

Introduction

1. 11:27-32 is parenthetical to 12:1-9
2. Chronology of these verses:
 - a. Terah lived in Ur with his three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran
 - b. Haran born a son, Lot, but then died
 - c. Abram and Nahor took wives, Sarai and Milcah
 - d. Abraham received the word of the Lord
 - e. Terah, Abraham, Sarai and Lot leave Ur for Canaan
 - f. They stopped along the way and settled in Haran where Terah died at 225 years old (they may have settled here due to Haran's health and old age)
3. Genealogy Timeline:
 - a. Abraham was born approximately 380 years after the Flood
 - b. Abraham was the 10th generation after Noah
 - c. Abraham was likely born shortly after Noah's death
 - d. AIG places the Tower of Babel about 100 years after the Flood (per Usher) but CRI follows other sources and places it approximately 340 years after the Flood
 - e. This would place Abraham's birth anywhere from as many as 280 years to as few as a couple of decades after the Tower of Babel
 - f. World population estimates range between 900,000 and 3 million

A. God called upon Abram to forsake his old life for the promise of a new life and to be a blessing to all mankind (12:1-3)

1. God's Calling of Abram involved two imperatives (commands) and there were promises associated with each:
 - a. First Imperative: God called on Abram to leave his old life for a new one (READ Genesis 12:1):
 - 1) The first part of the command was that he was to leave his country, relatives, and father's house:
 - a) 11:27 says that Abram lived in "**Ur of the Chaldeans**" which was in ancient Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2) west the Euphrates River
 - b) Scholars disagree on the exact location of Ur but it was most likely located in either southern Iraq, northwestern Syria, or southcentral Turkey
 - 2) The Mesopotamians were polytheistic, worshipping three main gods and thousands of minor gods:
 - 3) Now, the Bible doesn't come right out and say that Abram was a polytheist or that he worshipped other Gods, but it does reveal that this was the background of his father, brother, and relatives:
 - a) According to Joshua 24:2, Israel's ancestors, including Abram's father Terah, worshipped other gods while in Ur
 - b) Genesis 31:53 (READ) seems to suggest Abraham's brother, Nahor, and his father, Terah, may have continued worshipping other Gods after Abram's call:

- The Hebrew word for God here is plural, and is often used to refer to Yahweh but also translated as gods
 - Most English translate all three instances of Elohim here as “God” and a reference to Yahweh suggesting He was the God of all three—Abraham, his brother Nahor, and his father Terah
 - However, the verb “judge” is plural suggesting that multiple gods are in mind
 - This is why the NET translates it this way: **“May the God of Abraham (big G) and the god of Nahor (small g), the gods (plural) of their father, judge between us”**
- c) There’s further evidence of polytheism and idol worship among Abram’s extended family and relatives: while his nephew (Bethuel) and grand-nephew (Laban) knew of and acknowledged Yahweh (Genesis 24:50), they were polytheistic (Genesis 31:19)
- d) It seems reasonable based on all this that Abram was familiar with Yahweh but likely a polytheist before God called him, though we can’t claim that with certainty
- 4) Abram was to leave all of this behind—his country, his relatives, his father’s house and the gods that were associated with them—and head to a new land which the Lord would reveal to him:
- a) As we’ll see next, the land to which God was referring was Canaan, which was currently populated by Canaanites
- b) It was the land the Israelites would conquer some 500 years later, after the Exodus under the leadership of Joshua, and would ultimately become the land of Israel
- 5) This call by God came with three promises (READ 12:2-3):
- a) He would make Abram a great nation:
- We find out later that God would not only make Abram a great nation, but he would become the father of a multitude of nations (READ Genesis 17:4-6)
 - In fact, the Lord would change his name from Abram to Abraham which means “father of multitude”
- b) He would bless Abram (READ Genesis 22:17): there are at least three ways in which the Lord blessed Abraham:
- The first is that the Lord would greatly multiply Abram’s descendants; they would be like the sand of the sea and the stars of the sky
 - The second is the promise of a descendant that would **“possess the gate of his enemy”** (lit.); a reference to the Messiah—Ed DeZago addressed this passage when he was here
 - The third is that the Lord prospered Abram financially (READ Genesis 24:25)
- c) He would make Abram’s name great: meaning that Abraham would be remembered and revered for his faith throughout history
- b. Second Imperative: God called Abram to be a blessing:
- 1) The second imperative is found at the end of verse 2 and there is some debate as to whether the Hebrew construct should be translated as a simple verb, a statement of purpose or consequence, or as a command:
- a) The NIV and KJV treat the last phrase as a simple verb: **“and you will be a blessing”**

