. Barrow was honored with a doctor of divinity degree from Monrovia, Liberia, and a certificate in leadership from Harvard University. In September 1997, a street on Chicago’s South Side was renamed in her honor. Earlier that year, the Reverend Willie Barrow Wellness Center was opened and so was the Barrow Health Mobile Clinic.

Barrow died on March 12, 2015, at the age of 90.

Source:
<https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/reverend-willie-t-barrow>

Worshipping With Their Talents – Black History Profile Social Justice – Modern History

NELSON MANDELA

(1918 – 2013)

South African anti-apartheid activist | First president of South Africa

***“Lord, Bless Africa; May her
horn rise high up; Hear Thou
Our Prayers and Bless Us.”***

*A verse from “Nkosi Sikelel’
iAfrika” South Africa’s National
Anthem*

God heard the prayers of South Africans and blessed them. 2004 was a milestone for Black South Africans, it marked 10 years of liberation. Nelson Mandela, South Africa’s Moses, delivered his people from the strong hand of apartheid and later became that country’s first Black President. He was crowned the presidency shortly after he was miraculously freed after serving 30 years of a life sentence. He was unjustly accused, because he fought feverously against the prejudice in his country.

During the Rivonia Trial, Mandela said, “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. . . It is an ideal, which I hope to live for and to achieve. But If needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Mandela fought diligently against the unjust laws of apartheid. Black Africans as well as other non-whites were treated unjustly. The laws specified where they would live, what job they would hold, and what type of education they would receive. Much like the Jim Crow laws of the American South, it authorized



segregated public facilities, and Black Africans could not hold an office in national government.

There was a lot of blood shed during that time and many young people fought for freedom and lost their lives. Other leaders, like Mandela, were thrown into prison, beaten, tortured, and murdered. But their sacrifices were not in vain.

South Africans were praying and on February 11, 1990, Mandela was released from prison. Thousands waited outside the prison to see Mandela walk free. Major radio and television stations throughout the world were there to witness and report his release.

Not only were South Africans praying, so were African Americans. One Chicago, south-side church placed a black and white sign on their lawn, which read, “Free South Africa.” It was a symbol showing that many prayed and wept with South Africa because of the unjust rule it was subjected to.

It wasn’t long after Mandela’s release that he was elected the first Black president of that nation. Black South Africans had never voted before, and they were at the polls in record numbers. They did not mind the uncomfortable and tiring wait of the long voting lines. This was their day. The ugly face of apartheid had crumbled and Mandela was inaugurated on May 10, 1994. Their prayers were answered.

Teaching Tips

September 3
Bible Study Guide 1

Words You Should Know

A. Blessing (Genesis 12:2) *berakah* (Heb.)—Prosperity, benediction, benefit, favor, peace, invocation of good.

B. Seed (Genesis 12:7) *zara`* (Heb.)—Offspring, issue, progeny, posterity, family, race.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Sharing Good Fortune. Because of their faith in God's promises, Abram and Sarai in their old age risked everything to move their family and all their possessions to a new land.

A. Read and study the entire lesson.

B. Reread the Focal Verses in different translations.

C. Pray for your students and for lesson clarity.

D. Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Ask if any students are struggling with difficult life decisions, then include these in the opening prayer.

B. Have students read the Lesson Aim. Explain.

C. Summarize the In Focus story. Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Read and explain the Focal Verses using The People, Places, and Times; Background; the At-A-Glance outline; In Depth; Search the Scriptures; and More Light on the Text.

B. Discuss the significance of Abram being called out from his family.

C. Ask students to give examples on how we conduct our lives based on promises made (e.g., promissory note, marriage covenant, and credit card agreement).

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Reexamine how Abram walked in obedience.

B. Review the Liberating Lesson and Application for Activation sections and then reflect.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the lesson.

B. Close with prayer.

Genesis

A BLESSING FOR ALL NATIONS

Focal Verses • GENESIS 12:1-9

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ANALYZE the story of God's call and promise to Abram; EMBRACE the joy that Abram and Sarai's faith gave to them from obeying the Lord; and DECIDE what we are willing to sacrifice to claim the promises of God.

