

**THE CALL OF ABRAHAM:
BEGINNING OF A PILGRIM MOVEMENT**
PART 1

By Salaam Corniche¹

1 Introduction

“...exile is in itself sorrowful, and the sweetness of their native soil holds nearly all men bound to itself.” *John Calvin*

"And this is the glory of faith...after taking everything captive - perception and understanding, strength and will - to follow the bare voice of God and to be led and driven rather to drive"² *Martin Luther*

The streams of providence never cease to amaze me. At about the same time that I was listening to a series on the book of Hebrews by James Dennison of Northwest Theological Seminary, I visited two churches and in each church the pastor preached on the call of Abraham from Genesis 11/12.³ That same week I happened across a reference to Abraham in an article in the AFMI/ASFM Bulletin.⁴ Just what do all of these have to do with each other?

As we will detail in this article, Dennison suggests that Abraham is a protological pilgrim--more on that later-- and each pastor touched on the fact that the call of Abraham was a radical call, with a somewhat less than radical recipient. Finally, the article in the Bulletin by Daniel Shingjong Park suggests that “beginning with Abraham...God reveals a model of contextualization for His kingdom ministry among people groups of other religious traditions.”

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² Martin Luther, *Luther's Words*, Vol 29: Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrew (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 238.

³ James T. Dennison Jr. “*The Epistle to the Hebrews*” [audio lectures and handouts] www.nwts.edu/audio/jtd/hebrews.htm (Accessed October 2011)

⁴ In his “*Contextualizing Religious Form and Meaning: A Missiological Interpretation of Naaman's Petitions (2 Kings 5:15-119)*” in *Asia Frontier Missiology Initiative* [AFMI]-Asia Society for Frontier Mission [ASFM] Bulletin, No. 7 (Apr-Jun 2011), p. 24. [This article was originally published in *IJFM* 27:4 (Winter 2010), p.197ff]

Part 1 will examine the person and call of Abraham in some detail, looking at his context, at the exact wording of the call and the response of Abraham to such. We will be conscious to avoid an exemplarist or moralist reading, i.e. “Aspire to be an Abraham”, as we do so. This will be done by accentuating the Great Keeper of Promises, Faithful YHWH. Additionally we will use the pilgrim motif from Biblical theology to demonstrate that Abraham set his sights “from afar” on his final destination which he like all sojourners already possesses in faith in all that Christ has done. The Biblical data will be used to verify the validity of Park’s statement. In Part 2 we will continue the theme of sojourning that Israel was to follow, and that the new covenant people of God also must follow in the light of the last and greatest Pilgrim who has “led many sons to glory.”

2 Abraham

The importance of Abraham to Islam, Judaism and Christianity can hardly be overstated. Islam has been called the religion of the first Muslim, Abraham the Father of the prophets. Judaism has adopted Abraham as the patriarch ‘par excellence’ and the paradigm of meritorious obedience; and Christianity sees him as the father of the faith in a fully trustworthy God. Biblically he figures as the most prominent human figure in the book of Genesis and multiple chapters (11:27-25:11) detail his life.⁵ Theologically, for Christians the life of Abraham must be interpreted by the New Testament witnesses, especially those of Jesus, Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, the writings of Paul (especially Romans and Galatians), the Epistle to the Hebrews (especially ch. 11) and James.⁶ As much as the NT regards Abraham as an exemplary ‘father of faith’ and an example of obedience it goes further than that. Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day (John

⁵ Gen 22:20-24 is a brief genealogy and 23:1-25:11 could be called an appendix.

⁶ See T. Desmond Alexander’s, “*Abraham Re-assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith*,” <http://beginningwithmoses.org/bt-articles/185/abraham-re-assessed-theologically-the-abraham-narrative-and-the-new-testament-understanding-of-justification-by-faith> (Accessed 2011/10/26).

8:56) and that is the call to modern day believers. In Christ, they too can be counted or reckoned righteous due to their faith, as Abraham was. In Christ, too they are “blessed possessors” of all the benefits of Christ’s heavenly position, as Abraham was. The NT describes Abraham as a pointer to a greater One, the truly “Godly seed” in a royal line who will be the mediator of world-wide blessings, namely Jesus “...son of David...son of Abraham.” (Matt 1:1).

3 The Call of Abram

3.1 The context in Genesis:

“These are the generations (Heb. *’elle tolédot*) of Terah,” reads the section beginning Gen 11:27–32 and which sets the stage for the actual call of Abraham in ch. 12:1. Wherever this phrase occurs it “begins a narrative that traces what became of the entity or individual mentioned in the heading.”⁷ Another way to read this introduction is to read it as “this is what became of Terah,” however, with Abraham at the center. The reader of Genesis would be well aware that in the three previous (Gen. 5:1, 2; 6:9; 10:1-not including Gen 2:4) all start with new beginnings, i.e. creation, Noah, and the survivors of the flood, and each ends on a negative note, i.e. with God’s repentance about ever having made humans (6:6-8); the curse on Ham (9:29); and the Babel confusion which leads via Shem to Terah. Thus the reader is primed for a new beginning, yet wary of another crash and burn scenario. Thus in this section we are introduced to Abraham’s family relations, their movements, and the important, yet understated detail about the sterility of this patriarch and his wife.

William Dumbrell, the Old Testament scholar who has made extensive studies of the concept of the phenomenon of covenant, gives a very precise definition of the momentous nature of Genesis 12:1-3 in the context of the preceding chapters of Genesis and in the

⁷ cf. Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10 and 27; 25:12 and 19; 36:1 (and 9) 37:2. Comment in Biblical Studies Press: The NET Bible First Edition; (Biblical Studies Press, 2006). Also M. H. Woudstra, “*The Toledot of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance*,” CTJ 5 (1970), pp. 184-89.

