

“The Great Adventure” (Genesis 11:27-12:9)

Genesis 11:27 begins a new division in the book of Genesis.¹ The book of Genesis can be structured by tracing four great events and four great people. The four great events are laid out in chapters 1-11: Creation, Fall, Flood, and Nations. The four great people complete the book in chapters 12-50: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The point being: God’s first concern is all the people of the world (Gen 1-11), but the focus of Genesis (and the rest of the Pentateuch) is on God’s choice and care of His chosen people, Israel (Gen 12-50).² This sovereign choice begins with the call of Abram.³ The book of Genesis covers more than 2,000 years and more than 20 generations; yet, it spends almost a third of its text on the life of this one man (11:27-25:18). What a reminder that God truly cares about people and considers individuals valuable. This passage is going to challenge us to live a life of faith.

1. Faith grows gradually (11:27-32): In these six verses, the genealogy of chapter 11 becomes quite specific and focused.⁴ Moses begins with the familiar phrase, “**Now these are the records of the generations of...**” (11:27a). This “formula” serves as an outline throughout Genesis.⁵ The last major occurrence of this phrase was in 6:8, in reference to Noah, where God began a new thing in Noah and his sons. This is one hint that what is coming in 11:27-32 concerning the life of Abram will be something new on a grand scale. Moses goes on to say that “**Terah became the father of Abram,⁶ Nahor and Haran**” (11:27b). Again, this doesn’t seem to be terribly significant until we realize that the mention of Terah having three named sons alerts us to a previous pattern. Adam and Noah both had three named sons and both of them obviously point out high water marks in God’s dealings with people. So we should not be totally surprised when God calls Abram and embarks on a new path in the fulfillment of His promises and plan of redemption.⁷ God is preparing His way for His man.

In 11:27c, Moses also informs us, “**Haran became the father of Lot.**” Lot is introduced quickly because he is a major character who serves as a contrast to Abram. In 11:28, Moses records that “**Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.**”⁸ This is an important comment because it tells us that Abram, the son of Terah, was born in Ur of the Chaldeans (11:28).⁹ This will become important in just a moment. Verse 29 states that Abram and his brother Nahor “**took wives for themselves**” (cf. 6:2). Abram married his half-sister, Sarai (see 20:12), which was not contrary to God’s will at this early date in history.¹⁰ The marriage of Abram’s brother Nahor is mentioned because he became the grandfather of Laban and Rebekah, both of whom would figure largely in the history of Abram’s grandson Jacob.¹¹ Many of the names in 11:29 come right out of the cult of moon worship.¹² Joshua 24:2, 14-15, make it clear that Terah (and quite possibly his family) worshipped many gods. In 11:30, Moses makes an emphatic remark that Abram’s wife, Sarai, “**was barren; she had no child.**” Sarai’s infertility tests Abram’s faith and drives the whole story.¹³ Verses 31-32 then inform us that Terah took Abram and his family from Ur of the Chaldeans “**in order to enter the land of Canaan.**” The family, though, only went “**as far as Haran, and settled there.**” Sometime after settling in Haran, Terah died at the age of 205.

At the core of this story is the principle of God’s sovereign choice of an individual. God’s call to Abram was pure grace.¹⁴ There is no evidence in the text that God chose Abram because he merited favor. On the contrary, God chose Abram from a family steeped in idolatry. He did this so that He might receive all the glory for what became of Abram.¹⁵ The great thing about God is that when He is forming His family and choosing servants, He selects the most unlikely people! After all, He chose you and me. He did so not because of whom we would become; He did so because He chose to love us and He then made us into whom He wanted us to be (Rom 8:29). Today, may we express gratitude to God for choosing us to have a relationship with Him. May we also thank Him for calling us into service. It is a privilege to both know and serve God.

