

Genesis 11:27-12:7 – DHT

These are the generations of Terah. Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begat Lot. Haran died before the face of his father Terah in his birthland, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took wives to themselves. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milcah, daughter of Haran, father of Milcah and Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram. And they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan, but they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were 205 years and Terah died in Haran.

YHWH said to Abram: Go out from your country and from your family and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless him who blesses you and I will curse him who despises you; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. So Abram departed as YHWH had spoken and Lot went with him.

Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had gathered, and the people they acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem as far as the Oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. YHWH appeared to Abram and said: I will give this land to your descendants. He built there an altar to YHWH, who had appeared to him.

Introduction and Summary of the Bible’s Prologue

Genesis 1-11 is oftentimes called the prologue to the Bible. The purpose of this prologue to the Bible is to prepare us to understand the story of Scripture; to enable us to enter into the worldview of the Bible. In Genesis 1, we see the sovereign-creator at work constructing his cosmic temple and placing the “man of the ground” and his wife within as the temple-idols of his majesty. In Genesis 2, we see these first priestly-mediators were given the divine directive to extend the boundary of God’s reign to the ends of the earth. In Genesis 3, we see God’s priests follow the shrewdness of the serpent; disobeying God by attempting to become like God. And we see God make a promise of an offspring of the woman who would save humanity and the earth from the curse of sin by crushing the head of that serpent. In Genesis 4, we see the

beginning of the downward spiral of humanity in the wake of our new disposition towards rebellion against God. The downward spiral of sin led to Genesis 6 when the mysterious creatures called the Nephilim—the offspring of angels and humans—whose very existence prompted God to regret making humanity in the first place and prompted God to destroy all of humanity; all but eight lives who were saved through the waters of judgment in an ark.

The two primary images the Bible uses to describe God’s judgment are that of *de-creation* of the land and a *scattering* of his people. On the other hand, though, the two images the Bible uses to describe God’s salvation are that of *re-creation* of the land and a *gathering* of his people. De-creation and Re-creation of the land are both built upon the judgment and salvation of the flood in Genesis 6-9, and the scattering of the people is built upon Genesis 11. But what about the gathering of God’s people? This is where our passage comes in, for God’s promises to Abram are the next development in God’s plan of salvation following his promise from Genesis 3:15 of a seed of Eve who would crush the serpent’s head. Genesis 12:1-7 is one of the most significant passages in the whole OT for understanding the story of scripture, for it shapes what follows all the way to the person and work of Jesus, and further even than that to Revelation 22.

The First Point of Continuity

This morning, we are considering the last words of this prologue and the opening words of what comes next. One could say that our passage covers the transition from the genre of origin-myth to the historical narrative to which the rest of the Bible pertains. One commentator has suggested that all of Genesis 1-11 is a unified theodicy.¹ Essentially, he argues that all of Genesis 1-11 is providing the People of Israel an explanation for the existence of evil in the world and connecting the foundation of the world to their foundation as a People.

There is continuity with the prologue culminating in the introduction of Abram, and the story of Abram spanning from Gen. 12 – Rev. 22. Gen. 12:1-7 is in many ways the answer to the problems raised in Gen. 1-11, creating for us several points of continuity. I’ll give you three.

The first point of continuity is in the very language of blessing and curse. Can you say this Hebrew word: *barak*? This is the Hebrew word for “blessing.” God’s promises to Abram in Genesis 12 use this word *barak* five times: *The LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country*

¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, and Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11*. New York: T&T Clark, 2011.

and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you, 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. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the familiars of the earth shall be blessed.

This has continuity because the opposite word, *arar*, for “curse” appears five times throughout Genesis 1-11. In Gen. 3:14, *the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock...”* In Gen. 3:17, God said to Adam, “*Because you have listened to the voice of your wife...cursed is the ground because of you.*” In Gen. 4:10-11, after killing his brother, *the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.”* In Gen. 5:29, Lamech named his son Noah, which means rest, in the hope that Noah would bring rest or relief to *the ground that the LORD had cursed*. And in Gen. 9:25, after engaging in sexually deviant behavior, Noah condemned the line of Ham, saying, “*Cursed be [Ham’s son] Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.*”

The whole downward spiral of humanity is marked by the five-fold repetition of the word “curse.” God counters this in his promises to Abram through the five-fold repetition of the word “bless.” The first instance of curse is when God spoke to the serpent. In the same breath, God uttered a promise that an offspring of the woman would become the savior of humanity and the earth. Whereas Lamech hoped his son Noah would be such a savior, Noah, like Adam before him, sinned in his own garden and was shamed through an unintended awareness of nakedness. Abram, on the other hand, is introduced as the answer to the downward spiral of humanity. And yet, Abram is not the source of this blessing; rather, Abram is the vehicle through whom *God* will reverse the curse and redirect the spiral from curse to that of blessing.

