

Go From Your Country

Genesis 12–14

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the call of Abram is God's answer to Babel and the hinge of the whole Bible: a command to leave country, kindred, and father's house, a promise that reverses the tower point by point, a patriarch whose faith is real but not yet polished, and a mysterious king-priest who blesses him with bread and wine.

Catholic Touchstone. The call of Abraham as the beginning of God's gathering of the nations (CCC 59–61, 762); the obedience of faith (CCC 144–146); Melchizedek's offering as a prefiguring of the Eucharist (CCC 1333) and of Christ's priesthood (CCC 1544).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Genesis 12:1–3 may be the most consequential paragraph in the Old Testament. After eleven chapters of widening ruin (garden lost, brother murdered, world flooded, nations scattered), God speaks to one man in a city whose great sanctuary served the moon god, and starts the repair. Hear the shape: one command, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house” (three concentric losses, each closer to the bone), followed by a cascade of promise: a land, a great nation, blessing, a great name, and the widest sentence in Genesis so far: “by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (12:3, RSV2CE; the footnoted alternative is “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” and the New Testament reads it that way: Galatians 3:8). “All the families of the earth” is not a flourish; it is the address list of chapter 10. The seventy scattered nations are the intended beneficiaries of this one man's call. Your group read 12:1–3 twice at home; harvest their answer to “what exactly is promised?” before teaching it.

Set the call against Babel and watch the reversal. Babel: “let us make a name for ourselves.” God to Abram: “I will... make your name great.” Babel: self-gathered unity, “lest we be scattered.” God: one man scattered from home so that all families can be gathered. Babel: a tower up. Genesis 12: a word down. Everything the tower grasped, the call gives. And the promise is hung, deliberately, on an impossibility already announced: “Sarai was barren; she had no child” (11:30). God's great nation begins with an elderly, childless couple, so that no one can ever mistake the result for human achievement.

Abram's response is the Bible's sustained portrait of the obedience of faith before it has the word for it: “So Abram went, as the LORD had told him” (12:4), at seventy-five, with no map, no deed, and no heir. Hebrews canonizes the going: “he went out, not knowing where he was to go” (Hebrews 11:8), and the Catechism makes him the model of the obedience of faith (CCC 144–145). Notice his first answer to the promise of the land: not a sword but altars, at Shechem and Bethel (12:7–8): worship as possession-in-hope. But do not sand him smooth: within a page, famine drives him to Egypt, and fear drives him to pass Sarai off as only his sister, letting Pharaoh take her into his house while Abram is enriched on her account (12:10–20). It is ugly, the text knows it is ugly, and God rescues the promise anyway, plaguing Pharaoh's house until Sarai is restored. Watch the pattern: descent into Egypt under famine, plagues on Pharaoh, departure with wealth. Israel will live this story nationally in Exodus; the patriarch's biography is the nation's prophecy.

Chapter 13 shows faith maturing: given first choice of land, Lot chooses by sight (the well-watered Jordan valley, “like the garden of the LORD,” toward Sodom), and Abram lets him, trusting the Giver rather than grasping the gift. God immediately re-promises everything, bigger (13:14–17). Chapter 14 then shows the family’s first war: Lot is captured in a raid of kings, and Abram arms three hundred eighteen retainers, rescues him, and then faces the session’s climactic meeting.