Before we move into chapter 12, it is important to observe some interesting clues in this section and the rest of Scripture. An important point of interest is that God first called Abram to leave his home when he still lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (12:1-3; cf. 15:7; Neh 9:7; Acts 7:2-4). Evidently, God's initial revelation of Himself to Abram was of such a powerful and convincing nature that his father Terah was not only persuaded to join the pilgrimage but actually took the lead.¹⁶ (Abram, Sarai, and Lot followed Terah to Haran.) Unfortunately, the caravan stopped in Haran instead of going all the way into Canaan.¹⁷ There the pilgrimage bogged down and, it would seem, remained inert and inactive for many years until the death of Terah. Likewise, there are many people today who respond to God's call to be followers of Christ, but only partially obey. Yes, they have left the gross idolatry and rebellion of "Ur", but instead of pursuing the abundant life in the Promised Land of Canaan, they settle for something in between. They settle down in Haran, which means "barren." And like Abram, they have wasted many years of their lives living in the comfortable and familiar land of "Haran," a land of spiritual compromise.

When Abram received his first call from God, he was only partially obedient. Fortunately, God is patient. Abram was very young in the faith. He had much to learn, and God could afford to wait.¹⁸ So the wasted years slipped by and then upon Terah's death, Abram began to make the progress God desired. This should encourage us. Abram, the great father of our faith, started his Christian pilgrimage slowly. He also wasted some years along the way. If that's true of Abram, and God used him powerfully, how much more can that be true of you? If you started your Christian faith slowly or if you have found yourself squandering precious time, you can get back into the race. Don't wait another minute.

[While faith grows gradually, we learn in 12:1 that...]

2. Faith steps out (12:1). Moses writes, "Now¹⁹ the LORD said²⁰ to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house,²¹ to the land which I will show you.'²²" The famous call of Abram in 12:1 was a command to go away from three things and unto one thing. The three things that God called Abram to forsake were natural sources of security for any ancient, Near Eastern nomad. God lists the three in rapid succession, each succeeding item narrowing the base of personal support and security: (1) His country (or "land") was his nationality and was the largest group in which Abram moved. (2) His people (or "clan") was smaller than his tribe, but larger than his immediate family. Such groups in ancient tribal societies provide personal identity and security. (3) His father's household referred probably to a call to give up his right of inheritance in his extended family. To abandon his father's house would certainly involve giving up his economic security. In a sense, God was calling Abram to go backpacking. God removed anything that might weigh him down or prove to be unnecessary for a trek through the woods. This illustrates Christian discipleship in several ways. God's claim on our lives always beckons us to leave certain things behind at the same time we are taking up a new journey and following Him (Mark 1:18).²³

The term "go" is literally "go by yourself" and can emphasize loneliness, isolation; ideas of parting and seclusion are often implied.²⁴ Abram needs to find his own place and his own identity by disassociating himself from the familiar and the group.²⁵ Put yourself in Abram's sandals. I'm sure there was a good part of Abraham that would have just liked to stay in Haran or perhaps move back to the home he knew in Ur, where he married his wife and where all the family could be together. Why would he leave his home, a progressive metropolis equivalent to Seattle or New York, to journey to a new land, following the command of a God who was not even locally acknowledged? After all, there was no AAA "Trip Tik" or MapQuest directions. The only promise from God was that He would reveal the path to Abram. There was no visible certainty of his future. Abram was to follow the command of the Lord to leave Haran and go to a land he had never seen before. He is to step out in blind faith... a land God would show him.²⁶

Would you have gone? Are you willing to obey the voice of the Lord when He goes against all that makes sense and feels? When everything screams in you against it, are you willing to leave your job for the uncertainties of a higher calling? Faith steps out in obedience. Abraham made the choice to trust God and God blessed him exceedingly.

In these three verses, we see the inauguration of God's covenant with Abraham.²⁷ This covenant is everlasting (13:15; 17:7-8, 13, 19), unconditional (15:9-12; 17-18),²⁸ and literal. It involves a *land* (12:7; 13:14-15, 17; 17:8), a *seed* (12:2; 13:16; 15:4-5; 15:18; 17:4-6), and a *blessing* (12:3; 17:2, 6; 18:18).²⁹ In these verses, God gave Abram a seven-fold promise. The call had two imperatives, each with subsequent promises. The first imperative was to go ("Go forth from your country...to the land which I will show you"), and the second imperative was to be ("and so you shall be a blessing"). Abraham's obedience would bring great blessing. Also notice that five times in these verses you will see the phrase, **"I will..."** Everything is from God Himself.