The Second Point of Continuity

The second point of continuity is how the Bible introduces Abram altogether as a recapitulation of the two previous movements of God’s People. Adam and his wife Eve have three sons: Cain, Abel, and Seth. Cain, of course, murders his brother Abel and is cursed. Seth, on the contrary, is the recipient of blessing in Genesis 4-5 by being the first to call on the name

of YHWH in worship. So we have a cursed son and a blessed son. Noah and his wife Emzara² also have three sons: Shem, Japheth, and Ham. Ham shames his father by uncovering his nakedness and is cursed. Shem, on the contrary, is the recipient of blessing by being called “The Name,” in reference to YHWH, and through whom Abraham, David, and Jesus eventually come. So, again, we have a cursed son and a blessed son.

We are introduced in Genesis 11 to a man named Terah. Like Adam and Noah before them, Terah and his wife Edna³ also have three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. The apocryphal Book of *Jubilees*, written in about 150 B.C.E., is often called “little Genesis” because it is the written account of the second-temple Jewish oral tradition behind Genesis 1 through Exodus 18. We read in Genesis 11 that *Haran died in the presence of his father Terah*, but we aren’t given any details. *Jubilees* 11-12 gives us those details.

Terah came from several generations of idol-crafters and worshippers (*Jub.* 11:4, 16). He was raised in Ur of the Chaldeans, or Babylon. He was taught Babylonian culture and spirituality (*Jub.* 11:8). The chief evil spirit caused a flock of ravens to destroy the land,⁴ which prompted Terah and all his family to dive even deeper into Babylonian idol worship and unclean behavior. We are told that growing up, Abram “began to understand the errors of the earth that all went astray after graven images and after uncleanness,” and at the age of 14, “he separated himself from his father that he might not worship idols with him” (*Jub.* 11:16).

Fast forward a few decades; Abram is now 42 years old and he confronts his father over his idolatry. “He said, ‘what help and profit have we from those idols you worship, and before which you bow? There is no spirit in them, for they are dumb, and mislead the heart. Do not worship them. Worship the God of heaven’” (*Jub.* 12:2-4a). His father Terah agreed with Abram but did not know how to get out of it because of how lucrative and influential the idolatry

² The Biblical account does not provide a name for Noah’s wife. However, *Jubilees* 4:33, a significant apocryphal book considered canonical by some Christians around the world, provides the name Emzara as the wife of Noah. *Genesis Rabbah*, a collection of leading interpretations of Genesis from the post-Jerusalem Jewish tradition, dated to approx. 400 CE, provides the name Naamah as the wife of Noah. Naamah is named in Genesis 4:22, but not identified as the wife of Noah. However, *Genesis Rabbah* comes nearly 600 years after *Jubilees*. I find Emzara most compelling due to the date of the Jewish traditions, but also because the name Emzara means “mother of Sarai.”

³ The Biblical account also does not provide a name for Terah’s wife. However, *Jubilees* 11:14 provides the name Edna as the wife of Terah. *Bava Batra* 91a, part of the Talmud, dated to approx. 350 CE, provides the name Amathlai. However, like the previous footnote, the dating of *Jubilees* seems more compelling. *Jubilees* also gives the background to Abram’s name, saying it was the name of Edna’s father who died without any sons or grandsons.

⁴ In my view, the most significant theological flaw in the books of *Jubilees* but especially also of *Enoch* is they ascribe original sin to fallen angels rather than humanity. Humanity are merely recipients of demonic activity.

industry was in Babylon. We’re told Abram’s two brothers were privy to this conversation and they did not like what they heard (*Jub.* 12:6-8).

Fast forward again; Abram is now 60 years old. “Abram arose by night, and burned the house of the idols, and he burned all that was in the house...and they arose in the night and sought to save their gods from the midst of fire. And Haran tried to save them, but the fire flamed over him, and he was burnt in the fire, and he died in Ur of the [Chaldeans]” in the presence of his father Terah (*Jub.* 12:12-14). Terah, in the grief of losing one of his sons, implored the family that if ever there was a time to flee from Babylon and start anew, it was then. This is where Genesis 11 picks things up: *Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai...and they went together from Ur of the Chaldeans...but when they came to [the city named] Haran, there they settled.*

So if I can return to the original point that started us down this “apocryphal rabbit-trail,” Adam and his wife had three sons, one of whom—Cain—was cursed and one of whom—Seth—was blessed. Noah and his wife had three sons, one of whom—Ham—was cursed and one of whom—Shem—was blessed. Likewise, Terah and his wife had three sons, one of whom—Haran—was cursed, and one of whom—Abram—was blessed. The salvation hoped for through the line of Seth and the salvation hoped for through the line of Shem is extended through the line of this child of blessing, through Abram.

