

Genesis 12:1-3

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God tells Abram to leave his home and country in order to move to another land. God promises blessings to Abram and that through Abram all the families of the earth will be blessed.

God called Abraham from a pagan world to begin a new nation. God instructed Abram to *Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house*. At that point they dwelt in the city of Haran, not to be confused with Abram's deceased brother of the same name. Abram's Father Terah had led them out of Ur to settle in Haran, where Terah lived until his death. Now God gave a command: *go forth*.

Abram obeyed God's call to leave Haran and head to the Promised land, so *Abram went forth* from Haran ([Genesis 12:4a](#)). Abram had partially obeyed God's call when he left Ur, leaving his home but not his *father's house* ([Acts 7:2-4](#)). God called Abram to leave his *father's house* while in Ur, but Genesis states that Abram's father Terah led the expedition out of Ur ([Genesis 11:31](#)). According to Stephen's speech recorded in Acts, given to a hostile crowd of Jewish leaders well-versed in scripture, Abram buried Terah in Haran prior to leaving. Given that the crowd listening to Stephen's speech stoned him when he said something they disagreed with, this statement regarding Abraham burying his father prior to leaving must have met with conventional understanding at the time.

The Rabbinic sages roughly a thousand years later noted that the scripture states that Terah died (in [Genesis 11](#)) before it discusses God's renewed call and Abram's departure from Haran (in [Genesis 12:1-3](#)). But they also note a possible problem with the math. [Genesis 11:26](#) states that Terah lived 70 years, then begot Abram and his two brothers. [Genesis 12:4](#) states that Abraham was 75 when he left Haran, apparently meaning Terah would have been 145 when Abram left. And [Genesis 11:32](#) states Terah lived to be 205, indicating Terah would have lived another 60 years after Abram departed. The Jewish sages concluded that Terah was deemed dead to Abraham, which freed Abraham to leave Haran. It is also possible that there is some mystery in the statement, "Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran" ([Genesis 11:26](#)). The scripture lists Abram first, but in a manner that does not insist on a birth order. It could be that Abram is listed

first because of his importance rather than the birth order. If so, Terah might have been 70 when he began having children, and been much older when he had Abram, such that he did in fact pass prior to Abram leaving Haran.

Abram would have left a part of his *relatives* and *father's house*, but not all, as Abram took Lot with him. So Abram has faith, and obeys in part, but not yet fully. God will not grant Abram *the land* until he parts company from Lot. However, Abram's faith in leaving to head to the Promised Land is noted in Hebrews as an example for us to follow. [Hebrews 11:8](#) tells us Abram did not know where he was going, but he knew it was *the land which I (God) will show you*. His obedience required faith in God.

So even though Abram's obedience is partial at this point, God honors it and continues to work with Abram. However, God does not change his proposition to *bless* Abram if he will obey, and make it an unconditional grant of *blessing* until Abram parts company from Lot, and fulfills all the conditions God asked of Abram.

God's promises to Abram proceeded in three stages; three blessings that fell on Abram personally, that Abram would be a blessing and cause a blessing (or curse) upon those with whom he interacts, and that Abram would be an instrument for God to bless the entire human race. The last promise points forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be a descendant of Abram. In verses, 2-3 God gives seven specific promises to Abram that fulfill the three stages:

- 1) To make Abram *a great nation*
- 2) To *bless* Abram
- 3) To *make Abram's name great*
- 4) To *be a blessing*
- 5) That He would *bless those who bless* Abram
- 6) That He would *curse those who curse* Abram
- 7) And that *all the families of the earth would be blessed* through Abram

God first promises Abram that He *will make you a great nation* (great in number and significance) although his wife, Sarai, was barren. But it is God

alone who “opens” and “closes” the womb ([Genesis 20:18](#), [29:31](#), [30:22](#); [1 Samuel 1:5-6](#)). Abram did become the father of a great nation. This promise was fulfilled in the Jewish people and the nation of Israel through the birth of Isaac, in Abraham and Sarah’s old age ([Genesis 21:1-3](#)).

God also says to Abram; *I will bless you*. God blessed Abram personally with material and spiritual prosperity ([Deuteronomy 7:13-16](#)). In the Old Testament, wealth was measured by numerous and robust livestock, precious metals, such as gold and silver, and human laborers. Eighty-eight times in Genesis and 310 times elsewhere in the Old Testament, God’s blessing is manifested in human prosperity and well-being with long life, wealth, peace, good harvests, and children (e.g. [Genesis 24:35-36](#); [Leviticus 26:4-13](#); [Deuteronomy 28:3-15](#)).

The third of God’s promises to Abram was that He would *make your name great*. In the ancient Near East, one’s name was extremely important. This promise from God meant that Abram would acquire personal honor and become a man highly esteemed with great character and reputation. Ironically, Abram received the fame that was sought by the builders of Babel, who sought to establish fame apart from obedience to God.

The Tower of Babel shows the folly of human efforts to obtain wisdom and fame. Abram would *be a blessing*, serving as the standard by which a blessing was invoked. In other words, people will say, “May God make me as blessed as Abram.” True blessing comes by faithful obedience. No obligations were placed on Abram in order to receive the promises from God other than to simply respond to God’s command to *go forth*, an act of loyalty and faith.

God’s fifth and sixth promise to Abram was that He would *bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse*. The ones who wished Abram well would enjoy God’s blessing too. Those who mistreated, abused, or caused harm to Abram would incur God’s displeasure. This could be viewed as a promise of protection somewhat reminiscent of the protection God placed on Cain ([Genesis 4:15](#)).

Finally, the seventh and last promise was that *in Abram all the families of the earth will be blessed* and experience God’s favor. This promise is later reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob ([Genesis 22:18](#), [26:4](#), [28:14](#)). Of course, we know that the savior of the world descended from Abraham and, as foretold by the Jewish prophets who foretold His coming, died for the sins of the world. There can be no doubt that this promise of blessing to the entire world has already been fulfilled to a substantial degree ([John 3:16](#)). It is exciting to

contemplate that much more blessing stemming from this promise still lies ahead.

The apostle Paul quotes [Genesis 12:3](#) in the New Testament book of Galatians, and applies it to Gentiles, who are blessed in Abraham through their faith. In [Galatians 3:7](#) Paul asserts that the Gentiles who have believed in Jesus are Abraham's spiritual descendants by faith. Paul further asserts the fulfillment of [Genesis 12:3](#), quoting it in this passage: *"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' So, then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer"* ([Galatians 3:8-9](#)). Paul goes on to indicate that the "in you" stated by God to Abraham becomes "along with Abraham" as Gentiles are included in the blessing. This is true of the New Testament expression "in Christ" as well. *"In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"* ([Galatians 3:14](#)). In each case, the inclusion of the Gentiles comes by faith.

Biblical Text:

¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."