In Focus

Warren and his wife, Deloris, have been married for over 25 years and live a very comfortable life. Warren is a respected corporate executive and community leader, and Deloris is a College Professor. Both are active and faithful members of their church and within their circle of friends. Lately, they both had been thinking about doing more for God, even in distant lands. One day during Warren's morning devotion, he felt in his spirit that it was time to leave. When he felt it again as he was shaving, he immediately stopped what he was doing and inquired of the Lord. He knew in his spirit that it was time to move on to a new workplace assignment, which might include moving to another country to make a greater impact for God on the world. At work that morning, he learned that the company was in fact reorganizing. They were expanding operations to compete globally, and he was tapped to run overseas operations.

As we will see with Warren and Deloris, and Abram and Sarai in today's lesson, a decision to follow God's command continues to reap a reward for those who by faith in Jesus Christ become His seed.



Keep in Mind

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Genesis 12:1** Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him: and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had

gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

The People, Places, and Times

Abram. The significance of God's call for a nation through Abram was that up to this point, there was no distinction between people and races in the manner that we think of today. After the Flood, the people were dispersed at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). The Bible depicts a detailed review of Shem's descendants—Noah's eldest son. It is out of Shem's lineage, through Abram, that God would call out a people unto Himself to be witnesses in the earth of His greatness. They would receive the blessing for serving the one true and living God in the midst of universal idolatry. Ultimately, Abram's seed through 42 generations would bring forth the Messiah who would reconcile the world back to the Father (Matthew 1:1–17). Abram exemplifies the faith necessary to obtain righteousness and access to the promises of God through Jesus Christ.

The Land of Canaan. The Hebrew word for "Canaan" (*Kena'an*, ken-AH-an) means

low region or lowland. Its name denotes that the country resides west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, between those waters on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Named after Noah's fourth son Ham, the land was given by God to Abram's posterity, the Children of Israel, as promised. In modern geography, Canaan is now Palestine.

Background

In the preceding chapter (Genesis 11:10–32), we learn of Abram's lineage as a descendant of Noah's son Shem. In Genesis 9:26, Noah prophesied over Shem, after he and his brother Japheth covered his nakedness, declaring that he would be blessed and that Canaan would be his servant. Genesis 11 ends with Abram's father, Terah, leading his family's migration from his native land Ur of the Chaldees to make their way to the land of Canaan, but instead, the group settles in Haran (Genesis 11:31). It is noted in verse 32, however, that Terah remained in

Haran until his death. Geographically, scholars maintain that Haran was perched between Ur and Canaan, so they were in the middle of their intended destination. Terah's name was believed to mean "delay," and as referenced in a review of Israel's history (Joshua 24:2), he was an idol worshiper. We will see why Abram and Sarai's faith and obedience were pivotal to the blessing for all nations as God separates him from his people.

At-A-Glance

1. God's Call for a Blessed Nation (Genesis 12:1–3)
2. Abram's Response to God's Call (vv. 4–6)
3. God's Promise of Generational Blessings (v. 7)
4. Abram's Obedience in Answering God's Call (vv. 8–9)

In Depth

1. God's Call for a Blessed Nation (Genesis 12:1–3)

Abram was the youngest son of Terah. He was a descendant of Noah's son Shem. According to Stephen's account in Acts 7:2–4, the God of glory appeared to Abram while he was in Mesopotamia, which was before he settled in Haran. Therefore, when Abram heard God's call in Genesis 12:1, this was his second encounter with the Lord Jehovah, and it's believed to be not long after his father's death. Abram was told to leave his country and his family and uproot his home to go to a place the Lord would soon reveal. The Scripture does not indicate that there was a discussion after this command was given, but that Abram moved at God's word. Abram was surrounded by people, including his own family, who were polytheistic (worshiped multiple gods).

For him to hear the voice of the true and living God was monumental. Because of his obedience, Abram is forever etched as "the father of faith." With this second encounter, however, God made Abram a promise to bless him and make him a great nation, to make his name great and for him to be a blessing (v. 2). This promise from God was astounding due to Abram's age (v. 4), and as first noted in Genesis 11:30, his wife Sarai was barren. God gave Abram further motivation to adhere to His command with the pronouncement of future blessings. For leaving his father's house, Abram would receive a father's blessing—a namesake. God told Abram His sovereign promise to fulfill His word to make a great nation from him and to make his name great. Abram went from not having any children and with no hope of ever being a father to having the promise of an entire nation coming from his loins.