Biblical canon as a whole. In his work *Covenant and Creation* he summarizes:

Gen. 12:1-3 is the rejoinder to the consequences of the fall and aims at the restoration of the purposes of God for the world to which Gen. 1-2 directed our attention. What is being offered in these few verses is a theological blueprint for the redemptive history of the world, now set in train by the call of Abraham⁸

The scope of this paper does not permit a thorough examination of the wealth in vv 2 and 3. Suffice it to say, it will touch on many vital aspects of this “theological blueprint” including: YHWH’s self-revelation as the God of glory, His gracious initiative in extending his saving call to Abraham and by extension to his chosen people, the exodus motif in the call, the requirement of the ‘death’ of old things and a subsequent resurrection in the movement from sterility to fruitfulness or re-creation, the cost of obedience, the concept of faith and the pilgrimage motif. The pain of separation will be shown to be offset by the potential of great promises. This dynamic is brought out by Franz Delitzsch in the words describing the purpose of this call, namely “the formation of a God-fearing family separate from the heathen world, and the nucleus of a future God-chosen people”⁹ and, we might add, who would serve as a conduit for God’s blessings (cf. Is 51:2).

Similar wording has been observed between Gen 12: 1,3 and Gen 22: 2,18. It has been suggested that these form an ‘inclusio’ (pair of bookends) between which the major themes of the life of Abraham are found. The texts read:

"Go (Heb. *lēk lēkā*)" from...your father's household...to the land I will show you" (12:1)

"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:3)

"Go (Heb. *lēk lēkā*)" ...on one of the mountains I will tell you about" (22:2)

⁸ W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1984), p. 66.

⁹ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Vol 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874), p. 234.

"Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed"
(22:18)

Each bookend features YHWH's commands and the challenge to walk by faith with divine words of promise as the only certainty. Encapsulated within these verses is also a foreshadowing or summation of three major themes that emerge in his life, namely those of blessing, land, and offspring (or "seed").

3.2 The socio-religious context

Scholars have debated whether the call of Abram (later Abraham and the name we will use in this paper) came while he was in Ur or whether he had already moved to Haran with his father, Terah (Gen 11, cf Acts 7:2ff)¹⁰. What is more important, however, is the religious context in which Abraham was found. In Joshua 24:2 we read, 'And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.'" Just who these "other gods" were again is a subject of discussion, but we know from Gen 31:19, 34, that Laban, a member of Abraham's ancestral family through Nahor, Abraham's brother, lived near to Haran and owned teraphim, or house-hold gods.

A closer look at Abraham's immediate family also yields some clues. Terah, his father's origin is of some scholarly debate, but it is reasonable to suggest that it has roots in either the Akkadian *turahu* ('ibex') or Aramaic *yerakh* ('moon'). Abraham's wife, Sarai's (Sarah) name is the equivalent of *šarratu*, "queen," an Akkadian translation of a Sumerian name for Ningal, the female partner of the moon-god, Sin. Excavations have found temples to Ningal in both Haran and Ur. Milcah, the daughter of Haran, Abraham's brother, or his niece is equivalent to the same name as the goddess Malkatu, the daugh-

¹⁰ See also Philo of Alexandria; Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1993), S. 417; Josephus, Ant. 1.154. Bruce Waltke bases his argument for Ur on the use of the words [YHWH] "had said" as a pluperfect tense. Bruce K Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks. Genesis: A Commentary. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2001), p. 204.

ter of Sin. Finally, Laban (Heb. *lā-ān*) means “white,” and *le-ānā*, “the white one,” is a poetic term for the full moon.¹¹

Thus we can safely say that although the line of the godly “seed of Seth” was to perpetuate that calling, they were well immersed in the religious milieu of their surroundings, including the possession of household gods and likely moon worship. One scholar went as far as to say that it was natural to “assume that the patriarchs were actual worshipers of the [moon] deity.”¹² Yet miraculously God’s call to Abraham came to him in a rather dramatic way, in a fashion, not unlike that of Saul of Tarsus.

3.3 The verbal call

We are introduced to the chapter with the words, ‘Now YHWH said [or “had said”] to Abram,’ and grammatically this can indicate the beginning of a new sub-narrative. The Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar points out that this construction “is usually accompanied by an introduction of the characters of the new story and a change of location.”¹³ More than just a change of scenes is going to occur as will become evident quite quickly.

It was YHWH himself who described his coming and speaking to Abram as a “call.” In Isaiah 51:2 we read: “Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.” This call came in the form of a verbal proclamation. It has the sound and feel of a summons, but of a whole different genre, because it links obedience

¹¹ Victor R. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1 - 17*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 363. See also Andrew F Key, “Traces of the worship of the moon god Sin among the early Israelites,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, (84 no 1 Mr 1965), pp 20-26.

¹² Andrew Key, (p. 21) suggests that this was the conviction of the scholar Julius Lewy, professor of Semitic languages and biblical history at Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Institute of Religion.

¹³ Christo Van der Merwe, Jackie Naude, Jan Kroeze eds. *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*. Electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), S. 166. This construction is known as a waw consecutive + imperfect or a prefixed (imperfect) sequential. See fn #6 for details on the translation “had said.”

with the delivery of a “repeatedly promised gifts.”¹⁴ The call is unanticipated, because as Nahum Sarna observes, it seemed to come suddenly out of the blue after 10 generations of seeming silence.¹⁵ It was also the same voice that spoke creation into being (10 x in Gen. 1) and now is calling for a re-creation of a people of God’s own, through Abraham. The theme of a new people of call owing their existence to a gracious verbal call is found in I Peter 2:9:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

In Gen. 12: 1-3 we have an interplay between God who frequently says “I will” and Abraham who is commanded with “you/your.” Clearly it is YHWH who is the initiator and Abraham is to be the obedient recipient. Might we be so forward as to say that this encapsulates “the gospel preached to Abram” which Paul alludes to in Galatians 3:8? We see command and promise both in Abraham’s call and in the gospel. This passage also has echoes in chapter 22 where Abraham again is given orders by YHWH with the strong imperative: “Go... and I will show you.” In chapter 12 we have orders to leave the past with family and familiar surroundings, and in 22 we have orders to eliminate the future possibility of continuation of the family through the sacrifice of Isaac.

3.4 The call and ‘lech lecha’

The words of YHWH to Abraham start with a Hebrew alliteration for effect and they read *lēk lēkā*, or ‘lech lecha.’ Literally, this could be rendered in older style English, “Go, yea, you” or in the King James Version, “Get thee out,” or in more modern terms “Go, you by yourself”/“Get up and go”/“You, get going!”¹⁶ The apocryphal

¹⁴ Hans Walter Wolff in Walter Brueggemann, and Hans Walter Wolff. *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*. 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 47.

¹⁵ Nahum M. Sarna. *Genesis: the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 88.