- b) Most other English translations render the last phrase as a purpose or consequence: **“and so you shall be a blessing”** (NASB) or **“so that you will be a blessing”** (the argument for this is that waw +imperative after the cohortative often indicates purpose or consequence)
 - c) However, since **“be”** is in the imperative mood, many scholars believe that the best rendering is to simply take it at face value and treat it as a command—**“and be a blessing”** (we see this same Hebrew construct in Genesis 17:1: **“Walk before me, and be blameless”**)
 - d) All three of these are appropriate translations, but however we translate it the point is that God blessed Abram and expected Abram to be a blessing to others
 - e) As one scholar wrote, Abram was “both a receptacle for the divine blessing and a transmitter of that blessing” (Hamilton, p. 373)
- 2) Just as there were promises associated with the first imperative to leave, there were promises associated with this imperative to be a blessing:
 - a) The Lord would bless those who bless Abram (and subsequently Israel) but curse those who cursed Abram (e.g. God would banish or remove from His blessing those who treated Abram with contempt or as worthless)
 - b) Ultimately, God would bless “all the families of the earth” through Abram
 - c) We see examples of this throughout history; think about the number of nations that have persecuted Israel and the Jewish people throughout history and where they are now—the Egyptian Pharaoh, Haman, the Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Ancient Rome, the Ottomans, the Nazis
 - d) These are all examples of the TEMPORAL or EARTHLY nature of the blessing, but there is also an ETERNAL or SPIRITUAL nature to it as well
 - 1) Ultimately, in Abram, **“all the families of the earth will be blessed”** which is a reference to the salvation that would become available through a single descendant of Abram (READ Genesis 22:17-18):
 - 2) While some English Bibles translate the last phrase as **“and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies”**, others render it as **“and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies”** because the suffix on enemies is third person singular (**“his”**)
 - 3) It is the singular **“seed”** of Abram, the Messiah, that will possess the gates of His enemies which makes Abram’s blessing on the world an eternal and spiritual one
 - 4) The New Testament makes this clear (READ Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:6-9)
- 2. Takeaway:
 - a. The first takeaway is that God has offered every human being a new life in Jesus Christ, but just like His calling of Abram, it requires leaving something behind:
 - 1) Just like Abram had to leave his old life behind, we too have to leave our old lives behind
 - 2) God may not call us to leave our homes, relatives, or family as Abram did, but we do have to leave our old lives of sin behind
 - a) Jesus said that anyone who wants to follow Him must deny themselves and take up His cross (Matthew 16:24)
 - b) Titus 2:11-12: **“...the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.”**

- c) Ephesians 4:22-24 (READ)
 - d) Salvation may be a free gift of God's grace through faith, but there is no such thing as easy-believism
 - e) We do not get to experience the new abundant life Jesus promised without giving up our old sinful lives
- b. The second takeaway is that those of us who place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ are not merely to be recipients of God's blessings; we are to be a CONDUIT of God's blessings to others:
- 1) There is no question that the body of Christ, the Church, has been a blessing to the world (see addendum)
 - 2) However, the greatest blessing we bring to the world is the message of the Gospel, and this is true not just of the Church as a whole but us as individuals
 - 3) God called Abram to be a blessing to all the families and nations of the earth, and He likewise calls us to be a blessing through the proclamation of the Gospel in both our words and our deeds
 - 4) Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:13-16

<p>B. Abram demonstrated faith through obedience and worship (12:4-9)</p>
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1. Abram demonstrated his faith through obedience (READ 12:4-5):
 - a. These verses pickup in the middle of the story (so to speak):
 - 1) God called Abram while he was still in Ur, and it appears that call is what prompted his father Terah, to take Abram, Sarai, and Lot and set out for Canaan (11:31a)
 - 2) However, along the way they settled in Haran where Terah died at age 205
 - 3) After an undisclosed amount of time, Abram continued on the journey to Canaan with Sarai, his nephew Lot, all his possessions he had accumulated, and a multitude of persons he had "**acquired in Haran**" (these were likely servants or proselytes and would have been considered part of Abram's household; it must have been a sizeable group because Genesis 14:13 mentions 318 trained men born in his house)
 - b. The author of Hebrews refers to Abram's obedience as an act of faith (READ Hebrews 11:8-10):
 - 1) By faith, without knowing where he was going, he obeyed God and went to the place God promised to give him as an inheritance
 - 2) By faith, he lived in the land of promise as an alien, among the Canaanites
 - 3) Imagine what that must have been like for Abram to leave his homeland, his relatives, and even his father's household, travel anywhere from 600 to 1500 miles to a land he didn't know, and live among a pagan people who were known for their idolatry, child sacrifice, and deviant sexual activity...all on the promise by God that one day, his descendants would inherit the land
2. Abram demonstrated his faith through worship (READ 12:6-9):
 - a. Twice in these verses we see that Abram built an altar to the Lord which was not only an act of worship but a declaration
 - b. The first altar was at Shechem:
 - 1) Shechem was about 45 northwest of Jerusalem which pretty much put it smack-dab in the middle of the land of Canaan

