

Genesis 12 - Call of Abraham; Promises to Abraham; Abram & Sarai in Egypt

II. Epilogue: Patriarchal history (Gen 11:10—50:26)

- (1) Life of Abraham (Gen 11:10—25:11)
- (B) Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1—25:11)
 - (a) Establishment of the covenant (Gen 12:1—17:27)
 - (i) Abrahamic promises (12:1-20)
 - (a) Abrahamic promises (12:1-3)
 - (b) Arrival in Canaan (12:4-9)
 - (c) Egyptian stay (12:10-20)

Genesis 12

- (B) Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1—25:11)
 - (a) Establishment of the covenant (Gen 12:1—17:27)
 - (i) Abrahamic promises (12:1-20)
 - (a) Abrahamic promises (12:1-3)

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you;

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;

1 The LORD told Abram, "You are to leave your land, your relatives, and your father's house and go to the land that I'm going to show you.

1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

— "...the LORD said" - refers back to 11:31

— This is the first of 7x that Abraham receives a direct revelation from God:

- (1) God's initial call to Abram outside the Land of Canaan (12:1-3)
- (2) The first appearance of Abraham in the Land (12:7)
- (3) After the separation from Lot (13:14-17)
- (4) God signs and seals the Abrahamic Covenant (15:1-21)
- (5) Abraham receives a token of the covenant (17:1-21)
- (6) God speaks to him in conjunction with the destruction of Sodom (18:1-33)
- (7) God directs Abraham to offer Isaac (22:1-2,11-18)

— This opening phrase is the beginning of Abraham's friendship with God (referred to 3x: 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8; James 2:23)

— Abram didn't leave "his kindred" and "his father's house"; he simply moved up river...see note below, along with notes on Gen 11:32; Acts 7:4

- The structure of v1-3 in Hebrew is of two imperatives followed by three promises by God. The structure goes something like this: "You do one thing and I'll do three things; then in turn, you do one more thing, and I will do three more things."
- There are three promises based on Abraham's call to leave Haran, and three more promises based on his being a blessing. The word "bless" is used 5x.
- "...Go" - *lech lecha*, "go for yourself," "go for your benefit"; it emphasizes a separation
- Abraham is to immediately separate from his country; the blessing for Abram would only begin upon arriving in the Land
- "...from your country" - God first directs Abram to leave both Ur and Haran
- "...from your relatives" - away from your fellow citizens and away from your extended family
- "...from thy father's house" - away from immediate family (since Terah would only go as far as Haran, this becomes important)
- "...To the land which I will show you" - this is a separation from the lesser to the greater
- Abram will move from the lesser to the greater in that he will be separating from the least important place to the one that is most important
- Abram was simply told to leave for a land that God would show him. At this point, Abram is promised only to be shown a land and nothing more. God would continue to progressively reveal His will to Abram:
- Gen 12:7 - Abraham's seed will possess the land God showed him
- Gen 13:14-17 - Abraham will also personally possess the land, along with his seed (however, Abraham died never having possessed any part of the Land except for a few wells and a burial cave, which he had to purchase).
- Upon leaving Haran, Abram did not know he was heading for Canaan (Heb 11:8)
- Gen 12:1 is quoted by Stephen in Acts 7:3

Timeline for Abram's Departure from Haran (see also note on 11:26)

Acts 7:2-4:

2 And Stephen said, "Listen to me, brothers and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, **before he lived in Haran**,

- "...before he lived in Haran" - Stephen is going to begin with an overlooked lapse on the part of Abraham!

— A 25-year delay in responding to what God had called him to do...

3 and He said to him, 'GO FROM YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME TO THE LAND WHICH I WILL SHOW YOU!'

4 Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. **And from there, after his father died,** God had him move to this country in which you are now living.

– "...And from there, after his father died" – Abraham's original call was from Ur, not Haran (Haran was 500 miles up river; Cf. Gen 12:1-3)

— Abraham was called in Ur and he moved to Haran, and did not move again *until 25 years later* when his father died!

— He didn't really do what God called him to do, until his father died. 25 years of disobedience? (Gen 11:31). His sin, however, is blotted out (Heb 11:8)

- Discrepancy about ages occurs only if Abram is Terah's firstborn (Gen 11:27). Being listed first does not imply *order* of birth, but rather *importance*:

(1) Shem, Ham and Japheth: Ham was youngest (Gen 9:24); Japheth was oldest (Gen 10:2,21)

(2) Jacob and Esau: Esau was older (Gen 25:25)

(3) Moses and Aaron (Ex 5:20); Aaron was older (1 Chr 6:3)

(4) Ephraim and Manasseh. Manasseh was eldest (Gen 48:1)

Haran (or *Charran*): An important city in ancient Mesopotamia. It was situated about 550 miles northeast of Ur and 280 miles north of Damascus. Principal routes converged there. Highways to Nineveh, Babylon, and Damascus had their start from it. It was only 60 miles from the stronghold of Carchemish, the capital of the Hittite empire. Haran was one of the chief centers for the worship of Sin, the moon-god.



