

**The Promise to Abram (Genesis 11:27–12:9)**  
Grace Chapel April 29, 2009 Dr. John Niemelä

**INTRODUCTION**

**FLOW OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS**

*Toledot* = *These are the generations of* . . .

*Toledot* 1): 1:1–2:3: God formed (days 1–3) so He could fill the earth with light and life (days 4–6) and He rested, because creation was done (day 7)

*Toledot* 2: 2:4–4:26 (Day 6ff.) God’s evaluation of creation (after forming Adam) was, “Not Good that man should be alone,” but then He created the woman so the earth could be filled with people, but humanity fell into death while the woman was in her first pregnancy & that child murdered his brother before spawning a lineage

*Toledot* 3: 5:1–6:8 All of Adam’s descendants died, except Enoch who walked with God, then demons began procreating with humans (in an attempt to destroy humanity, but Noah found grace in God’s eyes

*Toledot* 4: 6:9–9:29 God used the universal flood to judge humanity which had become corrupt and violent, but delivered Noah and his immediate family to start over in repopulating the earth (with which God covenanted not to flood, but to provide for creation to procreate and to exact penalty for encroaching on God’s domain of taking human life) and He cursed Canaan’s lineage and blessed Shem and Japheth’s lines because Ham

*Toledot* 5: 10:1–11:26 As the descendants of Noah’s three sons multiplied (with Shem’s inheritance line continuing through Terah), people in Shinar revolted against God’s command to fill the earth by centralizing (rather than being scattered) and building a city and tower, so God caused them to scatter by confusing their language

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Toledot</i> 6: 11:27–25:11        | <i>Toledot</i> of Terah                     |
| <i>Toledot</i> 7: 25:12–18           | <i>Toledot</i> of Ishmael                   |
| <i>Toledot</i> 8: 25:19–35:29        | <i>Toledot</i> of Isaac                     |
| <i>Toledot</i> 9: 37:1–8 & 36:9–37:1 | <i>Toledot</i> of Esau (the father of Edom) |
| <i>Toledot</i> 10: 37:2–50:26        | <i>Toledot</i> of Jacob                     |

**NEW EXPOSITION:**

**TERAH’S FAMILY (11:27–32)**

**11:27–28 Terah begot Abram, Nahor & Haran; Haran (who died in Ur) begot Lot**

Abram was not the eldest, even though he is listed first.

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Terah died at age 205 in Haran (Gen 11:32)                       | 205        |
| Terah had the first of three sons at age 70 (Gen 11:26)          | <u>-70</u> |
| Terah died 135 years after his first son was born                | 135        |
| Abram left Haran at age 75 (after Terah died there)              | <u>-75</u> |
| Terah’s first son was born about 60 years before Abram was born* | 60         |

\*Assuming that Abram left Haran soon after his father died. If Abram delayed, the gap between Terah’s first and third sons would be a bit less than 60 years.

Abram is listed first because of his importance to Genesis, not because he was the eldest  
This verse explains Lot’s presence in the book. Abram was guardian to Lot in his younger years.

**11:29–30 Abram married Sarai (his half-sister) who was barren; Nahor married Milcah**

This underlies Genesis 12 & 20 where Abram told his wife to say that she was his sister

**11:31–32 Terah’s clan (Abram, Lot & Sarai) went from Ur to Haran and dwelt there, where Terah died**

Genesis 31:53 says that Terah became a worshipper of the Lord

**GOD’S PROMISE (12:1–3)**

**12:1 The Lord commanded Abram to leave his country and family, namely, he was to leave his father’s household**

Many sermons have been preached, saying that 12:1*ff.* happened prior to 11:31–32

However, Genesis 12:1 starts with a *waw* consecutive on a preterite. This tells us that 12:1*ff.* happened after 11:27–32. The NKJ ignores this chronological clue. It says: *Now the LORD had said. . . .* (NKJ)

A correct translation would be: *Then the LORD said. . . .*

Why is this important? Gen 12:4 says *Abram did as the Lord had spoken to him.*

In other words, Abram obeyed.

God said Leave your country, your family (father’s household), and father’s house. When God said this is important:

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|  |  |

|      | If He said it in Ur   | If He said it in Haran after Terah died |
|------|---|---|
| Then |   |   |
| 1    | Terah is the leader, not Abram (11:31)                                  | Abram is the leader (12:4)              |
| 2    | He did not leave his father’s family behind                             | He left his father’s family behind*     |
|      | *Lot is like an adopted son to Abram, so taking Lot is not disobedience |   |

Why don’t most translations accept this approach? It would mean that Stephen (in Acts 7:2–3) made a slight error (by saying that Abram was called while in Ur). This does not affect inerrancy, because Luke accurately records Stephen’s message. Luke committed no error in transmitting accurately what Stephen said. We should let Genesis interpret Genesis, rather than dismissing Moses’ grammar because of what Stephen said.