In Genesis 12:3, God established His relationship and the power of this connection by stating that He would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him. God's presence is marked in the lives of those chosen by Him. Verse 3 ends with the most important component of this promise: God commits to blessing all the families of the earth through Abram. Abram's seed birthed three world religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Ishmael) all lay claim to him as father. However, the ending of this verse points to the coming Christ who would bring salvation and restoration to the world. Abram's seed is the divinely appointed channel through which blessing would come to all humankind by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:6–7, 14).

2. Abram's Response to God's Call (vv. 4–6)

Abram followed God's spoken command and departed from his familiar surroundings to a place unknown. Abram, after having departed once with his kindred from his native land of Ur, was once again a nomad at the age of 75,

leaving Haran. He took with him his wife, all their possessions, his nephew Lot, and his servants. We can imagine how very unsettling it must have been for Abram to be uprooted again and to move everything he owned to answer God's call. However, in spite of the circumstances, Abram walked in obedience and trusted God based on what God had revealed to him. He went forward and began the journey. His father, Terah, stopped short his migration to Canaan (see Genesis 11:31, NIV). When God declares a call on your life, not everyone is privy to seeing the revelation of God's plan. Therefore, even close relatives may need to be left behind.

In Genesis 12:6, Abram arrives in Canaan and the land is already occupied by the Canaanites. He is yet again a stranger in a strange land. He was put in an uncomfortable position by coming into a land that was promised to him but was already inhabited, which could have been a reason to give up. But Abram continued to follow God and remain confident he heard God correctly. Oftentimes, when God gives us a directive, it may not come with full disclosure of the details—like what we have to go through to get to the promise. Just like Jesus, Abram teaches us to keep moving forward by focusing on God's promise (Hebrews 12:2).

3. God's Promise of Generational Blessings (v. 7)

In this instance, rather than just speaking to Abram, God appeared in the form of a theophany—God appeared in human form. Some scholars believe this appearance was Christ in His pre-incarnate state. He showed Abram once again the land He was going to bless Abram with and reinstated His promise to give him seed or offspring. Abram yet again heard a word from the Lord declaring that he would not only receive this land that is already occupied but that his children would live in it. In response to God's appearance, Abram built an altar unto the Lord. The proper

response to God's presence and confirmation of His promise is worship. Abram had God's continued assurance that he would receive that which God had spoken, and by making a personal appearance, it further sealed the guarantee.

4. Abram's Obedience in Answering God's Call (vv. 8–9)

Abram continued to move forward at God's command and thus declared his own allegiance to serve God alone. In spite of the culture around him, which had a god for everything, Abram is the father of a monotheistic religion that is based on a relationship with the true and living God. Abram pitched his tent, and wherever he pitched his tent, he built an altar unto the Lord. He remained in constant contact with Him through worship and prayer as he called on the name of the Lord. Abram lived a disciplined life of worship and walked in obedience by listening for the voice of the Lord God. Abram's faithful response to God's promise to make him a great nation required a close relationship and strict adherence to God's instructions. Abram would have been shortsighted if he thought only of the personal impact of this promise, but because the call was greater than he could ever imagine, he was willing to make the sacrifice with his wife by his side.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was God's instruction to Abram (Genesis 12:1)?
2. What was God's promise to Abram (vv. 2–3)?
3. What was Abram's response to God's call (vv. 4–5)?

Discuss the Meaning

How would you respond if God told you to uproot your life and leave behind all you know to follow Him with only a promise of what's to come?

Liberating Lesson

Today, we are reaping the benefits of the blood, sweat, and tears of our heroes and heroines of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the ancestors before them who sacrificed so that we might have the freedom to be whatever God called us to be. Like Abram, Dr. Martin Luther King did not live to see the fullness of this vision of freedom, but he moved at God's Word and did as he was instructed, walking in love. He trusted God and sacrificed his own personal comfort and gain by believing that God would do what He said. We can continue to honor Dr. King's legacy by showing our willingness to submit to God's plan no matter where it takes us as we serve others and strive to move toward lives of freedom.