- 1) **"I will make you a great nation"** (12:2). This promise is connected to the "seed" promise of 3:15. Since the fall of man, God chose certain lines of human descent to carry forward the promise that He would send a deliverer to crush Satan. That line now flowed through Abram to the Hebrew people (13:16; John 8:37), to the descendants of Ishmael (17:18-20), and eventually to all believers (John 8:39; Rom 4:16; Gal 3:6-7, 29). When God called Abram to separate from his family and his country, He did so with the purpose of producing from Abram a great nation. As the founder of the Jewish nation, Abram was appointed by God to be a witness to the rest of mankind concerning God (Isa 44:8). Further, that race was to be a storehouse of divine revelation (Rom 3:2) and a channel of blessing to the world (15:8-12). The ultimate objective in God's choice of Abram was to prepare the world for the coming Messiah and Savior of that world (Isa 53). Do you see how God carefully unfolds His program through individuals? Have you asked Him to reveal His plan for your life?
- 2) **"I will bless you"** (12:2).³⁰ The word **"bless,"**³¹ which occurred five times in chapters 1-11, now occurs five times in 12:1-3.³² God wants to bless his people. In fact, if you remember, this goes right back to creation where God blessed Adam and Eve (1:28) and then, later, that original blessing was repeated in 5:2. God also blessed Noah and restated the mandate in creation, namely, that man rule (9:1-2). God's plan is to bless the world. Indeed, the term **"blessing"** (*barak*) includes God's gracious provisions of personal well-being, long life, wealth, peace, abundance of food and crops, children, and personal knowledge of Himself and His ways. Yes, God's plan is to bless the world. When God blesses someone, He intervenes in their life to do good things. God's blessing to Abram caused him to prosper in all that he did. He was blessed both temporally (13:14-18; 15:18) and spiritually (15:6; John 8:56). Are you seeing God's blessings in your life?
- 3) **"I will make your name great"** (12:2).³³ To be given a great name is to have a good reputation and a secure identity. The builders of the Tower of Babel tried to make a name for themselves (11:4) and thereby gain power and prestige before the world and in the face of God.³⁴ On the other hand, Abram's power and prestige was to come directly from God. In time, God did make Abram's name great when he became known as the "friend of God" (2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23). Do you rely upon God to make your name great, or are you making a name for yourself? How can you submit more of your plans and goals to Him? Today, God wants you to believe that He has designed mankind to desire and pursue greatness.

But rather than finding that greatness the world's way, Christ taught that true greatness is found in: being the least and the servant of all (Matt 20:26), losing your life for the sake of Christ and others (Luke 9:24), and being last now so that you might be first in His kingdom (Mark 9:35).

- 4) **“You shall be a blessing”** (12:2). The Hebrew text says, “Be a blessing,” not “you shall be a blessing.” This was a command rather than a prediction. However as Abram blessed others he would become a blessing. God chose the family of Abram through which He would channel His blessings to the nations of the world, thereby drawing all nations to Himself (cf. Gen 10).³⁵ We never experience God's best for us until we are used to touch the life of someone else. Who can you bless today? Remember the words of 1 Peter 3:9: “Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult, but instead bless others because you were called to inherit a blessing” (NET).
- 5) **“I will bless those who bless you”** (12:3). Now God moves from personal blessing to global blessings.³⁶ Those who honor Abram and his God will be blessed.
- 6) **“The one who curses you I will curse”** (12:3). Unfortunately, not everyone in the world wants God's blessing, or the way He has chosen to carry it out. There will be people who will curse or level insults and accusations against Abram and in so doing bring a curse from God on their heads. They will be cut off from the hope of blessing.³⁷
- 7) **“And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”** (12:3). This is the great messianic promise fulfilled in Abram's descendant, Christ (John 8:56-58; Gal 3:16).