The Third Point of Continuity

So if *Abram* is the answer to the downward spiral of cursed humanity, and if *Abram* is the continuation of God’s promise of a serpent-crushing savior, then of what use is Noah? The state of the world is in sharp contrast to how it was in the beginning. Genesis 1:31 – *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.* But in Genesis 6:12 – *And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt.* So God flooded the earth, saving just Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives. *The LORD shut them in* the ark. The whole earth is covered in water. The doors and windows to the ark have been shut the entire time; darkness was over the face of the ark. And then, at the center of the flood-chiasm, *God remembered Noah...and God’s Spirit blew over the earth,* which was covered in water (Gen. 8:1). Does this remind you of Genesis 1? *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void,*

and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters (Gen. 1:1-2).

Genesis 8:2-3 continues, “The foundations of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth.” In Genesis 1, God separated the waters below from the waters above—it appears God let go of his restraint and the waters poured into the earth from both directions, but when the flood ended, God re-restrained those waters. In Genesis 8:6, Noah opened the window of the ark for the first time, meaning *at that point* God let Noah have light. After the birds that Noah sent out, the creatures exited the ark in the opposite order they appear in Genesis 1.

Through the waters of judgment, by grace, Noah re-lived the opening days of creation from Genesis 1. And from this new Adam, who in Gen. 9:20 is also called a “man of the ground,” we read of a newly created humanity featuring a father who sins in a garden and three sons, one of whom does something so evil, exile is required. Does this sound familiar? God dealt with humanity in the Flood by *de-creating* the earth in order to *re-create* it, and from that re-creation God calls forth a New Humanity. The third point of continuity is that the opening verses of Genesis 12 present Abram as a Noah 2.0. Between the stories of God’s call to Noah from the ark and God’s call to Abram from the city of Haran, we find at least seven correspondences and they appear in almost the exact same order.⁵

First, God initiated the call to Noah and Abram. Gen. 8:15, *then God said to Noah*. Gen. 12:1, *Now the LORD said to Abram*. Second, God tells Noah and Abram to “go out from.” Gen. 8:16, *Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you*. Gen. 12:1, *Go out from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you*. Third, we are told Noah and Abram obeyed. Gen. 8:18, *so Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him*. Gen. 12:4, *so Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him...when he departed from Haran*. Fourth, Noah and Abram both build altars to the Lord. Gen. 8:20, *then Noah built an altar to the LORD...and offered burnt offerings on the altar*. Gen. 12:7, *So Abram built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him*. Fifth and sixth, God blessed Noah and Abram by means of multiplication. Gen. 9:1, *and God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”* Gen.

⁵ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992; page 128.

12:2, *I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great.* And seventh, God establishes his covenant with Noah and Abram, *and their offspring.* Gen. 9:9, *behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you.* Gen. 12:7, *the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”*

So of what use is Noah in the narrative of the Bible’s prologue? He provides the link between Adam as the beginning of the first humanity of the first creation and Abram as the beginning of the new humanity of God’s re-creation.

God’s Promises to Abram for the World

God makes seven promises to Abram in this introductory passage. First, Abram must leave his land and go to the land God *will* show him. Second, Abram is to leave his father’s house and God *will* make Abram’s house into a great nation. Third, after the inhabitants of Babylon failed to make their own name great, God promises that he *will* bless Abram with a great name. Fourth, the stated purpose of God’s blessing of Abram is to be multiplied—God will bless him with a great name, so that he *will* be a blessing. Fifth, God *will* bless those who bless Abram. Sixth, God *will* curse those who curse Abram.⁶ And seventh, through Abram, God *will* bless all the peoples of the earth.

But this is where we face yet another problem that needs solving. Abram has no offspring. Abram has no genealogical progeny through whom this promise can take shape. Genesis 11:30 makes note of the barrenness of Abram’s wife Sarai, an inherently shameful designation in ANE culture. Considering the age of Abram and the age of his barren wife, this promise was untenable. This causes Abram to try to take things into his own hands. He appointed one of his servants Eliezer to be his heir, but God reassured him by telling him that his heir would come from his own body. Because of her old age, Sarai gave Abram her servant Hagar to provide for him an heir, resulting in the birth of Ishmael, but God reassured Abram again by telling him that his heir who would inherit the promises would come from his own body and from the body of his wife Sarai. From this union, the child of promise Isaac was miraculously born. Then God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac, the child of promise, and Abraham goes for it but is stopped by God just in time; God provided a sacrificial lamb in

⁶ This is a significant theme in many stories in the Bible such as with Melchizedek’s blessing of Abram in Gen. 15 and Balaam’s inability to curse Israel in Num. 22-24, among others.

