

June 7, Ordinary 10A (Genesis 12:1–9)

## **All of the narrative details in the call of Abram story reinforce a single point: God commands Abram to go, and Abram goes.**

by [Kerry Hasler-Brooks](#) in the [June 2026](#) issue

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Thirty years ago William L. Holladay wrote in these pages that the narrative of Genesis 12:1–9 was “stripped bare” by its authors in order to tell a simple story: God commands Abram to go, and Abram goes (“A new beginning: Abram,” May 22–29, 1996). Certainly we are given some detail in the story. We are told where Abram goes as he leaves his family land in Haran, and we can easily trace his movements through the land of Canaan. We are told what Abram leaves behind (his country, his kin, and his “father’s house”) and who and what he takes with him (his possessions, his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and the people he had “acquired”—the servants, slaves, or dependents who are unnamed but might number in the tens or even hundreds). We are told that God goes with Abram, holding out the promise of blessing, protection, security, and belonging. But collectively, all these narrative details do seem to reinforce this single, simple point: God commands Abram to go, and Abram goes.

It is this faithful going—recorded without hesitation, question, or protest—that makes this story the thematic center of the Torah for Hebrew Bible scholar Bruce Waltke. It is a profound moment of covenant-making between God and God’s people. It shifts the brokenness of the story that precedes it: the Fall, the flood, and the tower at Babel. It marks a new beginning, a restored and unshakable relationship between God and humanity, not only Abram or Abram’s family but “all the families of the earth.” In a book about Romans, New Testament scholar Rafael Rodríguez argues that this passage shapes the whole of the biblical record, which is ultimately oriented around the call to a faithful life unhesitatingly oriented to the voice of God. As Walter Brueggemann writes, it is a voice that calls Abram from nothing into “a new future” and “a new community” wrought “only by miracle and reliant only to God’s faithfulness.”

As I sit with this passage and the interpretations of these scholars, I am moved by the symbolic and thematic importance of this story as it profoundly narrates God’s covenant being made with God’s people. It is a story that makes central the work of God’s faithful calling and Abram’s faithful going. But it is also a story that calls me back into it. It calls me to reread, to pause, to stay awhile in this ancient moment—and as I linger there, I begin to wonder about all the things that are missing, that are not recorded in the biblical tale.

I begin to wonder about the people who fill the gaps and the silences in this story even though they are largely unwritten, unimagined, and even unnamed by the text. I wonder not where they went or why or how but instead what they thought, what they felt, what they whispered to each other as they prepared, packed, and moved, what they breathed silently only to themselves or confessed only to God in the quiet mystery of their own hearts. Were they excited or eager, anxious or scared? Were they willing or brave, hesitant or compelled? Was there unity or agreement, grumbling or unrest?

We cannot know, but we can imagine. As Brueggemann reminds us, these people are called into God’s faithful covenant, but by way of a “radical” journey marked by “precariousness,” “danger,” and “risk.” The risk would have been felt by Abram and Lot, who walked away from security in their patriarchal land. It would have been felt even more, I suspect, by Sarai and those many unnamed people who go, likely quite powerlessly, with them.

In daring to imagine the complicated thoughts and feelings of those who follow God's call, we are using what Holladay calls "pious imagination." Culturally, we often delegate and degrade the imagination to the world of play and pretend, but as Toni Morrison has noted, to imagine is an essential tool for truth, hope, and justice. She describes the careful editorial process that left early slave narratives full of holes, omissions, and silences much like those that permeate this biblical account. These narratives withheld so much; most lamentably, for Morrison, they withheld the interior thoughts and feelings of those enslaved people who each day suffered, feared, hoped, and loved. In order to write truthfully, Morrison turns to formal and informal archives to uncover the life that was silenced in the recorded history of American slavery. And yet "memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help me."

As we bring our holy imaginations to this Genesis text and dare to dream alive the imperfect people who occupy it, the story will become less straightforward. It may not be a simple story of God's faithful call and people's faithful response. Their faith may be touched by uncertainty and fear, hesitation and doubt, coercion and injustice. Real faith in the lives of real people, past and present, is imperfect, and in that imperfection it is all the more true.