3. Faith experiences obstacles (12:4-6). Abram demonstrated phenomenal faith in light of God's call and was thoroughly blessed for it. So it is with us as well when we trust in Christ. But that does not mean everything in our lives will run smoothly. Quite the opposite actually. Moses writes, **“So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him”** (12:4a). This time around, Abram immediately and completely obeyed God. Did Abram know he was headed to Canaan (12:5)? Apparently not. Hebrews 11:8 states that “he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Verse 4 even says, **“Lot went with him.”** Since Lot voluntarily chose to accompany Abram, he probably believed the promises as well.³⁸ Abram's call had been to separate from his pagan relatives, so he was not disobedient by allowing Lot to accompany him. Moses goes on to inform us that **“Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.”** Though he lived to 175 years old, Abram was no spring chicken when he decided to follow the Lord to Canaan. Age is no hindrance to faith and taking bold steps for the Lord. It's never too late. Despite Abram's age, responsibilities, and various commitments, he stepped forward in a venture of faith, in obedience to God. Fortunately, this principle remains true today. If you are getting up there in age, God still wants to use you. He wants you to finish your race well (2 Tim 4:7-8).

Verse 5 says that **“Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.”** The text says that Abram took his wife Sarai with him. Now the struggle comes to the forefront. In 11:30, the text goes out of its way to point out that Sarai was barren, that she didn't even have a single child. Then, in 12:2, God says He's going to make a great nation out of Abram. Well, it's obvious that it won't be through Sarai—she's barren. So it must be through someone else. But here in 12:5 we learn that there isn't a “someone else.” We are told that Abram took his wife Sarai. In spite of the obvious tensions, Abram must have believed God's promise.³⁹

Sometimes we forget what childlessness meant in the ancient Near East. It involved shame, social ridicule, and implied that the woman/couple were not in the favor of the gods. Why then should they trust

the Lord when He makes “high-flutin” promises about a nation; they don’t even have a single child. Sometimes, some of our greatest struggles believing God and His good promises center in one way or another around our kids. So it was with Abram and Sarai. Certainly they made mistakes along the way, but overall they trusted the God who loves to do the impossible. What are you trusting God for that only He can do? In order for faith to grow it must see beyond the obstacles and pain to the God of our circumstances.

Verse 5 also informs us that Abram’s entourage included **“the persons which they had acquired in Haran.”** While this could be a reference to slaves, it is more likely referring to converts that Abram won during his sojourn in Haran.⁴⁰ So while Abram was in a challenging and irreligious land (Haran), he shared his faith with many people. Consequently, he won converts. By God’s grace, you and I can do the same here in Olympia. The city we live in is certainly no worse than Haran. If God can use Abram to win converts in Haran, He can use you to do the same in Olympia (John 14:12).

In 12:6, Moses records that **“Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.”** Abram’s first settlement was in Shechem.⁴¹ This was God’s second major revelation to Abram. Shechem was near the geographic center of Canaan (cf. Josh 20:7). It lay in the heart of the land God now promised to Abram.⁴² The Hebrew term **“Moreh”** means “teacher” and may indicate an ancient shrine or a place where Canaanite priests declared oracles.⁴³ Thus, living among idolatrous people—people steeped in genuine unbelief—was going to test Abram’s faith. He himself was steeped in idolatry, and the tendency to lapse into pagan religion would remain a very real and present danger to him and his family.⁴⁴ To further complicate matters, Abram could not take possession of the Promised Land immediately because the Canaanites occupied it. Some five centuries would pass before the descendants of Abram would, under Joshua, conquer the Canaanites and take the land God had given them. The presence of the Canaanites was yet another test of Abram’s faith. God had promised to give his descendants an already-possessed land. The presence of the Canaanites indicated opposition that was going to be a reality as Abram continued his life of faith. A godly life must always be lived out in the middle of misunderstanding and even persecution.⁴⁵

Faith is not just believing God for great things and responding to His promises, it also involves a commitment to live as He desires in light of the circumstances He permits in our lives. Faith builds character; so also Abram. He knew that God had called him to go to this new land, even though he didn’t know where he was going. His faith gave him the courage and determination to live for God in a pagan land. By faith he overcame the struggles and trials of leaving family, the barrenness of his wife, and the hostilities of living in a foreign land. By faith he gained an exemplary character and did not succumb to the unbelievers around him...His life matched his words, so to speak (cf. Heb 11:8-12). Does ours?