Application for Activation

As you reflect on today's lesson, what has God promised in your life that will bless you and others now as well as in generations to come? What are you willing to risk to follow through with God's plan and bring Him glory, even at the risk of your own comfort? Pray and assess your own ambitions, goals, and interests to see if they line up with God's Word. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you about anything that needs adjustment.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Genesis 12:1–9

I Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

No one enjoys being uprooted, especially when one has been settled in a place for an extended time and enjoys a comfortable living. Abram and his family had lived in Ur of Chaldees with his father and brothers. During Abram's time, Ur of Chaldees was a port city that offered wealth and prosperity to its inhabitants, but for some unexplained reason, Terah, Abram's father, moved himself and his extended family to Haran. It was in Haran that God spoke to Abram. God first called to Abram while he was living in Ur of Chaldees (see Genesis 15:7 and Acts 7:2). Here, God issues an imperative command to *yalak* (yaw-LAK), the Hebrew word for "depart, get out." With this command, God indicated three specific areas Abram was to abandon: (1) Abram was to leave the country he had come to call home; (2) he was to leave the safety and security of his extended family; and (3) Abram was to leave his father's home. This was no small command on God's part. Family provided a hedge against

misfortune and mishap, but God was asking Abram to trust Him completely to provide for his safety and security. Abram was to venture, by faith, into the desert, and to an unnamed location.

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

It is hard to overstate the importance of God's call to Abram (and Abram's final obedient response) for the rest of the Gospel story. With the focus on Abram, God enters human history in a new way and begins to work out His own plan for the redemption of humankind. God follows His command to Abram with a series of promised blessings. Note the three times that God obligates Himself to Abram with the phrase "I will (do)," which is *'asah* in the Hebrew (aw-SAW). God promises to (1) give Abram a child from which a nation will come; (2) make Abram's name renowned; (3) bless Abram personally; (4) bless Abram to be a blessing to others; (5) bless nations that bless Abram; (6) curse nations that choose not to be a blessing to Abram; and finally, (7) provide a means for all the nations of the earth to be blessed through Abram. These blessings, taken collectively, become a reversal of the curses pronounced by God at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). At Babel, men came together to build a city so they could *shem* (Heb. "shame") or "make a name" for themselves. Through Abram, however, God established His own means by which someone would achieve renown and "become a nation," which translates in the Hebrew as *gowy* (GOO-wee). What a person tried to accomplish through his or her own efforts, God would do through Abram as a divine gift. However, these promises of blessing were conditional. Abram must trust

God with faith, believing that God will do as He has promised. The obedience would see Abram become *barakah* (ber-aw-KAW), Hebrew for "the source of blessing" for all humankind. God also wanted Abram to understand that He would be with him, and the nation that would flow from him in a very special way. God will bless those who bless Abram, but God will also "curse," in Hebrew *'arar* (aw-RAR), those who chose not to be a blessing to Abram or the nation that was to have its origin in him. History has borne out the reality that God's promise to Abram was not made lightly. At the Red Sea, God destroyed the armies of Egypt because of the way Egypt treated the Jews. Those nations that flowed from Ham, but found themselves at odds with Israel, were either destroyed or reduced to a minor state by God. These nations included the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Amorites, to name a few.

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him: and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

So Abram departed. Until this point, no indication is given that Abram has done anything at all to commend himself to God. But now he acted. In obedience to God's "spoken" word, which in Hebrew is *dabar* (daw-BAW), and implies a command, Abram left Haran.