Melchizedek, king of Salem, “priest of God Most High,” appears from nowhere: no father, no genealogy, in a book built entirely of genealogies. He brings out bread and wine, blesses Abram, and receives from him a tenth of everything (14:18–20). Then he vanishes from the narrative, but not from the Bible: Psalm 110 will swear that the messianic king is “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4), and Hebrews 7 will unpack the mystery: a priesthood older and greater than Levi’s, without beginning of days, resembling the Son of God. Salem is Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2). The Church, from the Fathers to the Catechism, sees in his bread and wine a prefiguring of her own Eucharistic offering (CCC 1333) and in his order the priesthood of Christ (CCC 1544). Note the contrast the chapter itself draws: the king of Sodom offers Abram goods, and Abram refuses to be enriched by him (14:21–24); the king of Salem offers bread, wine, and blessing, and Abram gives him a tenth. Two kings, two economies. Everything a life has ends up offered somewhere; the chapter asks to which king.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament treats Genesis 12:3 as the Gospel in advance. Paul says it outright: “the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (Galatians 3:8), and identifies the singular seed in whom the blessing lands: Christ (Galatians 3:16), the thread your group has been tracking since the garden. Peter preaches the same promise to Jerusalem, in wording that blends Genesis 12:3 with the oath to Abraham’s seed in Genesis 22:18 (Acts 3:25). The call of one man was always aimed at everyone.

Melchizedek’s afterlife in Scripture is unique: one appearance, one psalm verse, and then the longest sustained argument in Hebrews (chapters 5 to 7), where his lack of recorded genealogy, his royal priesthood, and his precedence over Abraham (the lesser is blessed by the greater, Hebrews 7:7) all become a portrait of Christ: king of righteousness, king of peace, priest forever, who still brings out bread and wine for the children of Abraham at every altar of the Church.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome · *Letter to the Corinthians* (1 Clement)

Writing in the first century, within a generation of the apostles, St. Clement teaches, in substance (1 Clement 10), that Abraham was called the friend of God because he was found faithful in obedience to God’s words: he left country and kindred at a word, and his obedience was his faith made visible. The study’s summary of that earliest witness: believing and going are one motion.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan · *On the Sacraments*, Book IV

Catechizing the newly baptized on the Eucharist, St. Ambrose teaches, in substance, that Melchizedek’s bread and wine, offered while Abraham was returning from battle, prefigure the sacraments of the altar: the Church’s offering is older than Levi’s, rooted in the mysterious king-priest whose order Christ holds forever. And what the figure promised, the altar delivers: not bread

and wine only, but the true Body and Blood of Christ, whose eternal priesthood the ordained priest serves and the baptized share in their offering of praise (CCC 1546–1547).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. John Henry Newman · *Parochial and Plain Sermons, “The Ventures of Faith”*

St. John Henry Newman teaches, in substance, that real faith is known by what it ventures: what we stake on God's word that would be lost if His word were untrue. Abraham's going, not knowing where, is the pattern: a life that would make no sense if God had not spoken. Newman presses the question this session presses: what have you actually ventured? (A study note: ventures are weighed with prudence and counsel; duties of state and the care of dependents are never the stake. See *Leading With Care*.)

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- CCC 59–61: God calls Abram to make him the father of a multitude; in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed, and the people descended from him become trustees of the promise.
- CCC 144–146: the obedience of faith: Abraham is its model, obeying a call “not knowing where he was to go,” and thus fulfills the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1.
- CCC 762: the remote preparation of the People of God begins with Abraham's call: the gathering that answers the scattering.
- CCC 2570–2572: with Abraham, prayer appears as attentiveness of the heart and the submission of the will; his journey is a pilgrimage of faith punctuated by altars.
- CCC 1333: in the offering of the king-priest Melchizedek, who “brought out bread and wine,” the Church sees a prefiguring of her own Eucharistic offering.
- CCC 1544: Christ is the one high priest “after the order of Melchizedek”; every priesthood of the old covenant finds its fulfillment in Him.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