Ur of the Chaldees: An ancient city of the early Sumerian kingdom, located about 125 miles from the present mouth of the Euphrates, 100 miles southeast of Babylon, 830 miles from Damascus, and 550 miles from Haran. It was the capital of Sumer. In Abram's day it was a thriving commercial city, with unusually high cultural standards. The inhabitants worshiped the moon-god, Sin.

2 And I will make you into a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing;

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;

2 I'll make a great nation of your descendants, I'll bless you, and I'll make your reputation great, so that you will be a blessing.

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

- "...I will make you a great nation" - the first of three promises; God will make Abram one specific nation
- This nation will be in addition to the 70 nations of Gen 10

- "...I will bless you" - God would bless Abram; these blessings would include both material and spiritual blessings
- "...make your name great" - Abram was to become famous; today, three of the world's religions honor him: Judaism, Christianity, Islam.
- What the builders of the Tower of Babel wanted for themselves, a great name (11:4), is something that God now promised individually to Abram
- "...thou shalt be a blessing" - the second commandment: be a blessing
- Since Abram would be blessed by God, as contained in the first three promises, he is now to become a blessing to others
- Those who are exposed to Abram would be blessed by God in a positive way; one example is Melchizedek

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."

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."

3 I'll bless those who bless you, but I'll curse the one who curses you, and through you all the people of the earth will be blessed."

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

- "...I will bless those who bless you" - the first of the second three promises

— Those who bless Abram will be blessed; this will later extend to the nation of Israel, as those who bless the Jews will be blessed (Num 24:9)

- "...the one who curses you I will curse" - those who curse Abram will be cursed; this also extends to the nation of Israel, as those who curse the Jews will be cursed (Num 24:9)

— "curses" - *kalal*, a light (mild) offense; a light (mild) offense to the Jews will incur a heavy curse (*aor*) from God

— "curse" - *aor*, from the Hebrew root *arah*, means "to impose a barrier," "to ban"; this is a much stronger word than *kalal* and implies that God will severely punish anyone who even a mild/light offense against the Jews

— The language of this phrase changes from encouraging to obligatory, meaning that even a light curse against Abram or the Jews will bring a heavy curse from God

— See note: **Anti-Semitism** below

- "...all the families of the earth" - Abraham will become a channel of blessing to the entire world (Gal 3:28-29); the promise of spiritual blessing will extend to the Gentiles; they are the ones to whom Abram will be a blessing

— This is the one promise that goes beyond Israel and is reaffirmed in the Abrahamic Covenant more than once

— The promise is fulfilled in Matt 1:1 (Cf. Gal 3:16)

- Peter quoted Gen 12:3 in Acts 3:25 while speaking to the Jews, and Paul quotes this verse in Gal 3:8

Election

The principle of election is first implied in Gen 12:1-3. God chose Abram to father the elect nation. In addition, while Abram was individually elected, the national election of Israel also begins. Why did God choose Abraham? — to be witnesses (Is 43:10) and to show blessings to those in relationship to God.

Seven "I Wills" (v2-3)

- And I will make of thee a great nation
- and I will bless thee
- and make thy name great
- and thou shalt be a blessing
- And I will bless them that bless thee
- and curse him that curseth thee
- and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed

Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is contained in six passages (Gen 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18). The covenant is between God and Abraham, who stood as the representative head of the Jewish nation (not all of humanity). See [Covenant](#),

[Abrahamic](#) and [8 Covenants of the Bible](#) for details on each of the 8 covenants in Scripture. God and Abraham are involved in this covenant, in which Abraham stood as the representative head of the whole Jewish nation, not for all humanity.

Gen 12:1-3 - Covenant introduced

Gen 15:1-21 contains many provisions of the covenant. The emphasis is:

- (1) Abraham would father one nation in particular
- (2) Abraham would father many nations in general
- (3) God signs and seals the covenant, and determines the borders of the Land as extending from the river in Egypt in the south, to the great river Euphrates in the north.

The signing was done in such a way that it rendered the covenant unconditional.