4. Faith leads to reassurance (12:7a). In 12:7, the Lord speaks to Abram. This is none other than the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ The key to growing a strong faith in the midst of trials is hearing and heeding the voice of the Lord, experiencing the presence of the One who made the promises. So God, knowing we are but dust, and are among those who consistently need encouragement, appears to Abram—the one who is a stranger in a foreign land, with a foreign language, customs, faith, and way of life—and reaffirms to him the promise of offspring and ownership of the land. While God speaks to us primarily through the Scripture, as the indwelling Spirit marries the very words thereof to our hearts, God appeared to Abram and spoke to him.⁴⁷ In the midst of trials, nothing is more assuring and nothing is clearer, than the voice, yes, the very presence, of our heavenly Father.

As we make our way through life, strangers in a foreign country, as it were (1 Pet 2:11), we need to know the presence of the One who will carry us safely to our appointed destination. We need to hear the voice

of God in His Word and in prayer. So God appeared to Abram and restated the essential promise to him: **“to your offspring I will give this land.”** This, we know from Genesis 15:1ff was the besetting question uppermost in Abram’s mind. God comes to us in our time of need and encourages us with His voice: “So do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isa 41:10). What a breath of fresh air!

[A faith like Abram’s steps out in obedience, hopes in the fulfillment of God’s promises of blessings, and grows through trials. But also...]

5. Faith proclaims God (12:7b-9). Abram’s response, in 12:7b to God’s appearing and to His reassuring word in 12:7a, was to worship. The text says that God appeared to Abram and said... **“So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.”** First God speaks (12:1-3), then Abram journeys (12:4-6). Next God appears (12:7a), then Abram worships (12:7).⁴⁸ Though the passage does not explicitly say that he sacrificed, we can be sure from Noah’s example in chapter 9—as well as Abraham’s in 22:13—that Abram offered sacrifice to the Lord. Worship is the first and foremost response to the voice of God. Obedience and the proclamation of God’s grace and greatness inexorably follow like the rainbow after spring showers.

Thus, worship has consequences. Verse 8 says that Abraham pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai, which probably indicates that he stayed there for some time. Abram **“pitched his tent.”** In 1 Peter 2:11 we are exhorted to live “as aliens and strangers in the world.” We are to live as people who have their permanent dwelling place in heaven, not on earth. Unfortunately, too many Christians want to build mansions on earth and are happy with tents in heaven!

During his time on the mountain, Abram continued to worship by building an altar. But then notice that the text also says that Abram called on the name of the Lord. This phrase **“called on the name of the Lord”** (cf. 4:26; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25, etc.) means much more than simple worship. It carries the idea of proclaiming the name of the Lord (cf. Zeph 3:9). Isn’t it interesting that God promised Abram to make his name great and here Abram is making the Lord’s name great in Canaan? In the midst of a foreign and thoroughly pagan land Abram erected an altar and there proclaimed the name of the Lord. What amazing faith! He truly shone like a star in the universe by holding out the Word of Life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (cf. Phil 2:16).

My prayer for you today is that you become a man or woman of faith that transforms your culture. As you step out in obedience, overcome obstacles, and proclaim God, you will accomplish His will for your life and for the generations to come.