¹⁶ Gordon J Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15 Vol 1*. (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), S. 267.

book of Jubilees 12:22 renders this order as, “Get thee up from...”¹⁷ This very small clause packs a powerful punch and formally it is ‘so-called “ethical”/“reflexive”/ “centripetal” use of the preposition lamed” which some have called an ethical dative (or *dativus ethicus*).¹⁸ Simply put it places a particular emphasis on the subject.¹⁹ Takamitsu Muraoka shows the effect of this construction as having “the effect of creating a self-contained little cosmos around the subject”. All fine and well, one may say, but what is the point?

Recall the posters, “Uncle Sam wants you.” The finger is pointed at one person who is to receive orders for military service, namely the one observing the poster. Similarly, YHWH says to Abram, “I want you.” “I want you to go.” Thus the simple verb “to walk/go” is changed into “separate from/take leave of.” Consequently Umberto Cassuto suggests that when the ethical dative is used with the verb “to go” it suggests that the person mentioned is going alone and “breaks away from the community or group in whose midst he was till that moment.”²⁰ Elsewhere Muraoka states the case even more strongly: “This particular usage of the preposition” ... conveys “the impression ... that the subject establishes his own identity, recovering or finding his own place by determinedly dissociating himself from his familiar surrounding. Notions of isolation, loneliness, parting, seclusion or withdrawal are often recognizable”²¹ In a word,

¹⁷ Robert Henry Charles, (Hrsg.): *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), S. 2:32.

¹⁸ Muraoka Takamitsu, “On the so-called *dativus ethicus* in Hebrew.” *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 29 (no 2 O 1978), p 495-498.

¹⁹ As Wilhelm Gesenius states: It emphasizes “the significance of the occurrence in question for a particular subject” in his and George Wolseley Collins, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley eds. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 119s.

²⁰ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Vol. 2* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1972), p. 310. cf. Gen 21:16, 22:2; Exod 18:27; Joshua 12:4; Cant 2:10, 13; 4:6.

²¹ Muraoka Takamitsu. *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew*. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1985), p. 122. Although see Bruce K Waltke, and Michael Patrick O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 208 who prefer to leave the preposition untranslated when used with the imperative as in Gen. 12:1.

YHWH is calling Abraham to break away and the text details from what and whom.

3.5 The call and the self-disclosure of YHWH

In Genesis 12:7 and 17:1 God appears to Abraham and speaks words of command and words of promise. In Acts 7:3 Stephen uses the same verb [as the LXX of the above] to describe God's self-disclosure to Abraham. Stephen describes not just a generic God, but literally, 'the God who is characterized by glory' as "The God of glory" (cf. Ps. 29:3; Eph. 1:17).²² The irony of a God who is associated with radiance and light appearing in the darkness of a pagan context is not lost to a number of commentators.²³ For Abraham it is as if this radiance is the cause of his expulsion from this context and he is told "Get out from your land...." (=LXX of Gen. 12.1) The verb "get out from" from the Gk *exêrchomai* is used "as a verb of self-movement signifying change of place from one point of origin."²⁴ It can also refer to disembarking from a ship, demons coming out of a person, demoniacs coming out of tombs, or blood and water coming out of a person. The movement is singular in direction.

Other instances of the "God of glory" appearing to people might include the glory of Jesus that appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), John the Revelator (Rev 1), Isaiah (Is.6) and Ezekiel (Ez.1). All, like Abraham are arrested in their steps, and this Divine self-revelation, in a manner not unlike that of Moses, marks a new beginning and a new commission in their lives. Stephen, however, who finishes his mandate, as it were, is said to

²² Joseph Addison Alexander elucidates further and suggests that the emphasis is on the self-disclosure of God through his glory (e. g. Ex. 24: 16; Is. 6: 3; Ps. 24: 7-10) more than on being simply denoted as glorious (Ps. 29: 1; Rev. 4:11) in his, The Acts of the Apostles Explained. Vol 1, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1866), p. 256. Note that each member of the Trinity has a name associated with glory: The Father of Glory (Eph.1:17); Jesus as the Lord of Glory (I Cor 2:8); The Spirit of Glory (I Peter 4:14)

²³ F. F. Bruce. *The Acts of the Apostles; The Greek Text with Introd. and Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 192.

²⁴ W. Shenk in Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-c1993), S. 2:4.

have “looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55-56).

**3.6 *The call's three 'mins':
homeland, kindred, and father's house***

The Young's Literal Translation is unique among English translations in that it carries the force of the repeated Hebrew word *min*, or 'from.' It reads: 'Go for thyself, from thy land, and from thy kindred, and from the house of thy father, unto the land which I shew thee.'²⁵ There can be no mistaking that this threefold repetition is for more than stylistic effect. It functions like the pounding of a jackhammer... “and from”... “and from”... “and from.” The effect of the ethical dative re-enforces and the importance of each item in the list is driven home (cf. Gen. 40:2, 2 S. 6:5, Hos. 1:7).

Abraham is given orders to make a decisive break from three important spheres of security and influence in his life, namely: his land [Heb. *'ere'*], his kindred/ people/relatives/place where they have settled/neighborhood [Heb. *môledet*] and his father's household [Heb. *ba-yi' 'ā'*]. The possessive pronoun “your” that precedes each category also re-enforces that these spheres are close to Abraham's heart. We might also say that the spheres have increasing emotional value as they move from country, extended family to nuclear family. Gerhard von Rad observes, "To leave home and to break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient men almost the impossible."²⁶

²⁵ Curiously Jubilees 12:22 reads almost the same with the repeated words “from” ‘Get thee up from thy country, and from thy kindred and from the house of thy father unto a land which I will show thee, and I shall make thee a great and numerous nation.’ Robert J.V. Hiebert's English rendition of the LXX of Gen 12.1 reads “And the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country and from your kindred and from your father's house to the land that I will show you” in Albert Pietersma and Benjamin Wright eds. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title*. (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), p. 13.

²⁶ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis*. (Westminster John Knox Press; [Old Testament Library] rev.ed.1972), p. 161.