- NAME THREAD RESOLVES ITS FIRST STAGE: Babel grasped a name; God gives one (12:2). Draw the contrast aloud tonight; the group built the Babel half last week, so let them find the reversal themselves in Q2 before you confirm it.
- NATIONS THREAD: 12:3's “all the families of the earth” is chapter 10's address list. Harvest last week's tally when this lands.
- SEED THREAD: the promise now rides on Abram's line, and on a barren womb (11:30). Next session is the reveal: Genesis 15, faith reckoned as righteousness, covenant cut, and the SEALED GUESSES OPENED. Bring the envelope next week. Prepare a brief plan for the reveal moment.
- SACRIFICE THREAD develops: altars at Shechem and Bethel; Melchizedek's bread and wine and Abram's tithe. Next stops: the covenant pieces (Session 8) and the Aqedah (Session 10). Say nothing forward.
- Descent-into-Egypt pattern (famine, plagues, wealth, exit) is planted for the Joseph sessions and beyond this book to Exodus. Note it in one sentence tonight (Q3 answer does this); do not build on it yet.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group harvests its homework and states the content of 12:1–3 precisely: what is commanded, what is promised, and to whose ultimate benefit.
2. The group discovers the Babel-reversal structure of the call themselves.
3. The group reckons honestly with Abram's failure in Egypt and articulates why Scripture's honesty strengthens rather than weakens its witness.
4. The group meets Melchizedek in the text, then follows him by live discovery through Psalm 110:4 into Hebrews 7 and the Eucharist.
5. Each participant names one venture of faith: something actually staked on God's word.

TIMED PLAN (75–90 MINUTES)

- Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- Win questions (10 min)
- Build: harvest homework, read 12:1–9 aloud, Q1-Q2 (25 min)
- Build: Egypt and the steelman (20 min)
- Build: Melchizedek, Q4 and live discovery (20 min)
- Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (10 min)

If time runs short: *Cut the Dig Deeper first, then compress chapter 13 (Q3's Lot material) to a spoken summary. Never cut Melchizedek; the session must end at the altar.*

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father of Abraham and our Father, You speak into moon-lit cities and barren decades, and Your word makes futures where nothing was possible. Speak to us tonight. Give us ears for our own call, courage for our own going, and bread from the true Melchizedek before we leave. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPEN THE ROOM

W1. What is the biggest move or leap you have ever made: a city, a job, a vocation, a relationship? What did you have to leave to do it?

W2. Who is the most faithful person you have known personally, and what did their faith cost them?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

Open with the homework harvest: “You read 12:1–3 twice. List for me exactly what God promises this man.” Write the list where all can see it; you will return to it at Q2 and again in Session 8. Then read 12:1–9 aloud.

Q1. Look at the command in 12:1. What three things must Abram leave, and what is the order doing? Then look at what he is given to go on: how much detail does the destination get?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Country, kindred, father's house: three concentric circles, each cut closer to the bone. The call strips identity as the ancient world defined it: land, tribe, household. Abram must become nobody in particular so that God can make him the father of everybody.

The destination is “the land that I will show you”: a promise with no coordinates. He gets a Person to trust, not a plan to audit. Hebrews 11:8 canonizes exactly this: “he went out, not knowing where he was to go.” Faith is not information; it is entrustment (CCC 144–145). At seventy-five, with a barren wife, “Abram went.”

Q2. Take last week's Babel notes out. Set the builders' speech (11:4) next to God's speech (12:2–3), line by line. What do you find? And who, according to 12:3, is this whole call ultimately for?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Point-for-point reversal. Babel: “let us make a name for ourselves”; God: “I will... make your name great.” Babel: self-gathered, “lest we be scattered”; Abram: sent out from everything so that gathering can begin. Babel: a tower up to heaven; here: a word down from heaven. Everything the tower grasped and lost, the call gives. Grace does not just forgive Babel; it out-builds it.

The call is for “all the families of the earth”: the seventy nations you tallied last week are the address list. One family is chosen not instead of the others but for them. Paul calls this verse the Gospel preached beforehand (Galatians 3:8). Election in the Bible is a job description: blessed to be a blessing.