The Significance of Abraham (Genesis 11:27-25:18)

Fast Facts:

- Apart from Jesus Christ, Abraham is in many respects the greatest man in Scripture.
- Jesus Christ, the Messiah, came from the lineage of Abraham (Gen 12:3; Matt 1:1).
- Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation (Isa 51:2; Ezek 33:24).
- The three covenant promises God makes to Abraham (i.e., land, descendants, and blessing) are foundational to His program of bringing salvation upon the earth.
- The promises to Abraham became assurance for future generations (Exod 32:13; 33:1).
- The three great world religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism identify Abraham with the coveted title, “friend of God” (2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23).
- Islam holds Abraham second in importance to Mohammed. (The Koran refers to Abraham 188 times.)
- One-fourth of the book of Genesis is devoted to Abraham’s life (Gen 11:27-25:18).
- Abraham’s name occurs 234 times in the Old Testament and 74 times in the New Testament.
- Apart from Moses, no other Old Testament character is identified by name as many times. (Keep in mind, many of the references to Moses are found in citations of the Old Testament Law.)
- Abraham is identified as the father of: Israel (Acts 13:26), the Levitical priesthood (Heb 7:5), the Messiah (Matt 1:1), and all believers (Rom 4:11; Gal 3:16, 29). Abraham’s life is used as an Old Testament illustration (“type”) of justification by faith (Rom 4:1-3, 16-24), justification by works (Jas 2:21-23), and living by faith (Heb 11:8-19). In the “Hall of Faith,” (Heb 11) the author devoted more space to Abraham than any other individual.
- Abraham was the reason the Southern Kingdom of Israel was spared as long as it was (2 Kgs 13:23).
- When the apostles preached to the Jews, they frequently appealed to Abraham (Acts 3:13, 25; 7:2-32; 13:26).
- Abram means, “father is exalted”; Abraham means, “father of a multitude” (Gen 17:5).
- God Himself was subsequently known as “the God of Abraham” (Exod 3:6).

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Notes

¹ “This is the central passage of the Book of Genesis.” Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002 [1988]), 25.

² “Whereas chapters 1-11 generally portray man’s rebellion, chapters 12-50 detail God’s bringing man into a place of blessing.” Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 47.

³ Theologically, Genesis 12 is one of the key OT passages, for it contains what has been called the Abrahamic Covenant. Six passages in Genesis pertain to the Abrahamic Covenant (12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18). This covenant is the key, which unlocks the rest of the OT.

⁴ Sailhamer observes, “The function of this genealogy is not so much to connect Abraham with the preceding events, as the previous genealogies have done, but to provide the reader with the necessary background for understanding the events in the life of Abraham. The list includes eight names. All the individuals named are relevant for understanding the events of the following narrative except “Isciah” (11:29). The inclusion of this otherwise insignificant name in the list suggests that the author is seeking to achieve a specific number of names. Thus far in the Book of Genesis, the author has followed a pattern of listing ten names between important individuals in the narrative. In this short list only eight names are given, hence if we are expecting ten names, the number of individuals in this list appears to be short by two names. By listing only eight names, the author leaves the reader uncertain who the ninth and, more importantly, the tenth name will be. It is only as the narrative unfolds that the ninth and tenth names are shown to be the two sons of Abraham, “Ishmael” (16:15) and “Isaac” (21:3).” John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis: EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), Electronic ed.

⁵ The literary structure of Genesis is built around eleven separate units, each headed with the word “generations” in the phrase “These are the generations” or “The book of the generations” (1:1-2:3; 2:4-4:26; 5:1-6:8; 6:9-9:29; 10:1-11:9; 11:10-26; 11:27-25:11; 25:12-18; 25:19-35:29; 36:1-37:1; and 37:2-50:26).

⁶ God is called Abram in Gen 11-16. From Gen 17:5 on, Scripture uses the name Abraham to refer to this patriarch, except for 1 Chron 1:27, 32 and Neh 9:7.

⁷ Greg Herrick, *Contours of Faith* (http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=35), 4/24/05.

⁸ A later writer probably added the reference to the Chaldeans in 11:28 since the Chaldeans did not enter Babylonia until about 1,000 B.C. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15: WBC* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 272.

⁹ It is generally held that this Ur is located in southern Mesopotamia near the Persian Gulf. Others, however, have contended that this Ur is located to the north and east of Haran. Considerable support may be marshaled for this view, both within and without the Bible (cf. Isa 23:13; Gen 22:22; 24:4-7; Josh 24:2-3). I assume that the traditional view is correct, but the other affords an intelligible understanding of the passage and may be correct.