As an owner of considerable wealth, likely derived from the land, Abraham is called to dissociate with the “turf” that gives him status. Later on in life he reflects on this with the words in Gen. 24.7:

The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred [*môledet*], and who spoke to me and swore to me... (ESV)

In this verse he describes his departure, not on his terms of obedience, but in terms of the person of YHWH. He, who is the One who speaks and swears an oath is the same who took him from all of these cherished kinship connections. Additionally Nehemiah’s prayer (Neh.9:7) reflects the fact that Abraham’s call was due to YHWH’s sovereign choice and power: “You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham.” This verse is a quotation of YHWH’s direct address to Abraham in Gen 15:7 with the words: “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” As we will observe later, this terminology “brought out” will be applied to the people of Israel and the Exodus (Ex 3:10-12; 13:3; 20:2), and the new people of God and the new exodus (Col 1:13). Finally we note that Nehemiah reasserts the fact that YHWH “gave him the name Abraham” which would be equivalent to a new identity.²⁷

There is no mistaking that order to leave the area where one’s relatives have settled (*môledet*), or we might say the neighborhood, would have caused one to question the call.²⁸ The Targum Jonathan makes that quite clear in its wording of: “Go thou from thy land; separate thyself from thy kindred; go forth from the house of thy father; go into the land which I will show thee.”²⁹ Seth Kunin thinks that the use of this word goes even further, however. He

²⁷ Compare Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 which also demonstrates God’s sovereign gracious initiative: (who appeared [v. 2], spoke [v. 3], sent [v. 4], promised [v. 5], spoke [v. 6], and gave the covenant of circumcision [v. 8]).

²⁸ *Môledet* cf. Gen 24:4; 31:3; 32:10[EB 9]; 43:7; Nu 10:30; Est 2:10, 20; 8:6+

²⁹ J. W. Etheridge *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel On the Pentateuch With The Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum From the Chaldee*, (New York, Ktav Publishing, 1968, original 1862), p. 192.

suggests that because (*môledet*) has a Hebrew root meaning birth, Abraham's 'divine birth' is "associated with a complementary denial of natural birth—Abram denies his father, his natural progenitor in favor of his divine progenitor."³⁰ Curiously, Nahum Sarna who is not an evangelical also makes note of the motif "new birth" by stating that "Abram's immediate response marks the true beginning of his life," his chronological age of 75 notwithstanding.³¹ Additionally Kunin observes a contrast between the sterility of Abram's family by natural birth and the blessings of fruitfulness of a new family by divine birth. Yet, as we will see, it was not without some difficulty and, one might say, compromise that Abraham obeyed.

Finally, there is the order to leave his father's household (ba-yi' 'ā'). Literally this means the "house of the fathers" and could be described as his clan or a subunit of it. Normally this would include parents, children, close relatives, also servants and those living in relatively close proximity.³² As we have seen, the pagan religious associations with this family were very strong and God is calling Abraham to break ties with them. If we were to use the language of Paul, Abraham would be leaving "the weak and beggarly elements," (KJV) "weak and worthless elementary principles of the world" (ESV) of his old life, (Gal 4:9) without a thought of return. The result for Paul, as for Abraham, is a dissociation with the familiar, the resultant loneliness as Muraoka has shown, and the temporary loss of identity. Paul put it this way, "To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless" (1 Cor 4:11 cf Heb 11:38–40).

The global cost of each of these spheres of the call of the God of glory to Abraham is further delineated by Lyle Eslinger in his paper, "Prehistory in the call to Abraham." There he states the following:

³⁰ Seth Daniel Kunin, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology*. (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 64.

³¹ Sarna, p. 88.

³² James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), S. DBLH 1074, #3 cf. Ge 7:1; 24:38, Ex 6:4

Territory and human collectivity are the raw materials of a social network that has insulated humans from natural perils for...years. In the ancient social order, as for most humans who have ever lived, family and territory were an individual's primary hold on life-sustaining resources and a bulwark against adversarial encroachments. This is what God asks Abram to renounce, no less.³³

But just in case we think this is the end of the story, this renouncement must be balanced with the fact that promises - even interim ones - were realized as we read in Joshua 21:43-45: "Thus YHWH gave to all the land which he swore to give to their fathers....Not one of all the good promises which YHWH had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."

3.7 *The destination of the call:*
"the land that I will show you":

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1); "Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you" (Acts 7:3).

Both the Genesis and Acts renditions show that there is no fixed destination, only a fixed leaving point. This accords with Hebrews which observes that Abraham left "not knowing whither he went" (Heb 11:8). What is fixed, is that the God who appeared to Abraham is known as "The God of glory" (Acts 7:3); "YHWH, the God of heaven" (Gen 24:7); "YHWH, the God who chose" (Neh 9:7), who reveals himself, speaks, swears an oath on his own name (Heb 6:13), is all powerful to execute His promises, and will cause Abraham to see the land.

"I will show you" is a Hebrew verbal construction known as the hiphil and often it has a causative aspect to it. In a word, YHWH will open Abraham's eyes - those of faith and physical ones - to see this land. Thus it could be rendered "the land which I will cause you to see" (cf Is 30:30 ESV). This will prove to be true on two le-

³³ Lyle M. Eslinger, "Prehistory in the call to Abraham," *Biblical Interpretation*, 14 (no 3, 2006), p. 196 in pp. 189-208. On p. 196 Eslinger observes: "The iterative [=repeated] rhetoric of God's demand focuses precisely on personal resource divestment"

vels: namely, he will be shown the physical land of Canaan, and will have his spiritual eyes opened to see his true homeland, with the better and permanent city in heaven (cf. Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:12; 13:14) built not with human-centeredness as Babel, but by God Himself.

A Jewish Midrash or commentary on Genesis has a comment on this aspect of suspense in the orders to go a yet undisclosed “land” (Gen 12:1) and “mountain” (Gen 22:2). “He whom the Holy One, blessed be he, puts in doubt and holds in suspense, namely, the righteous, he then informs, explaining his reasoning.”³⁴ John Calvin sets it out in easier to understand word-pictures, as if God were to say: “I command thee to go forth with closed eyes, and forbid thee to inquire whither I am about to lead thee, until, having renounced thy country, thou shalt have given thyself wholly to me.” An earlier church father from Egypt from the 4th century, Paphnutius, said, “It is not a land that you can know or discover through your own effort, but is a land that I will show you, a land that you know nothing about...”³⁵

The call of faith, i.e. “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1) is further heightened by a nuance in the wording of the Acts passage. As Joseph Alexander points out, it would be better to render “the land that I will show you” which he finds as too definite, as “whatever land I shew thee (or may shew thee)” and which implies uncertainty.³⁶ This same nuance is thus translated by Westcott and Hort: “whichever [land] I show thee” and by Weymouth as “into whatever land I point out to you.”