Gen 17:1-21 emphasizes the token of the covenant: circumcision. Just as the rainbow was the token of the Noatic Covenant, circumcision was the token of the Abrahamic Covenant. Gen 22:15-18 emphasizes that due to Abraham's obedience in the sacrificing of Isaac, God would bless his multiply and seed as the stars of heaven, possess the gate of his enemies, and through Abraham all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Gen 26:2-5 - Covenant renewed with Isaac

Gen 28:10-17 - Covenant renewed with Jacob

There are 14 provisions in this covenant:

- (1) A *great nation* was to come out of Abraham, namely, the nation of Israel (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:1-2,7; 22:17b)
- (2) He was promised a Land; specifically, the land of Canaan (Gen 12:1,7; 13:14-15,17; 15:18-21; 17:8)
- (3) Abraham himself was to be greatly blessed (Gen 12:2b)
- (4) Abraham's name would be great (Gen 12:2c)
- (5) Abraham will be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2d)
- (6) Those who bless Israel will be blessed (Gen 12:3a)
- (7) Those who curse Israel will be cursed (Gen 12:3b)
- (8) In Abraham all will ultimately be blessed (Gen 12:3c; 22:18)
- (9) Abraham would receive a son through his wife Sarah (Gen 15:1-4; 17:16-21)
- (10) His descendants would undergo the Egyptian bondage (Gen 15:13-14)
- (11) Other nations as well as Israel would come forth from Abraham (Gen 17:3-4,6); the Arab states are some of these nations.
- (12) His name was to be changed from *Abram*, meaning "exalted father," to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude" (Gen 17:5)
- (13) *Sarai's* name, meaning "my princess," was to be changed to Sarah, meaning "the princess" (Gen 17:15)
- (14) Circumcision was to be a token of the covenant (Gen 17:9,14; thus, according to the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision was to be a sign of one's Jewishness. The practice of circumcision did not begin with Abraham since others in the ancient Near East practiced the ritual either at birth or puberty. The uniqueness of Jewish circumcision is not the act, but the timing of the act: on the eighth day. Circumcision would show this to be a blood covenant and hence emphasized its solemnity. It would also show that this sign of Jewishness is passed on through natural generation.

The provisions are categorized in three areas: to Abraham, to Israel, and to the Gentiles.

Abraham

He was to be the father of a great nation, Israel. He was to possess all of the Promised Land. He would father many nations (both the Jewish nation as well as Arab nations). He was to receive special blessings and was to be a blessing to others. His name was to become great.

The Seed: Israel

Israel would be a great nation. It was to possess all of the Promised Land. It would receive victory over its enemies. The fact that the promises were made to both Abraham and his seed shows that these blessings have not yet received complete fulfillment, but await the Millennial Kingdom.

Gentiles

Gentiles would be blessed for blessing Israel and cursed for cursing Israel. They would ultimately receive spiritual blessings, but these would come through one specific Seed, the Messiah. While physical blessings were limited to the Jews, spiritual blessings would extend to Gentiles through the Messiah.

Foundational Covenant

Reducing the Abrahamic Covenant to its very basics, it can be seen that it contained three aspects:

- (1) The Land aspect, developed in the Land Covenant
- (2) The Seed aspect, covered in the Davidic Covenant
- (3) The Blessing aspect, presented in the New Covenant

Confirmation of the Covenant

Through Isaac

Abraham had eight sons by three different women. Through which son would the covenant be confirmed? God revealed that it was only through Sarah's son Isaac (Gen 26:2-5). The covenant was later reconfirmed to Isaac in Gen 26:24.

Through Jacob

Isaac had two sons, and God chose to confirm the covenant with Jacob, the younger (Gen 28:13-15).

Through the Sons of Jacob

The covenant was confirmed to all of Jacob's 12 sons in Gen 49.

The Abrahamic Covenant became the basis for the Dispensation of Promise. Because the Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional, it is still in effect today (largely unfulfilled). The ultimate fulfillment will come during the Kingdom Age. Some examples of this include: Ex 2:23-25; 4:24-26; 6:2-8; 32:11-14; Lev 26:46; Deut 34:4; 2 Kings 13:22-23; 1 Chr 16:15-19; 2 Chr 20:7-8; Neh 9:7-8; Ps 105:7-12; Luke 1:54-55,68-73; Gal 3:15-18; Heb 6:13-20. These verses note that the Abrahamic Covenant was the basis for:

- The Exodus

- Giving them the Land
- Jewish survival in spite of disobedience
- For the coming of the Messiah
- For the resurrection of the dead
- For Israel's final redemption and restoration

God's contract is still intact. Nations will be judged (Matt 25:31-46). It foresees the blessing of the family of the entire earth (Gal 3:8) before the Throne of God (Rev 5:9). From Abraham's seed would ultimately come a singular Seed (Gen 3:15; Gal 3:16) or Descendant who would procure all of the promises found in the Abrahamic Covenant for Israel consequently ushering in blessing for the nation and world. This seed aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant's promises is later amplified in what is known as the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:13-16).