¹⁰ Cf. Lev 18:9; 20:17; Deut 27:22.

¹¹ John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), 106.

¹² Several of Abram’s relations have names that suggest adherence to lunar worship (cf. Sarah, Milcah, Laban), a cult that was prominent in Ur and Harran. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 252.

¹³ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 200.

¹⁴ God’s revelation to Abram in these verses explains why his family left Ur (11:31). “...by placing the call of Abraham after the dispersion of the nations at Babylon (11:1-9), the author intends to picture Abraham’s call as God’s gift of salvation in the midst of judgment.” John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 139.

¹⁵ Ephesians 1 tells us that God selects people “to the praise of His glory” (1:6, 12, 14).

¹⁶ Phillips, *Exploring Genesis*, 108.

¹⁷ Perhaps the prosperity and comfort of the city of Haran became too much for Terah.

¹⁸ Phillips, *Exploring Genesis*, 108.

¹⁹ This section begins with a *waw* disjunctive in the Hebrew text translated “Now.” It introduces an independent circumstantial clause (cf. 1:2). Probably the revelation in view happened in Ur.

²⁰ The NIV, NKJV, and KJV include the word “had,” which clarifies this verse: “The Lord had said to Abram.” These translations are suggesting that 12:1 flashes back to something that happened in Ur even though 11:31 ends with Abram in Haran.

²¹ God called Abram to separate himself from his homeland and to proceed to a different country. That Abram’s family chose to accompany him does not imply an act of disobedience on Abram’s part. God did not forbid others from accompanying Abram. The focus of God’s command was that Abram should uproot himself and follow His leading.

²² Once Abraham obeyed God's call to the land, no further conditions were placed on the covenant. The fulfillment of the covenant depends solely on the faithfulness of God. This fact was made even clearer when the covenant was ratified in Gen 15, at the point God "cut" the covenant with Abraham. The "cutting" of the covenant required both parties to pass between the sacrificial animals; but at the critical time, God caused a deep sleep to come over Abraham and only He (represented by the "smoking oven and flaming torch") passed between the animals (15:17). This placed the full responsibility for fulfillment of the covenant provisions upon God.

²³ Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 72.

²⁴ This word "go" (*halak*) is used in Gen 22:2 when God told Abram to sacrifice his son, that is, to get up in the morning and go by himself and take his son to a place that He would show him (cf. Gen 21:16; 22:2; Exod 18:27; Song 2:10, 13; 4:6). See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 266 n 32b.

²⁵ According to the genealogical record of the sons of Noah, the "nations" were divided according to their "lands" (10:5, 20, 31-32). By leaving his "land," Abraham would in essence be leaving his nation. "From your relatives" and "from your father's house," in this verse, further confirms this understanding. According to Gen 10, common ancestry was the basis of national identity. Thus, the Lord called Abraham to renounce his identification with the nations who were in rebellion against Him.

²⁶ Calvin comments that God said in effect, "I command thee to go forth with closed eyes, and forbid thee to inquire where I am about to lead thee until having renounced thy country, thee shall have given thyself wholly to me." John Calvin, *Genesis*, trans. and ed. John King (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 344.

²⁷ Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *Master's Seminary Journal* Volume 10, No. 2 Fall 1999:191-212.

²⁸ It is important, therefore, to observe the relationship of obedience to this covenant program. Whether or not God would institute a covenant program with Abram depended on Abram's act of obedience in leaving the land. Once this act was accomplished, however, and Abram did obey God, God instituted an irrevocable, unconditional program...in what sense is the Abrahamic covenant (ch. 15) unconditional? The point here, which has often been misunderstood, is that while the fulfillment of any particular generation of Israel depended on obedience to God, the ultimate possession of the land is promised unconditionally to Israel even though she does not deserve it. Scripture prophesies that a godly remnant of Israel will be the ultimate possessors of the land at the second coming (Ezek 20:33-38).