A number of commentators as well show that the words of Acts 7:3b “...and go into the land that I will show you” can actually be translated, “and come (NET)/ hither (Lenski) to the land...” Lenski

³⁴ Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Genesis Rabbah. Vol 2* Lanham, (Maryland, Univ. Press of America, 2001), p. 118 which cites R. Huna in the name of R. Eliezer.

³⁵ As cited by the church father John Cassian (ca. 360 – 435) in his *Conferences* 3:10

³⁶ Alexander, p. 257.

thus translates this verse as follows: “Go out from thy land and from thy kindred and hither! Into the land which I will show thee”³⁷ Hair-splitting? Perhaps not. What this construction could show is that YHWH is already in the land to which Abraham would have to go, and is beckoning him to come to it.³⁸

If we follow the logic of Kunin, we will observe that Abraham had to die to all of the personal resources that came through his natural birth, including land, kinfolk and even his father’s house. It is for good reason then, that he is to leave one land (‘erets) which was denoted as his with the possessive pronoun ‘your’ and to move to another land (‘erets) that he is no longer the proprietor of, let alone has never seen.³⁹ Yet as he is commanded to move by faith, those things that he has left will be multiplied by God’s initiative and power, i.e. “a great nation”—in quality and in quantity (v.2); “a great name”—or reputation (v.2); and “a great blessedness”—for himself and for the nations (vv.2-3).

3.8 The response of Abraham to the call

So Abram went as the Lord had told/commanded him, and Lot went with him. (Gen 12:4)...and they set out to go to the land of Canaan (v.5)

...then he went out [Gk *exérchomai*] (Acts 7:4)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out [Gk *exérchomai*] to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (Heb. 11:8)

God ordered. Abraham obeyed. It seems very simple. There is a verbal parallel between the “go” of v. 1 and the “Abram went” of

³⁷ R. C. H Lenski. *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*. Vol 1 ch 1-14 (Minneapolis, Minn: Augsburg Fortress, 1961), p. 260; Also Joseph Fitzmyer notes that this passage uses the adverb ‘deuro’ as an imperative for ‘come’ in his *The Acts of the Apostles*. Anchor (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 370.

³⁸ Cf the story of Lazarus and Jesus saying, ‘Come out,’ (Jn 11:43) and angels beckoning John the Revelator to ‘come’: (Rev. 17:1; 21:9).

³⁹ John B. Polhill states that “Land” is a major subject of the Abraham portion of Stephen’s speech. In fact, the entire subject could be described as “the promise came, apart from the land” in his Acts. *New American Commentary* Vol. 26 electronic ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992), S 190, fn 44.

verse 4. This caused one commentator to gushingly state: "This [grammatical/phonetic correspondence of the order in v. 1 and the response in v. 4] teaches that he went in the paths of his Maker, even more than his Maker had commanded him."⁴⁰ Even Cassuto states "He carried out what he was enjoined to do forthwith, without any hesitation."⁴¹ Yet the inclusion of the throw out phrase "and Lot went with him" in v. 4 and repeated in v. 5 suggests a less than perfect obedience on the part of Abraham.

Very likely Abraham is hedging his bets with Lot, just in case YHWH is too impotent to follow up on his promises of extending Abraham's family line. Verse 5 gives us a further glimpse of what Eslinger called "a hedging pragmatism."⁴² Andrew Vaughn closely analyses vv 1-4 and observes that the verbs and suffixes in v. 4 indicate that there are two households traveling in tandem. He thus entitles his paper, "Abraham's disobedience in Genesis 12:1-4a."⁴³

Could it be that Abraham had inherited some of his father's incredulity? With jarring words, Cassuto observes that Terah left the moon cult behind him in Ur only to come back to it in Haran and states: "Where he halted he also died."⁴⁴ There had been no decisive break with idolatry and consequently he fell back into its spell.

And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. (v.5)

Instead of "leaving and cleaving" solely to the sufficiency of God's promises, part of Abraham left, but also cleaved to the things that gave him security, namely his possessions, people, and extended family. Yet in spite of this weakness, it was the hand of God

⁴⁰ M.M. Kasher in the Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1995), p. 119 citing Yelamdenu as noted by Eslinger, p. 196, fn 15. Also Gerhard von Rad approvingly states, "Abraham obeys blindly and without objection."

⁴¹ Cassuto, p. 316.

⁴² Eslinger, p. 197.

⁴³ In Bernard Frank Batto, Kathryn L. Roberts, and Jimmy J. M. Roberts eds. *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts*. (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2004), p. 121.

⁴⁴ Cassuto, p. 283.

that was stronger, and likely for good reason, Gen 15:7 and Neh. 9:7 describe YHWH as having “brought out” Abraham.

3.9 Abraham’s resettlement

The saga continues with a feeble, yet obedient faith on the part of Abraham who continues his west-ward march to Canaan. Yet the powerful hand of God to cause this move was never far away. In Acts 7:4 Stephen tells his audience that “God removed him [i.e. Abraham] from there [i.e. his homeland] into this land...” The words have a somewhat jarring ring to them. Removed? Literally, it could be said that God ‘transferred’ [Gk. *metōkisen auton eis*] or “resettled him in the land. Another way of saying this would be that God has caused Abraham to “change one’s habitation, move from one habitation to another, migrate.”⁴⁵ The verb *metoikízō*’ is derived in part from the word ‘house’ [Gk *oikos*] and one could say that God caused Abraham to change houses, which ties into the fact that he was commanded to leave his father’s house in Gen 12. 1 [LXX=*oikos*]. Additionally, the Septuagint uses this verb used to describe the action of God sending someone into exile (1 Chr. 5:6; Amos 5:27) by a forcible deportation.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament. electronic ed.* (Chattanooga, TN : AMG Publishers, 2000, c1992, c1993), S. G3351. A very interesting study is the synonyms and the antonyms for this verb: Examples included:

Syn.: *metabaínō* (3327), to pass over from one place to another; *methístēmi* (3179), to cause to move; *metatíthēmi* (3346), to move a person or thing from one place to another; *paraphérō* (3911), to take or carry away, bring to or before; *apochōrízō* (673), to separate, remove; *aírō* (142), to lift, take up; *kinéō* (2795), to move; *astatéō* (790), to wander about, to lack a fixed dwelling place.

