

Introduction

At this point, we have reached the account of Abraham. He is the center of attention through chapter 25.

Terah's Family, 11:27-30

Terah had three sons – Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Abram will take up our attention for the next few weeks, so we will deal with him later.

Nahor married Milcah (v. 29). Genesis 22:20-23 tells us that they had eight children. One of these was Bethuel, a cousin to Abraham's son Isaac. Bethuel's daughter was Rebekah, who would eventually become the wife of Isaac (Gen. 24:15-67).

Haran had a son, Lot, but then died while still in Ur of the Chaldees with his father Terah. From here, Lot tagged along with his uncle Abram.

Abram's wife was Sarai. They were not able to have children for many years.

Move to the City of Haran, 11:31-32

Terah moved his family from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran. Ur is on the Euphrates River, just northwest of the Arabian Sea. This is right along the border between modern-day Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Haran is basically northwest along the Euphrates about 600 miles. The city was probably named by Terah after his son who died as a young man in Ur.

Apparently Terah intended to take his family to the land of Canaan but stopped short of that goal. They lived for a while at a stopover point. Genesis 12:5 says that Abram left Haran and departed to go to Canaan, a goal he achieved.

Terah reached the old age of 205 years and died in Haran.

God's Call to Abram, 12:1-3

The message that God gave to Abram is what is called an unconditional covenant. He promised to give Abram certain things, without any conditions attached to the ultimate fulfillment of those promises. So this is the commencement of what we call the dispensation of promise. While God has not abandoned his previous dispensational arrangement of human government, he is making a new arrangement for the beginnings of the nation of Israel which will be the focus of God's work throughout the remainder of the OT.

The first part of what God said consists of a command for Abram to move to the land that God would show him. From 12:5, it is apparent that Abram knew the general area to which God was directing him, namely the land of Canaan, but he did not know some of the more specifics (Heb. 11:8). In fact, it was only later (12:7, 13:14-18, 15:18-21) that Abram was given more details on the exact dimensions of the property that God was deeding to him.

Note that Heb. 11:8 tells that Abram obediently left his home country in faith. Genesis 15:6 is the classic verse that points out that Abraham was justified, but he first exercised faith in God before Genesis 15.

Then God makes several "I will" promises. Depending on how you divide it up, you might see three parts to this promise, or up to seven parts. The following will break it down into seven parts to help explain it, but you can see how different parts logically fit together. Some are promises to Abram personally; others are to his descendants; others are for those who are outside of his physical family.

1. I will make you a great nation. This is a promise that, though Abram does not have any children yet, he would have a huge number of descendants. Heb. 11:12 says that Abraham has many descendants. In addition to those from Isaac, there are those of Ishmael's line. This assumes "great" carries the sense of "large." Of course, the nation of Israel will also be "great" in the sense of "important" in the future of God's program with mankind

2. I will bless you. Abraham would receive personal blessings, both spiritually and physically. He did receive personal blessings in his lifetime. He was very wealthy (13:2), for instance. He also had many servants (318, 14:14).
3. And make your name great. This speaks of renown and fame. There is no doubt that Abraham is well known throughout the world to this very day.
4. And you shall be a blessing. Some of the blessings that Abraham receives will be transmitted to others around him. The "and" indicates that this is a consequence of God's promise to multiply his descendants, bless him personally, and make him famous. And how this works out practically is shown in the next three statements. This is like a hinge verse: the previous verses build up to this, and the following verses come out of it. Interestingly, this is not a future tense verb. It is an imperative. Because of God's promise, Abraham *must* be a blessing. He cannot avoid it!
5. I will bless those who bless you. Those who treat Abraham well will be blessed. Note that this and the following promise *primarily* refer to Abraham personally. Of course it applies to his descendants as well.
6. I will curse those who curse you. Those who treat Abraham "lightly" (disrespect him, etc.) will not receive blessings from God; in fact, they will be cursed.
7. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The spiritual aspect of the blessing upon Abraham really comes in here. See Acts 3:25, Galatians 3:8. It is obvious that the later Scriptures show this promise to be a reference to the Messiah and his making salvation available to Gentiles as well as Jews.

Note that Heb. 11:13 tells us that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not receive the promises, but saw them afar off and were assured of their fulfillment. These promises *still* await their final fulfillment. One's view of eschatology must be formed in large part around these promises, and those associated with them throughout the OT.

However, disobedience can delay (from the human perspective) the fulfillment of an unconditional covenant; it can certainly make its provisions out of reach at some specific time or another, according to the pleasure of God. This is the situation that Israel finds itself in today. The people are in a hardened state of unbelief. They cannot expect that God will bless them in their unbelief, particularly when the Scriptures attach the millennial time of blessing to the salvation of the nation (Romans 11:25-27). God blessed Abraham with temporal blessings in part because he was a believer. When Abraham stepped out of bounds (i.e., with Hagar), problems ensued. While we must not take the blessings promised to Israel and give them to the church, we must also not forget the curses that God specially gave to Israel for unbelief. They both stay with the nation and have to be considered.

A note about this calling: This is special, direct revelation from God to Abram. Abram was privileged to receive this kind of revelation many times in his life. No one is "called" this way today. The Holy Spirit does not "speak" to anyone. He will use the Word of God to convince a person of their need to do this or that, but He does not give an audible voice.

Abram's Travel to Canaan (Palestine), 12:4-9

Abraham obeyed God's command and took his family, with Lot, to Canaan. He stopped on the journey at some notable locations, namely Shechem and Bethel. God promised the land again (v. 7). This time, Abram could see the land before his very eyes.

Abram's Travel to Egypt, 12:10-20

A famine induced Abram to go to Egypt to find food. This may have been necessary for a short time to find nourishment, but what was clearly not right was for him to lie about his wife, and ask her to lie for him (12:10-13). If she was his sister, then they would treat him well, trying to curry favor so that he would allow one of the Egyptians to marry her. But as her husband, he was a "rival" to anyone who wanted her for himself.

Pharaoh took Sarai into his house and by so doing treated Abram "lightly" (even though he was deceived) by treating his wife this way. God plagued Pharaoh as a result. Abraham went away dishonored because of his lie in the sight of the Egyptians. MAP