The writer of Hebrews (11:8ff) informs us that it was on the basis of Abram's belief in God's word that he acted and this belief expressed by action was accounted to Abram for faith. We can appreciate the faith that Abram demonstrated. At 75 years of age, he was relatively old. Additionally, Sarai (his wife) was barren and incapable of producing a son for Abram. Still, Abram trusted God that he would be blessed personally with prosperity, land, and an heir. Further, Abram trusted God that through him the whole world would also be blessed.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. 6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

Lot's father, Haran, was dead. He died while the family resided in Ur of Chaldees. It is likely that Abram took his nephew into his own home after his brother's death because he and his wife were childless. In the ancient culture of that day, families that were childless were considered to be out of favor with the gods. Sarai's barrenness then was, no doubt, a source of shame and embarrassment for Abram. Still, in response to God's command, Abram takes Sarai and Lot with him. In addition to his nephew and wife, verse 5 records that Abram also took his servants, "substance" or "possessions" (NIV), translated in Hebrew as *rekuwsh* (rek-OOSH) and implied material goods as well as animals. They set off for Canaan. When God first called for Abram's father, Terah, to leave Ur of Chaldees and venture to an unnamed land, the patriarch only made it as far as Haran. This time Abram entered Canaan and traveled to Sichem and the plain of "Moreh" (Heb. *Mowreh*, mo-REH, meaning "teacher"). Moreh was home to a great oak tree used as a place of worship by the pagan priests of Canaan. It was located near the heart of the land of Canaan and was probably a place where the Canaanite priests came to instruct their people in the worship of their gods. By venturing so deeply into Canaan, Abram was signaling his intent to remain obedient to God's instruction. He would not be returning to the life of comfort and security that he had once known.

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land:

and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

It took a lot of faith on Abram's part to pack up his family and possessions and cross into the land of Canaan on the basis of a promise from God. To this point, God had not revealed to Abram what land He was going to give the patriarch as a possession for his obedience. Abram had been proceeding purely by faith. However, his faith was rewarded at Moreh when God took on human form and "appeared" (Heb. *ra'ah*, raw-AW) to Abram. This type of personal visitation by God is called a "theophany." The purpose of this theophany was for God to confirm the promise He had made earlier to the future patriarch. Abram was to be given land for possession, and in fact, the land on which he was standing was to be that land. However, God now makes clear that the land will go to Abram's descendants, even though Abram is childless at the time of God's promise. In a repeated expression of his faith and as an act of worship, after the visitation, Abram erected an "altar" (Heb. *mizbeach*, miz-BAY-akh), to the true God upon that site. The altar demonstrated that Abram believed God, even though he did not know at this point in the Scripture it would be 500 years before his family would be in possession of the land.

8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

Probably in an act of great wisdom, Abram left Moreh. The altar he had "builded" or "established" (Heb. *banah*, baw-NAW) would serve as an indication that Abram was staking a claim to the land on behalf of his God. Now he would need a place within Canaan to call home. After leaving Moreh, Abram journeyed deeper

into the southern portion of the land of Canaan and temporarily settled upon a mountain, built another altar, and worshiped his God.

9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

There would be no turning back for Abram. After God's visit and the view of the "promised" land from the heights of the mountain, Abram now knew what his future looked like. Abram removed himself from the mountain and headed further south into Canaan. His life would now become the life of a nomad. By stating in verse 9 that Abram "journeyed" (Heb. *naca* ', naw-SAH), the writer of Genesis is indicating that Abram continually moved about. Abram's wanderings in the desert of Canaan, awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises, would serve to strengthen the future patriarch's developing trust and faith in God.

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Say It Correctly

Canaan. KAY-nuhn.

Haran. HAY-ran, -ruhn.

Moreh. MOH-ray.

Sichem. SHEE-kem.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 1

Genesis 1–3

DAY 2

Genesis 4–7

DAY 3

Genesis 8–11

DAY 4

Genesis 12–15

DAY 5

Genesis 16–18

DAY 6

Genesis 19–21

DAY 7

Genesis 22–24

Teaching Tips

September 10
Bible Study Guide 2

Words You Should Know

A. Fear (Exodus 20:20) *yare'* (Heb.)—To be afraid; to stand in awe; to show proper honor or reverence.

B. Prove (v. 20) *nasah* (Heb.)—To test.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—A Covenant is a Serious Thing. Without obedience to law, people live in chaos, hurting themselves, others, and their environment. Where can people get a law that they will obey? God delivered the commandments to the Israelites while showing divine and holy power that tested them to convince them to obey the laws of the covenant.

A. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help your students to honor the contracts and agreements they have made with others.

B. Read Genesis 12:1–3, 15:5, 18, 17:1–16 for background on God's covenant with Abraham.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer.

B. Introduce the lesson by reading the Aim for Change statements.

C. Ask a student to read the In Focus story. Then facilitate a brief discussion about it.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask a student to read the Focal Verses.

B. Use The People, Places, and Times, Background, Search the Scriptures, At-A-Glance outline, In Depth, and More Light on the Text sections to clarify the verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Depending on the size of the class, divide the class into groups of four to six students each. Invite them to talk about the Discuss the Meaning, Liberating Lesson, and Application for Activation sections. Ask each group to select a representative to report their responses.

B. Facilitate a discussion on how the students connect their responses to the Aim for Change and Keep in Mind verse.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the lesson.

B. Close with prayer.

Exodus

OBEYING GOD'S LAW Focal Verses • EXODUS 20:18-26

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: EXPLORE the divine manifestations and warnings that accompanied the giving of the Ten Commandments; ASPIRE to live in more perfect obedience to God's laws; and SHARE one way to show God that we are serious about obeying His laws.

In Focus

Arron and Regina were married right out of school and rented a walk-up apartment near Regina's parents' brownstone. After several years of paying their bills on time, raising their credit score, and saving what they could, they decided it was time to buy their first home. They found an inexpensive house in the best school district in the city and set off to see the loan officer at the only African American bank in town.

"Banks are imposing, and bankers intimidate me," Regina told Aaron the morning of their appointment. "Don't worry," Aaron replied, "we are also meeting my uncle, who invests in real estate, and he can help us understand the documents and explain our rights and obligations. As for the bank building, those marble columns, high ceilings, and ornate wooden desks are all meant to assure us that the bank is solid, stable, and invested in our community." Excited, yet a bit apprehensive, Regina held Aaron's hand tightly as they walked through the massive brass and glass doors of the local bank.

On their way back to their apartment, Regina commented, "I feel so much better. The people at the bank were welcoming and willing to trust us with this loan. Let's pray together, right now, that God will help us to honor our part. Let's ask God to enable us to show the bank that their trust in us is well placed."

Describe a time when someone didn't do their part to honor an agreement. In this lesson, we will find out how the Israelites were called to honor their covenant agreement with God.



Keep in Mind

"In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee"
(from Exodus 20:24, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Exodus 20:18** And all the people saw the thundering, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

23 Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold.

24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and they peace offering, they sheep, and thine oxen: In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon

The People, Places, and Times

Moses. Moses plays a prominent role in the events of this passage. Born a Hebrew slave, Moses was later raised in the home of the Pharaoh, God chose Moses to return to Egypt and lead the Hebrew people out of slavery. In the process, God shaped and molded Moses into His faithful servant who became an outstanding leader of His people.

Mount Sinai. The events of this passage take place at Mount Sinai, often referred to as “the mountain of God.” It is believed by some to be located about fifty miles north of the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, in an area now controlled by Egypt. On this mountain, Moses met God in the burning bush, and here God called Moses to go to Egypt and lead His people out of slavery (Exodus 3). Many years later, the prophet Elijah would return to this mountain (which is also called Horeb) and hear from God in the gentle whisper of a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:8–13).

How would you evaluate Moses’ relationship with God? Did God direct Moses’ life in ways that helped Moses mature and become the leader that He needed?

Background

The events of this Scripture take place in the third month after God had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. For nearly three months, a vast multitude of men, women, and children had been slowly moving across formidable deserts. All the miraculous events that God had ordained in Egypt, including the night of the Passover and the parting of the Red Sea, were certainly still fresh in their minds. In the past few months, they had seen the presence of God in the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. They had been miraculously fed by the manna and quail. God had provided water when none was to be found. The Israelites were constantly aware of the presence and power of God in their midst. Now they were camped at the foot

of Mount Sinai, where God would once again show His mighty power and give the Law to His people through their leader Moses. Through the process, the people would learn more about God and what He expected of them.

How would you evaluate the importance of the Ten Commandments in the lives of the Israelites, as well as all modern-day believers?