Ant.: *ménō* (3306), to abide; *kataménō* (2650), to stay in one place; *paraménō* (3887), to stay continuously; *diatribō* (1304), to stay; *oikéō* (3611), to dwell; *katoikéō* (2730), to dwell continuously in one place; *paroikéō* (3939), to reside as an alien; *skēnóō* (4637), to pitch a tent; *kataskēnóō* (2681), to lodge in a tent.

⁴⁶ Flavius Josephus uses a similar construction to describe the exile as Nabuchodonosor “removed our people entirely out of their own country, and transferred [metoikízō] them to Babylon; when it so happened that our city was desolate ...” in his and William Whiston’s *The Works of Josephus : Complete and Unabridged.* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1987, S. Apion 1.132.

The old Israel who will also become a pilgrim people, are said to have been “brought out of the house of bondage” and the new people of God are said to have been delivered “from the domain of darkness and transferred [Gk *methistēmi*] ... to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” (Col. 1:12)⁴⁷ The pattern of “out of” moving to “in to” is repeated in each instance.

In effect, God has exiled Abraham from his former land, into the new one. The disjunction between the old and the new could not be clearer. Abraham is now an exile or might we say a sojourner?

3.10 A result of the call: Abraham as a sojourner

A wealthy man leaves his country of origin, the bulk of his family, and likely a good part of his status, all in response to the self-disclosure and orders of YHWH. Is this lunacy or is this something else? Why leave the comforts of being a permanent resident and become a resident alien or a sojourner.⁴⁸

We recall that the story of the call of Abraham is set in purposeful contrast to the story of the human-engineered, human-centered, human attempt to form their own society and reach god on their terms. The making of “a name for ourselves” stands in contrast to YHWH who will make a great name for Abraham; as does the fact that the inhabitants of Babel, “found a plain in the land of Sinar” and by inference, it was their effort that located the place. Additionally we read in (11:2) that they “settled there.” Abraham neither finds a place nor settles down.

When Abraham is about to purchase some land from the Hittites in Hebron to buy a burial plot for Sarah, he describes himself as being “a sojourner (Heb. *gēr*) and a foreigner (Heb. $\tau\omicron=\sigma\]\alpha\beta$)” among them (Gen 23:4). He uses two words rendered by the LXX as *pároiikos* and *parepídēmos*. The latter is found in Heb. 11:13 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11. It could also be rendered, ‘a foreigner who has settled down.’ These same words are found in Psalm 39:12, “Hear my

⁴⁷ *methistēmi*—to cause to move from one place to another

⁴⁸ See Moses Chin, “A heavenly home for the homeless: aliens and strangers in 1 Peter” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 42 no 1 (My 1991), pp. 96-112 for a thorough treatment of OT backgrounds of this concept.

prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my weeping. For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were.” In all these cases it is assumed that this resident alien status with all of its implications of transitoriness is a given, one might say a permanent state of affairs.

This “rootless existence” was attested to by a list of name places where Abraham was said to have sojourned: Egypt (Gen. 12:10); Gerar (20:1); the land of the Philistines (21:34); Kiriath-arba/ Hebron (35:27); as well as, by the descriptor, that he “lived in tents.” To live in a tent, as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did, (Gen 26:17, 25; Gen 25:27; 32:25, 33–34; 33:18–19; 35:21) conveys much more than nomadic pastoralists on the move. It was a theological statement that they were not prepared to settle down, as they had a more permanent city and permanent citizenship in their sights. As William Lane suggests, it is a sign of refusal to “establish a permanent settlement in a culture devoid of the presence of God.”⁴⁹ This theme is picked up in the book of Hebrews 11:9–10 which reads:

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.

Stephen in Acts 7:5 comments as well on this alien status with its tension of living between promise and realization with the words:

Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

The lack of property ownership and the living in temporary shelter points us as well to the greatest Pilgrim of all, namely him who said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Mt 8:20 ESV)

⁴⁹ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9–13*. Vol 47B (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), S. 350. It should be noted that in the same breath that the patriarchs are described as living in tents, the author of Hebrews describes them as a group of “fellow-heirs.” (11:9)

3.11 Abraham's acceptance of his calling:

Just as Abraham had declared his residency status to the Hittites as a “stranger and exile,” the book of Hebrews (11:13) declares that among the heroes - note the plural - of faith, he acknowledged the same:

“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.”

The word translated “acknowledged” (Gk: *homologēsantes*) is a key to comprehending that Abraham accepted his resident alien status. The word can also be rendered confess, confess publicly, admitted openly (GNT), acknowledge openly, profess, admitting (LEB), agreed (CEV), to speak the same, owning (Moffatt). Obviously the connotation is an open acknowledgement and personal ownership of a truth (cf John 1:20; Acts 24:14; 1 Tim. 6:12; 1 John 4:15 etc.). The author of Hebrews also pastorally exhorts his audience to “let us hold fast to the confession” [same root - *homología* - 4:14; 10:23]. Likely this confession included the fact that Jesus (3:1; cf. 13:15) is the “apostle and high priest” and the Son of God. The pastoral appeal is also to ask his audience to hold on tenaciously to what Dunning calls their “social identity ... as outsiders.”⁵⁰ They can find validity in their own marginalization as they look to examples of Moses, Abraham and Jesus as other outsiders. The converse of such would be to deny or refuse to admit their status as such.