Q3. Read 12:10–20 without flinching. What does Abram do in Egypt, what does it cost Sarai, and what does God do about it? Then glance at chapter 13: what has changed in Abram when he deals with Lot?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Famine tests the brand-new faith and it buckles: Abram passes Sarai off as merely his sister (a half-truth, we learn later, deployed as a whole lie), lets Pharaoh take her into his house, and profits from the arrangement. The father of faith trades his wife's safety for his own. The text offers no varnish, and neither should we. God rescues the promise that Abram endangered, plaguing Pharaoh's house until Sarai is restored, and Abram exits Egypt wealthy and rebuked by a pagan. Keep Sarai at the center of the reckoning: she is the endangered one, silenced and taken, and the only one in the chapter who acts for her is God: the plagues are heaven's intervention for a woman her husband would not protect. File the pattern: famine, descent to Egypt, plagues, departure with wealth. A nation will live this story later.

Chapter 13 shows growth: given first choice of land, Abram yields it, and Lot chooses by sight: the valley "like the garden of the LORD," toward Sodom (a location note the narrator drops like a stone). Abram has learned to trust the Giver rather than grasp the gift, and God instantly re-promises everything, larger (13:14–17). Faith in Genesis is not a state achieved but a road walked, with potholes; that honesty is next.

BUILD, THEN PRESS · STEELMAN

Build it at full strength.

"Read chapter 12 honestly and the 'father of faith' is a coward who trafficked his own wife. Twice in Genesis he runs this same scheme. And the Church holds this man up as the model of faith? If these stories are inspired, inspiration has low standards; more likely they are tribal legends, and religious people have simply agreed not to notice what their hero actually does. You cannot build a moral tradition on a man like this."

Press it: read 12:13 and 12:15–16 aloud again. Do not defend him too quickly; let the ugliness be ugly.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

First, agree with the reading: it is ugly, and the text means it to be. Notice what that concession does to the objection's foundation. Tribal legends tend to flatter their founders; ancient peoples generally polished their patriarchs. What is astonishing is how much failure Israel canonized: the founder's cowardice, rebuked by a pagan king, preserved in the founding document. Scripture's refusal to airbrush is not an embarrassment to inspiration; it is a credential. These do not read like stories a people invents to flatter itself.

Second, be precise about what the Church holds up. The model is not Abram's polish but his going and his growing: Hebrews 11 canonizes the obedience ("he went out"), not the Egypt detour. Faith in Scripture is a journey with a learning curve: the man who hid behind his wife in chapter 12 will stand between God and a doomed city interceding in chapter 18, and climb Moriah in chapter 22. The Church has never taught that God's friends start finished; she teaches that God finishes His friends.

Third, and most important: watch who carries the promise through the wreckage. Abram endangers it; God rescues it. The engine of these chapters is not the patriarch's virtue but the Speaker's fidelity: which is exactly why this story is good news for the people in this room, whose faith also buckles under famine. If the covenant ran on Abram's consistency, it would have died in Egypt. It runs on God's. Ours does too: and God's fidelity does not cancel the human yes; Abram

must still go, still grow, still persevere, and so must we (CCC 162, 2016).

Q4. Read 14:17–24. Two kings come out to meet Abram after the battle. Compare everything about them: their cities, what they bring, what they say, and what Abram does with each. And what is strange about Melchizedek appearing in this book at all?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The king of Sodom brings nothing and proposes a deal (“give me the persons, but take the goods”); Abram refuses so much as a sandal-thong, so that no one but God can claim to have made him rich. The king of Salem brings out bread and wine, blesses Abram in the name of God Most High, and receives a tenth of everything. Two kings, two economies: one offers wealth and gets nothing; one offers blessing and gets everything's tithe. Everything we have ends up offered somewhere; the only question is to which king.

The strangeness: Melchizedek is a priest centuries before Levi exists, a king of (Jeru)Salem centuries before David takes it, and a man with no genealogy in the one book of the Bible built entirely out of genealogies. In Genesis, you are your toledot; he has none. He simply is: king of righteousness (melek + tsedek), king of peace (Salem), priest of God Most High, bearing bread and wine. The Old Testament will mention him once more, in a single sworn line, centuries later. Find it.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Live discovery. Send one reader to Psalm 110:4 and another to Hebrews 7:1–3 and 7:15–17. Read the psalm first. Ask: “Who is God swearing this to, and what is sworn?” Then Hebrews. Ask: “What does the author do with Melchizedek's missing genealogy, and where does the Church meet this priesthood now?”