- 2) That makes it all the more appropriate that the Lord would appear to Abram here—in the center of the land He promised to give Abram’s descendants: **“To your descendants I will give this land”** (7)
 - 3) Abram’s response was to build an altar to the Lord, and though it’s not stated specifically that Abram worshipped the Lord there it is reasonable to assume he did because that was ultimately the purpose for building altars (this was the first of at least four altars attributed to Abram in the Bible; 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18; 22:9)
 - 4) However, it wasn’t just an act of worship, but a declaration that Abram served God:
 - a) The text tell us, **“the Canaanite was then in the land”** and the general consensus is that this was one of their holy sites
 - b) The Hebrew word moreh means teacher and some suggest another translation for this would be **“the terebinth (or oak) of the teacher”**
 - c) In fact, Judges 9:37 appears to refer to this tree as **“the diviner’s oak”** or **“the Oak Tree of the Diviners”** meaning that it was a place the Canaanites would go to seek oracles from their gods
 - d) The Bible records numerous instances where God’s people built and dedicated altars at significant times and places--Noah, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel and David all built altars after significant events, and sometimes even gave them names in dedication to the Lord
 - e) How appropriate that Abram would erect an altar right there in the middle of the polytheistic Canaanites and declare his relationship with the One True God
 - c. The second altar Abram built was just a few miles away in the mountains between Bethel and Ai, but this time it states specifically that Abram engaged in worship: **“and called upon the name of the LORD”** (8)
3. Takeaway:
- a. First, genuine faith is demonstrated through both worship AND obedience
 - 1) We cannot claim to have faith simply because we “worship” God; we must also obey what the Lord has commanded through His Word:
 - 2) Jesus specifically commanded the teaching of obedience in His Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20): **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**
 - 3) In fact, Jesus also said, **“He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”** (John 3:36)
 - b. Second, just as Abram declared his relationship to the One True God by building altars and worshipping God in the midst of the Canaanites, our obedience and worship declares to the unsaved world our relationship to Jesus Christ

Final Takeaway

1. One thing we cannot overlook here is that this passage really isn’t as much about Abram as it is God and His redemptive plan
2. God called Abram while he was living in a polytheistic family, culture, and nation, in order to save not just him but ultimately the world

3. Does this sound familiar? For Romans 4:8 says, **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Addendum

From the article, "Good done by the church"

<https://www.christianity.org.uk/article/good-done-by-the-church>

Christianity has utterly transformed societies across the world since the days of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago. The positive impact of the Church cannot be overstated: guided by the teachings of Jesus Christ to be a good influence on society, Christianity has touched virtually every part of life. Over the centuries, the Church has founded schools, hospitals and orphanages; Christians have campaigned for prison reform, better housing and an end to the slave trade; they have helped to establish a huge number of charities to support the poor, the underprivileged, prisoners and their families, the homeless and those seeking justice. Christians were involved in setting up many of the best-known charities including Oxfam, the Salvation Army, the Samaritans and the RSPCA. Church work reaches all ages and stages of life: there is a Christian ethos behind the Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements and also the establishment of hospices. Churches run marriage preparation courses, countless parent-and-toddler groups and provide support for the bereaved. Remarkably, a number of famous football clubs can trace their origins back to efforts by the Church to establish sports teams in the late 19th century.

On any one day the Church continues to make a difference to millions of lives across the world. The Church runs lunch clubs for schoolchildren; it organizes overnight accommodation and food for people sleeping rough; it runs chaplaincies in scores of organizations, including universities and workplaces, to provide practical and emotional support to students and workers. The Foodbanks, which provide vital support to tens of thousands of families around the UK, were set up by a Christian organization. In many towns and cities, churches provide Street Pastors: teams who serve the night-time economy, spending their evenings caring for, listening to and helping people whether they are returning from a night out or from working in pubs, clubs or bars.

Around the world, the Church is working to tackle poverty and injustice. It is providing financial and practical help for communities hit by natural and man-made disasters. It does advocacy work too - speaking up for the voiceless in the corridors of international power. The Church was at the heart of the civil rights movement in the United States and the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa.

The work done by volunteers is saving nations staggering sums of money. It is estimated that in New York City alone, the time given by churches and the faith community is worth \$8.8bn a year. Research in the UK in 2015-16 for the Cinnamon Network calculated that the time given by churches and faith groups to their communities through social action was worth more than \$3bn a year.