At-A-Glance

1. God Makes His Presence Known (Exodus 20:18)
2. The People Show Reverent Fear (vv. 19–21)
3. God Encourages Proper Worship (vv. 22–26)

In Depth

1. God Makes His Presence Known (Exodus 20:18)

For three months, God had made His presence known through miraculous physical phenomena such as the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He led them to stop at Mount Sinai, where He would give His people the Law.

The Israelites' stopping at Mount Sinai mirrors what happens in a believer's life. We worship the Lord and come to know who He is before we are given commands to obey. The Law outlined how they were expected to live as His people in relationship with Him and in relationship with each other. They were expected to fulfill these covenant requirements. This is in line with the commands that Jesus put forth as the first and second greatest commandments for us—to love God and to love people.

It was important for God to make sure His people knew that it was He, Almighty God, the God of their fathers, who was giving the Law.

So He used spectacular divine manifestations to cause them to respond in fear and reverence to keep their covenant commitment. He used smoke, thunder, the sound of heavenly trumpets, and lightning. God's manifestation of His presence had the desired effect. The presence of God and the recognized authorship of His commands also cause us to reverence God, receive His words, and obey them.

What has caused you to fear and revere God lately?

2. The People Show Reverent Fear (vv. 19–21)

The people withdrew in fear, knowing they were truly in the presence of Almighty God. Yet Moses told them, "Fear not, for God is come to prove you" (v. 20). What Moses was telling them was that they should not withdraw from God in terror; God intended to use this experience to instill in them a reverent awe of Him. It was as if God were saying, "I want you to know I really mean business here!" Thus, "fear of the LORD" would prompt His people to want to keep the Law, and never sin. God also used the divine manifestations to underscore the importance of His commands that He would be their only God, and that they were never to make any idols. After all they had seen, heard, and experienced, it is hard to imagine that any of the Israelites would ever consider following any other god! They had heard His voice and seen His power, yet they had not seen Him in any physical shape or form. But God knows the fragility of human nature, and no matter how many times they experienced God's miracles and presence, they turned to idols. It is the same way with us. We often forget who God is and turn to less-than-satisfactory idols.

What motivates you to modify your behavior and respond to God in obedience?

3. God Encourages Worship (vv. 22–26)

Finally, God gave instructions on the building of altars to be used in worship. While this command seems unusual to us, it was fitting for the culture of the time. From the beginning, God has always desired worship, and at that time worship included sacrifices and burnt offerings. What God wanted to make clear with the commands of verses 24–26 was that the altars were to be temporary and portable. They were not yet in the Promised Land, and their focus was to be on the object of their worship rather than the place of their sacrifice. The stones were to be unhewn, perhaps so that no one would be tempted to carve the stones into some image or idol. And the altars were not to have steps leading up to them so their sacrifices would be made in humility and modesty. Again, the focus was then, and is now, on the object of our worship, not on the means, place, or structure.

How and where can we create opportunities to worship God in addition to Saturday and Sunday worship services?

Search the Scriptures

1. Moses says that God appeared in the way He did so the people would not sin (Exodus 20:20). How does God's presence keep us from sinning?

2. Why did God want them to make an altar of unhewn stone (v. 25)?

Discuss the Meaning

In this Scripture, we learn a lot about God, His power, and His desire for us to live in obedience and fellowship with Him. What can we do to achieve and keep a proper attitude of awe, reverence, fear, and love for Him?

Liberating Lesson

Places such as banks, courtrooms, and churches are intentionally built to inspire awe,

respect, and even proper fear in us. And in those places, we often enter into agreements where we make certain promises and receive certain privileges. The awe, respect, and fear generated by our surroundings, as well as our faith in God, should prompt us to live up to the promises we have made, and joyfully comply with agreements into which we have entered. In this way, we will enjoy more blessings and peace in our relationship with God and with our neighbors.

Some years ago, Tavis Smiley helped to develop a book titled *The Covenant with Black America*. The book outlines strategies for the betterment of the African American community. This book addresses the problem on a structural level, but there also could be a solution to improving the African American community on a personal level. We need to tackle some of the weightier economic, educational, and health issues that plague our communities. At the same time, we also need to fear God and treat Him with reverence and respect. We need to live up to the agreements we have made in our churches, businesses, and relationships.