**12:2 The Lord promised (unconditionally) to make Abram into a great nation, to bless him, and to exalt Abram's name; [in light of this blessing from God) Abram was supposed to be a blessing (to others)**

This is a covenant of grant (having no conditions for perpetuating it). Note the sequence.

1. Abram is to leave
2. God blesses Abram and makes him into a great nation
3. The possession of such blessing is to evoke a response: Be a blessing.

The phrase *You shall be a blessing* is a command, not a simple future (*Be a blessing*). I would recommend that you adjust the translation accordingly.

When we say that it is unconditional, God does not say "If you bless people, I will bless you." He says, "I will bless you, so bless others." Failing to bless others is will not cause God to revoke the promise.

Furthermore, the command for Abram to leave his country has already been fulfilled, so no conditions remain.

Interpreting the promise:

Becoming a great nation means progeny, but they are old & Sarai is barren.

Abram is 75; Sarai is 65; he is 10 years older than Sarah (Gen 17:17)

God will bless him (it is not Abram blessing himself; God's work will be evident)

God will make his name great

**12:3 The Lord will bless those who bless Abram & curse the one who curses him; in Abram blessing will be extended to all families of the earth**

How others treat Abram will determine whether God curses or blesses them

Blessing is not given a narrow definition in verses 2–3, but Genesis shows that it includes everlasting life (Cf. Gen 17:8; 26:3; 28:4). It will also include material prosperity in the kingdom. (cf. Paul's commentary in Gal 3:8)

### **ABRAM GOES TO CANAAN & WORSHIPS (12:4–9)**

#### **12:4 Abram obediently left Haran at age 75 (taking Lot)**

This passage does not say that Abraham believed the Lord's promise, but he would not have obeyed the command to leave for another land, if he did not believe the promise.

Furthermore, properly understood, Genesis 15:6 affirms that Abram had already believed.

Note Genesis 15:1: *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying. . . .*

The word *saying* tells us that the words of the vision start in 15:1b. Therefore, the vision is in 15:1b–21.

The verses that follow (except for verse 6) each begin with a *waw* consecutive plus a preterite. This means that each verse happened one right after the other, other than verse 6. But verse 6 is a parenthesis that is outside of the vision. Abram had already believed in the Lord. I would take it that he had believed back in chapter 12. We will say more about this when we get to chapter 15.

Remember that we argued in Gen 12:1 that the Lord made the promises while Abram was in Haran, so Abram fully obeyed God's command (as verse 4 affirms). He did not partially obey

#### **12:5 Abram took Sarai and Lot and their possessions and people they acquired in Haran to the land of Canaan**

The people they acquired cannot be Abram's progeny, because he did not yet have any.

It could be a reference to servants or it could be a reference to people voluntarily associating with this man whom the Lord was blessing

**ABRAM PUBLICLY CLAIMS ALL OF ISRAEL FOR THE LORD (GEN 12:6–9)**

**12:6 Abram went as far as Shechem, to the terebinth tree of Moreh—surrounded by Canaanites**

Genesis 9:25ff. and Genesis 10 indicate that the Canaanites were under a curse—a curse that precluded entering into alliance with them. Most Canaanites would see Abram as a threat, especially as God blessed him

**12:7 The Lord appeared to Abraham (at Shechem) and told him that He gives this land to Abram’s seed; Abram built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him**

God had promised to elevate Abram’s name (12:2); Abram elevates God’s name. Altars are a public proclamation of the one being worshipped

This is an unconditional and eternal grant of land (cf. Gen 17:8; 16:3; 28:4)

**12:8 Abram went to a mountain between Bethel and Ai, built another altar to the LORD & worshipped Him**

**12:9 Abram continued traveling through the land to the Negev**

The NKJ translates *Negev* as *south*

**CONCLUSION**

After Terah’s death in Haran, God told Abram to leave his father’s house & household; God would make him a great nation & bless him so that he would bless others, so Abram went to Canaan where the Lord revealed Himself again and gave the land to Abram, who then built altars to the Lord and worshipped Him throughout the land that the Lord gave him