This acknowledgement has two practical consequences. First, they habitually “make it clear” (11:14) [Gk. *emphanízō* - to manifest, make known, declare, show] or plainly declare by their speech that the driving desire of their allegiances lies elsewhere than the fatherland of their birth. There is no hidden agenda here. Secondly, their acknowledgement translates into an attitude of “there is no going

⁵⁰ Benjamin H. Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self As Other in Early Christianity*. (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 53. See also Wisdom 18:13 where after the destruction of the first-born, the Egyptians finally overcame their disbelief and came to accept and comprehend the truth that Israel was God's son.

back.” This is shown in v. 15 where the heroes of faith, although they might have been tempted to return to their land of origin could not consider that a viable option when compared to the better country, namely a heavenly one (v.16 cf. 12:22–24; 13:14). It was on that better homeland that they set their strong desires or earnest expectations, due to their hope in God’s promises.⁵¹ Thus we read:

For people who speak thus 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. (Heb 11: 14–16 ESV)

To close out his argument the writer of Hebrews appeals a second time to the fact that God is not ashamed to be associated with those who as pilgrims fix their eyes on the destination, rather than on their surroundings or from where they have come. Their horizon is what is ahead of them, not what is behind them. “Therefore [or “because of this”] God is not ashamed to be called their God” (v. 16b cf. 2:11). In effect God is saying that they will not lose out regardless of peer pressure or their own perceptions. This was certainly a fear that Abraham must have had as well, and which was responded to by, “I will” make for you a great name, nation etc. Thus to both Abraham and the audience of the book of Hebrews God identifies as their God.

3.12 The “why” of the call

As much as we have examined the how, when, where, who of the call, one question remains. Why would YHWH demand such a radical separation from family, language, food, the familiar - all those things of one’s culture - and the like? The answer must be influenced by the facts that have been observed, namely that this call is initiated, orchestrated, and sustained by YHWH. In His sovereign grace, YHWH chose Abraham in spite of his context. That is to say, only YHWH could get credit for that. Secondly, YHWH has a plan of gargantuan proportions for Abraham and his life as 12:2-3 de-

⁵¹ The Gk. *orégōntai* literally means ‘to stretch out especially with the hand,’ and metaphorically ‘to eagerly desire to accomplish some goal or purpose’, so ‘to strive to attain, to aspire to, to eagerly long for’

monstrates. It is as if Abraham is a second Adam and so a clean start for a new people of God must happen: and this is through a man “as good as dead” (Heb. 11:12). Additionally it could be said that the execution of the plan through Abraham and his descendants is linked to his leaving. Some translators render the beginning of v. 2 to read, “in order that,” i.e. leave in order that he will be in a position to receive what YHWH will do both for him, his offspring, and to the nations.⁵²

As well, in strongest terms, YHWH will arrange this exodus, as he does all subsequent exoduses to have it said at the end of the day that it was He and He alone who could execute such. There can be absolutely no glory for this plan shared with Nanna the moon god and his consort Ningal, nor the household gods of the family. This will also permit YHWH to identify himself as the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Abraham too must be stripped of any and all resources to which he could derive credit for this divine undertaking. This pattern will reappear in the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, and in the new exodus of new covenant children from the dominion of darkness. All of them must and will say, “Salvation belongs to the Lord.”⁵³

4 Abraham as the protological pilgrim:

In order to make linkages between this paper and the following, prior to examining the statement of Park in light of some summary observations about Abraham as we have gathered from the text, we will look at some of Dennison’s categories. Recall that James Dennison is a lecturer on the book of Hebrews who is convinced that the pilgrim motif is one of, if not the dominant theme of that epistle.⁵⁴ To set the groundwork for his teaching he distinguishes between four types of pilgrims, namely:

⁵² William Yarchin, “*Imperative and Promise in Gen 12:1–3*,” *Studia Biblica et theologica* 10 (1980), p. 169.

⁵³ See Vaughn, p. 122.

⁵⁴ See his “*To the Hebrews: A Narrative Paradigm*” in *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 26/2 (2011), pp. 30-33.

- A. Abraham as the first or protological pilgrim.
- B. Israel as the pilgrim people between the exodus and the Promised Land who could be called sojourners of the “former times.”⁵⁵
- C. The church as semi-eschatological pilgrims between the new exodus and the promised land of heaven which could be called the sojourners of the “last times” (Heb 1:2)
- D. Jesus as the Eschatological or last Pilgrim (Heb 12:2).

Dennison thus observes that there is a strong linkage between the fact that Abraham was the first to be called a Hebrew (Gen 14:13) while he was a sojourner. This makes him the first of such a line and becomes the father of the household of faith. Secondly, he marshals adequate Biblical evidence to show that the children of Israel were known as Hebrews and they follow Abraham’s example of being sojourners, although in the wilderness they were more characterized by hard and unbelieving hearts than those of faith. Using the book of Hebrews with its multiplicity of pilgrimage related words, he then shows that the church is also called to look back retrospectively at the examples of Abraham and the children of Israel in terms of their responses, or lack thereof to the Great Keeper of Promises, YHWH, in order to learn valuable lessons.

These lessons are designed not to fix eyes on Abraham as an exemplar, but rather be an inspiration to also “see from afar” that which Abraham saw with eyes of faith, and also to eagerly desire a “better city” as he did. Lastly he shows that Jesus as the eschatological or last Pilgrim functions as a forerunner for the Christian community in a journey that involves both humiliation and eventual exaltation. By placing their trust in Him, they live in a “now” and “not yet” state of presently owning all of the promises of future salvation encapsulated in the heavenly Jerusalem to which they have already come (Heb 12:18, 22 with the verb *prosérchomai* in the perfect tense); and yet not realizing them all in the present, in a fashion

⁵⁵ In Leviticus 25:23 YHWH address his people concerning their pilgrim status: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.”

not unlike Abraham died without having physically possessed the land, but who owned it fully by faith.

Summary observations regarding Abraham:

1. Although a member of the godly line of Seth, Abraham and his family were well implicated in the worship of gods other than YHWH.
2. The use of the ethical dative in Gen 12:1 stresses the personal costliness of the call as well as the radical nature of the extrication of Abraham from things familiar. In a word: separation and marginalization.
3. The use of *min* with concentric spheres of relationship demonstrates that the call of YHWH is a high call to dissociation of personal resources.
4. Obedience to the call has a response to divine initiative at its root.
5. Abraham's obedience has human frailty mixed into it.
6. The status of being 'deported' has the potential to engender shame
7. The status of living as a resident alien who lives in a state of transitoriness has the potential to engender shame
8. Regardless of both of these shame producing elements, God is honored to associate with this pilgrim who takes Him at His word.
9. The temptation to return to the familiar is mitigated by something superior seen yet invisible. There is no going back.
10. Abraham's resident alien status requires a coming to terms and acceptance of it.