Isaac’s place. Abraham did this as a reflection of the faith he had in YHWH. Despite his own flaws and sinfulness, Abraham’s life story is one marked by faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age... Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak like this make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” But he considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead, from which figuratively speaking, he did receive him back (Heb. 11:8-19).

For God’s blessing to be extended to all peoples from every nation, a genealogical progeny of Abraham is required to be the vehicle or child of that promise. That singular promised offspring would come through Isaac. From Isaac, the promise was extended to Jacob, and further extended through David. Scholars commonly refer the seven-fold *toledot* structure of the Bible’s prologue. However, in LXX, the standard Greek translation of the OT during the time of Christ, two of these seven *toledot* headings get a rare designation *biblos geneleos*, meaning “The Book of the Generations of.” This introduction is used in Genesis 1-11 to introduce the formation of heaven and earth, and the formation of the first humanity. This Greek phrase is used just once in the entire NT, the opening words of Matthew’s genealogy, which traces the lineage of Jesus back to Abraham, identifying Jesus as the Savior of the New Humanity; identifying Jesus as the specific, singular genealogical progeny of Abraham who would be the vehicle

through whom God would bless all peoples from all nations, who like Abraham live by faith in the promises God has made.

Invitation to Believe the Gospel

What does it mean to live by faith in the promises God has made? Various definitions of faith are out there in the larger society. The Bible actually defines what faith is in Hebrews 11:1. *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Unlike Haran and the other Babylonians rushing into their idolatrous temple to save their gods from destruction, the Gospel is that God rushed into our idolatrous world to save his people from destruction. God came into this world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, solidifying his identity as both fully God and fully man. Jesus lived the life we fail to live, being tempted in all the same ways we are tempted but never succumbing to sin; never violating even one of God’s laws. He carried his cross all the way to the same mountain on which Abraham offered Isaac, and Jesus died the death your sins deserve; taking upon himself the full weight of God’s wrath against our sin.

When he offered up his own son, *by faith Abraham...considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead*, because Abraham had a conviction that God would remain faithful to his covenant promises, even if Abraham could not see their fulfillment himself; even if he had to greet those promises from afar. Centuries later, God offered up his own son Jesus as the vicarious sacrificial lamb to cover the sins of the world, and two days later, on the third day, he demonstrated his power by raising Jesus from the dead, confirming his identity as the Savior of Humanity and the Savior of the World.

What does it mean to put your faith in Christ? Time and time again, the NT writers equate that phrase “faith in Christ” with the simultaneous act of submitting to the Lordship of Jesus and believing specifically in his resurrection. Paul is quite explicit that without faith in the resurrection, you cannot be saved. He writes in Romans 10:8-13, *The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith that we proclaim; because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is [made right with God], and with the mouth one confesses and is saved... For there is no distinction between [those who are*

descendants of Abraham and those who are not]; *for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his [blessing] on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

Have you done this? Have you submitted your life to Jesus as your master; do you have faith; do you have the conviction; do you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? If you have, then as Paul writes in Gal. 4:28, like Isaac you also are among the children of promise, sharing in the new humanity inaugurated at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you have submitted your life to the Lordship of Jesus and believed by faith in his resurrection, then the Bible says the totality of your sins are forgiven. If you have submitted your life to the Lordship of Jesus and believed by faith in his resurrection, then the Bible says you have a new heart; you have been transformed presently in order to hate sin, love God, and live in a manner worthy of your calling as a child of the promise more and more with each new day. If you have submitted your life to the Lordship of Jesus and believed by faith in his resurrection, then the Bible says the Holy Spirit dwells within you right now as a down payment of the promised life to come when we will fix our eyes on our soul's reward: union with Christ. And if you have submitted your life to the Lordship of Jesus and believed by faith in his resurrection, then the Bible says God has promised that, like Christ, you also will be physically raised from the dead and *gathered* into the New Creation as the new humanity where we will dwell with our Savior in the house of the Lord forever. To this final promise, we still hope. Along with Abraham, we *look forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.* And though we may pass from this earth before seeing the fulfillment of these promises, we *see them and greet them from afar*, as exiles awaiting the New Jerusalem, our Promised Land, where the hope of our conviction will be finally realized and heaven and earth itself perfectly reunited once again.

Amen.