How can we prioritize our relationship with God and seek to improve our dealings with others?

Application for Activation

God's greatness and awesomeness compel us to honor our commitment to Him. Here are some ways we can remember to honor Him and what He has done in our lives:

- Go outdoors and look up at the sky to remind yourself of the greatness of God.
- Bring a special offering in thanksgiving to God.
- Spend time each morning reading God's Word and writing down a Bible verse on a card that you take with you.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Exodus 20:18–26

18 And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

The people of Israel witnessed the visible and audible manifestation of God's presence on the mountain. Thunder and lightning were typical signs associated with ancient Near Eastern gods of the time, but the difference is that usually these were seen in battle. On this occasion, God revealed Himself to people, which was unheard of in the narratives of the gods at the time.

The Children of Israel are now in the presence of God! Their reaction shows that this manifestation of God's presence was something far from the ordinary. The lightning they see and thunder they hear cause them to be in awe,

which is expressed in their removing themselves and standing back from the mountain.

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. 20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

They call out to Moses and ask that he would speak to them instead of Yahweh. Their reason is that they could bear to hear Moses' words, but hearing Yahweh made them feel as though they would die.

Moses assures them and tells them not to be afraid. Although they should have a healthy fear of Yahweh—which is respect—Moses encourages the Israelites that they do not have to fear that they will die from hearing God's voice. The purpose of Yahweh's presence on the mountain is to prove (Heb. *nasah*, nah-SAH) them. This word is from a root word that means to smell or test by the smell. In this context, it means to ascertain the nature of something, including any faults or imperfections. The Lord wants the people to fear Him in a healthy way so that their lives would be free from sin.

21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. 22 And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

The people are still described as standing "afar off" as Moses draws near to God. The "thick darkness" is one word in Hebrew (*'arapel*, ah-rah-FELL). It should be distinguished from just the opposite of light. The thick darkness described here is similar to a cloud of smoke, gas, or dust. This could refer to storm clouds that would accompany the thunder and the lightning mentioned previously. This also

aligns with the fact that the mountain was emitting smoke.

The presence of the Almighty was a mystery to most Israelites, but Moses enters into the darkness to hear from God. As he approaches God for the people, Moses acts as mediator. First, he goes to the Lord to hear from Him, then the Lord commands Moses to go to the people and speak to them. Moses is told to let them know that God has spoken to them “from heaven,” in order to assure them that the words come from God even though Moses is delivering them.

23 Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. 24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

The Lord again warns against making idols, but the wording is very specific. He warns them not to make any idols “with me,” meaning that they could not worship God along with other gods. He wants their exclusive allegiance. Nothing else must share in the worship due to Him.

He also informs Moses that an altar of earth is required in order to make sacrifices to Him. This was most likely intended to foster humility in worship. The Israelites would not be tempted to focus on the monuments they made for worship, but on God alone. Many altars from the region were known to have been constructed of mud bricks, although no Israelite altars of this sort have been found.

25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. 26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.

These verses warn against two things. First of all, if an altar is made of stone, then it must not be “hewn” stone. No work was to be done to shape or cut it. If any work was done on the altar to cut or shape it, then it would be polluted (Heb. *chalal*, kha-**LOL**). This word means more than just physically dirtying someone or something; it means to defile the sacred character of someone or something, to treat it as common rather than showing the honor it deserves.

The second thing the Lord commands Moses to tell the people is to not go up steps to the altar. This was to ensure modesty among the people. In contrast to the surrounding nations, the Israelites would not go up steps to the altar to expose themselves. Ritual nudity was a common practice for pagan worshipers of the surrounding nations, and God wanted absolute holiness when it came to His people’s worship practices.

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Say It Correctly

Hewn. **HEE**-yoon.
Altar. **AL**-ter.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 8

Genesis 25–26

DAY 9

Genesis 27–29

DAY 10

Genesis 30–31

DAY 11

Genesis 32–34

DAY 12

Genesis 35–37

DAY 13

Genesis 38–40

DAY 14

Genesis 41–42

Notes