5 Analysis of Park

Daniel Shingjong Park begins his article defending the integration of Naaman into his local life and religion (2 Kings 5), with the following statement: "beginning with Abraham"... "God reveals a model of contextualization for His kingdom ministry among people groups of other religious traditions." The statement is not further qualified other than serving as an introduction to the story of

Naaman. Yet, based on the Biblical data just examined, we must ask the following questions:

1. "Beginning with Abraham...." What does God begin? According to Dumbrell - "a theological blueprint for the redemptive history of the world." The Biblical text shows that beginning with Abraham we have the start of the Hebrew/pilgrim line which, as we have seen and will see, implies anything but contextualization as it is defined by moderns. Abraham can not be used as the fore-runner or champion of some kind of 20-21st century model of ministry anachronistically applied.
2. "...God reveals..." Is it a "...model of contextualization...?" No. First and foremost, as Stephen pointed out, God reveals himself as "The God of glory." Listen to what Hugh Martin wrote concerning this revelation and Abraham's response to it:

What could make him a stranger on the earth? "The God of glory appeared unto him." That would do it. From that moment he was alienated from the world. Formerly he had been at home in the world and a stranger to God. Now he is at home with God and a stranger on the earth. Formerly the world had "appeared" to him - and God was not in all his thoughts. Now "the God of glory" has appeared unto him, and the world disappears and fades from view. The "appearance" of God he beholds as real and glorious.⁵⁶

"The LORD appeared unto Abram..." reads Gen 12:7. Here and in other subsequent self-disclosures, YHWH reveals Himself to Abraham.

3. "...for His Kingdom ministry..." This term can have as many meanings as authors, but to give Park the benefit of the doubt, yes, we can see Abraham as a type of a king who will have a multitude of subjects, a great reputation; be the mediator of blessings for other nations; and have the ability to have judgment inflicted on them by YHWH, per their response to him. He will take up Adam's abdicated role of "having domi-

⁵⁶ Hugh Martin (1822-85), "*Joyous Spirituality of Christian Pilgrimage*"

nion” once again and always point forward to a greater King. Both Abraham as a king and Jesus the King are the fathers of the faithful and in assembly, they are known as the church, not just an amorphous “kingdom ministry.”

4. “...Among people groups of other religious traditions...” What is being suggested? There are two choices. Either Park is suggesting that Abraham would continue to live and work in the context of his old religion, which the text very clearly suggests could not be the case, or that he would do so in the context of the religion of “the Canaanites [who] were in the land” (Gen 12:6). What is clear from the text is a radical dissociation from his old religious context, and the formation of a radically new religion if we can call it that, i.e. of serving YHWH, while living in the context of Canaanite religion. It is more than just living in that context, however. Cassuto shows that Abraham’s construction of altars to YHWH at strategic centers of Canaanite worship “signifies the proclamation of the supremacy of YHWH the God of Abram, over the gods of Canaan.”⁵⁷ This “kingdom ministry” then is the declaration of the Kingship of YHWH and a corresponding declaration of war over these resident gods. This separateness will later manifest itself in the attempted curse by Balaam over Israel, where it becomes a blessing instead and he describes Israel as “a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations” (Num 23:9).

Taken as a complete phrase, then, Park’s assertion seems to appeal strongly to using the historical precedent of the weighty figure Abraham as a means to prepare his reader to accept his interpretation and consequent application of the Naaman story. Rather than listening to the text itself, Park, I would suggest, has illegitimately searched for a legitimization for a current methodology which is all about “staying in one’s religious context.”

⁵⁷ Cassuto, p. 306

6 Conclusion

The Biblical text demonstrates that the call of Abraham is a call from sterility and death in his old context to fruitfulness and new-birth in his new context. Based on the gracious self-disclosure of YHWH with His promises, it facilitates a life of vulnerability, loss of identity, and loss of secure status. It casts Abraham fully on the veracity of YHWH's promises in Christ and in the "better city" which he had to "see from afar" and "welcome" through God-given eyes of faith. It is no less than the call of Jesus to take up one's instrument of crucifixion and follow him. Abraham well could have written the words of the Welsh hymn which reads:

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more.

For further reflection

1. Extraction - or taking someone out of their familiar context - has been described as the cardinal sin by some working among Muslims. What principles, if any, can be gleaned from the call of Abraham?
2. William Dumbrell encapsulated the impossible cost of leaving for Abraham with these words: 'The call was to abandon all natural connections, to surrender all social customs and traditions, to leave land, clan and family. These were the very areas of strong attachment which in the ancient world would have been thought to provide ultimate personal security.'⁵⁸ Was this true only for Abraham or could it apply to modern day disciples regardless of context? Consider Martin Goldsmith's description of the challenge facing a Muslim in his society: "Islam is within the whole warp and woof of society - in the family, in politics,

⁵⁸ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 57.

in social relationships. To leave the Muslim faith is to break with one's whole society. Many a modern educated Muslim is not all that religiously minded; but he must, nevertheless, remain a Muslim for social reasons, and also because it is the basis for his political belief. This makes it almost unthinkable for most Muslims even to consider the possibility of becoming a follower of some other religion."⁵⁹ Two contexts, same call, same God: are they incompatible?

3. Cassuto's description of Terah being wooed back to the idolatry that he never really left ends with the chilling statement, "Where he halted he also died." Can modern day applications be made of this statement?
4. The potential shame of rootlessness and lack of social status has been said to be avoided at all costs. What can we learn from Abraham and other heroes of faith in Hebrews 11?
5. Self-determination, i.e. I call the shots as to where I live, with whom I associate, and how I worship. This has been said to be the clarion call of much of North American evangelicalism. How does this square with the story of Abraham, and how might this attitude find expression among missions to Muslims?
6. The story of Abraham is replete with verbs of movement. What do the directions of these movements suggest? How do they square with other modern "movements?"
7. In the call of Abraham promises outnumber commands 2:1 (i.e. 2 verses of blessings and 1 verse of command). How might this be of pastoral use to those who fear shame or loss?
8. Joseph called his first Gershom: "...for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land" (Ex 2:22 RSV). John Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress* had a character named Obstinate who, when faced with leaving his friends and family said, "I will go back to my own house." Which name would your disciples have?

⁵⁹ Martin Goldsmith, "*Community and controversy: key causes of Muslim resistance.*" *Missiology*, 4 no 3 (Jl 1976), p 318.