²⁹ The promises that this glorious God gave to Abram fall into three categories. First there were *personal* promises given to Abram. God said, "I will bless you; I will make your name great." Then there were *national* promises given to this childless man. "I will make you into a great nation." And finally there were *universal* promises that were to come through Abram. "You will be a blessing . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

³⁰ Davis writes, "These promises are extremely vague. Abram has no idea what God means when He uses the various forms of the word 'blessing.' The term 'blessing' can mean different things to different people. Furthermore, even the statements that Abram would be a great nation and have a great name can be understood in very relative terms. Abram's faith, therefore, is seen not merely in his obedience to God's command, it is also seen in his willingness to accept whatever it is that God plans to do for him. Barry C. Davis, *Genesis 12-50* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class Notes, 2003), 1.

³¹ The idea of blessing is used more in Genesis than in any other book: 88 times, compared to a total of 310 in the rest of the OT.

³² Dumbrell writes, "Some have contrasted the use of 'bless(ing)' in this section with the fivefold occurrence of the word *curse* in chapters 3-11 (3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25)." William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991 [1988]), 25.

³³ The OT usually reserves this "great" reputation for God (Josh 7:9; 1 Sam 12:22; Ps 76:2; Mal 1:11), along with kings (2 Sam 7:9; Ps 72:17). Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* 372-73; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* 275-276.

³⁴ Instead of retaining God's favor and exercising authority on His behalf, man rebelled against the Creator who blessed him (3:1-7; 4:1-24). Instead of experiencing all of God's blessing, God's "curse" fell upon mankind (3:17; 4:11; 5:29). Just before the flood this rebellion produced "men of renown," literally, "men of a name" (6:4). These "men of a name" were the offspring of the sexual union of "the sons of God" and the "the daughters of men." The text depicts them as ancient warriors who had established their reputation or fame apart from God. After the judgment of the flood, mankind once again rebelled against God. Although God had directed mankind to populate all the earth (9:1; 11:4), men came together saying, "Let us make for ourselves a name" (11:4). Again, "name" has the connotation of reputation or fame apart from God. God judged mankind through the confusion of languages, not by a flood as previously, because of the provisions of the covenant with Noah (11:7-8; cf. 9:8-17).

³⁵ Some of these ideas came from Paul Wright, ed., *Genesis: Shepherd's Notes* (Nashville: Broadman, 1997), 40-42.

³⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 184.

³⁷ The Hebrew words translated "curse" are significant. The word *qll* in "the one who curses you" really means "disdains," but the word *'rr* in "I will curse" means "curse." It was only disdain for Abraham that would provoke God's judgment. God's ultimate purpose was to bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham and his seed.

³⁸ This is why he is called "righteous" three times in the book of 2 Peter (2:7-8).

³⁹ Though Sarai struggled deeply with her barrenness later, and Abraham sought to fulfill the promise through Hagar (Gen 16:1-16), God did fulfill his promise for Sarai to have a son (21:1-8). But their faith was developed as a result of suffering through this.

⁴⁰ See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1964), 320-321. See also Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002 [1988]), 265.

⁴¹ Shechem became sacred to the Israelites because here God revealed Himself to Abram for the first time in the Promised Land.

⁴² At Shechem Jacob later bought land, set up his home, and buried his idols in rededication to the Lord after returning from his sojourn in Paddan-aram (Gen 33:18-20; 35:4). Here, too, the Israelites assembled twice when they had taken possession of Canaan under Joshua's leadership to commemorate God's faithfulness in giving them the land He had promised their forefathers (Josh 8, 24).

⁴³ Hosea 4:13 talks about the use of a *terebinth* tree for idol worship.

⁴⁴ And, as we know from the book of Joshua and several other places in the OT, the Canaanites would prove a formidable enemy for the Hebrews to drive out of the land.

⁴⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 186.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gen 16:7-14; 18:2, 17, 33; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; 31:11-13; 32:24-30.

⁴⁷ What may the modern believer expect as a confirmation of the promises of God? All that the text would say to us today is that God can appear to people; it does not say that He will or that we must experience such an appearance for confirmation. Probably the New Testament believer will find confirmation.

⁴⁸ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), Electronic Ed.