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 110 is God's oath to David's Lord, the messianic King: “You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” The Messiah will hold a priesthood older than Levi, royal and unending, rooted in this Genesis meeting. Hebrews reads the silence of Genesis as literary design: with no father, mother, or genealogy on the page, Melchizedek stands in the text “resembling the Son of God”: a figure drawn in silence, not an immortal man; and the One who truly holds priesthood “by the power of an indestructible life” is Christ Himself (Hebrews 7:16).

And the Church meets this priesthood at every Mass. The Fathers, and the Catechism after them, see in Melchizedek's bread and wine a prefiguring of the Eucharistic offering (CCC 1333), and in his order the priesthood of Christ (CCC 1544), which every priest at the altar serves and makes present (CCC 1545, 1548). Abram, returning from battle, was met by a king-priest with bread, wine, and blessing; you are met by more: the true Melchizedek gives not figures but Himself, His own Body and Blood in the one sacrifice of the Mass (CCC 1365–1367). The session ends where the study keeps ending: at an altar.

DIG DEEPER · THREE HUNDRED EIGHTEEN AND THE SHAPE OF RESCUE

Abram's strike force numbers three hundred eighteen "trained men, born in his house" (14:14): the Bible's first narrated military rescue, a kinsman going out at cost to bring back a captive relative who chose his own captivity's neighborhood. Early Christian readers were fascinated by the number itself: the Epistle of Barnabas famously read 318, in Greek numerals, as a cipher of Jesus and the cross (Barnabas 9): a curiosity of ancient exegesis, not the Church's doctrine. The durable treasure is the pattern: the faithful kinsman who arms himself, descends into the war of kings, and brings the prisoner home is a small early sketch of the Kinsman-Redeemer the whole Bible is waiting for. Lot, notably, learns little and returns to Sodom; rescue does not compel conversion. That thread resumes in two sessions.

SEND · OUT THE DOOR

S1. "Go from your country, your kindred, your father's house": which circle is God currently asking you to loosen your grip on: a comfort zone, an approval you cannot leave home without, a version of yourself others built? What would going look like?

S2. Newman's question: what have you actually ventured on God's word: something you would lose if His word were not true? If the honest answer is "nothing," what could it be?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Write your own 12:1 in one sentence: the going you believe God is asking of you this season. Date it. You will want it in Session 10.
- Make one venture this week: one concrete act (a conversation, a commitment, a generosity) that only makes sense if God's promises are true.
- At Mass this Sunday, when the bread and wine are brought forward, name Melchizedek to yourself, and receive the blessing of the true King of Salem.
- Read Genesis 15–17 before next session. Bring your Take-Home sheet from Session 1 with the sealed My Guess box, unopened. Next week we open them.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2)

CLOSING PRAYER

God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, You called Abram out of Ur and You have called each of us by name. Bless what You have begun in this room. Make us bold to go where You show us, honest about our Egypts, generous with our tithes, and hungry for the bread and wine of the true Melchizedek, in whose kingdom we pray. Amen.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in the Discussion Guide, in order.

Where It Is Used	Passage
Homework harvest and reading	Genesis 12:1–9
Q1 the command and the going	Genesis 12:1, 12:4; Hebrews 11:8
Q2 Babel reversed	Genesis 11:4 with 12:2–3; Galatians 3:8
Q3 Egypt and Lot	Genesis 12:10–20; 13:1–17
Steelman answer	Genesis 12:13–16; Hebrews 11:8–10; CCC 144–146
Q4 two kings	Genesis 14:17–24
Live discovery	Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 7:1–3, 7:15–17
Eucharistic prefigurement	CCC 1333, 1544–1545, 1548
Dig Deeper	Genesis 14:14–16
Memory verse	Genesis 12:2