These covenantal obligations make an enormous impact upon the reality of a future earthly kingdom when it is understood that these promises are *literal, unconditional, and unfulfilled*.

Literal

There are that 3 reasons make it apparent that these promises should be construed literally:

- (1) The promises are terrestrial or earthly in nature.
 - Abraham was told to walk around the Land that he and his people will one day possess (Gen 13:17)
- (2) The promise is made exclusively with national Israel, not the church (which didn't exist at the time) or any other people group or nation.
- (3) The seed concerns David's physical lineage. There is nothing in this passage or the Davidic Covenant that lead to an understanding other than earthly and literal.

Unconditional

There are 4 reasons that make it apparent that these promises are Unconditional:

- (1) God performed the typical near-eastern covenant ratification ceremony...by Himself! Severed animal carcasses were placed into two rows and the parties of the covenant passed through these rows in a figure 8 pattern. Abraham never passed through the severed animal carcasses...God put him to sleep and He alone passed through the animal carcasses (Gen 15:12,17).
 - This strange ceremony testified to the fact that if the parties ratifying the covenant did not fulfill their obligations under the covenant, they too were to be severed as the animals had been (Jer 34:8-10,18-19).

- (2) There are no stated conditions for Israel's obedience. If Israel had to do something before God would perform his obligations, it would have been mentioned.
- (3) The Abrahamic Covenant is called eternal (Gen 17:7,13,19) and unchangeable (Heb 6:13-18), thus performance cannot rest on sinful man. Only God is eternal and unchangeable, so only God can bring the covenant promises into fulfillment.
- (4) The covenant is trans-generationally reaffirmed despite Israel's perpetual disobedience. No matter how wicked they became, God continually reaffirmed the covenant to Israel.

Unfulfilled

Some argue that some parts of the covenant have been fulfilled in the past:

- (1) Land promises fulfilled in days of Joshua (Josh 11:23; 21:43-45)?
 - The Land promises were not completely fulfilled (Joshua 13:1-7; Judges 1:19,21,27,29-36). The land Israel obtained in the conquest was a fraction of what was promised in the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - The Land promises could not have been fulfilled because Israel had not yet conquered Jerusalem (Joshua 15:63). The conquest of Jerusalem would have to wait another 400 years until David (2 Sam 5).
- (2) Land promises fulfilled in the days of Solomon?
 - Although Solomon gained a large percentage of the land, his empire only extended to the border of Egypt (1 Kings 4:21), not to the river of Egypt (Gen 15:18).
 - In addition, not all of the territory during Solomon's reign was incorporated into the geographic boundaries of Israel. Many of the conquered kingdoms retained their identity and territory, but paid taxes (tribute) to Solomon. Israel's own geographic limits were from "Dan to Beersheba" (1 Kings 4:25).
- (3) The Abrahamic Covenant promises that Israel would possess the Land forever (Gen 17:7-8,13,19). This has obviously not been fulfilled.
- (4) The subsequent prophets treat the land promises as if they are not yet fulfilled (Amos 9:11-15).

Anti-Semitism: "I will curse him that curseth thee"

Very early in human history, God set down a principle to control the relationship of the Jews to the Gentiles. This statement is God's foreign policy to the Gentiles in their dealings with the Jewish people. Deut 32:8-9 restates this in wider terms:

Deut 32:8-9:

8 "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, When He separated the sons of mankind, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the sons of

Israel.

9 "For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.

It is not only God's program for Israel, but His program for the Gentiles as well. When God in His providence set down boundaries for the Gentile nations, He took into account the number of Jews that will play a role in that nation's history.

The Abrahamic Covenant contains a unifying principle for understanding history: God blesses those who bless the Jews and curses those who curse them. This principle explains much in history that defies any naturalistic explanation. Time and again, Scripture demonstrates that this fact works itself out in the histories of both individuals and nations. Many aspects of Jewish history make sense only if one clearly understands God's philosophy of history. History repeatedly testifies that every nation that has ever dared to raise its hand against the Jew has eventually fallen. The Jew "has stood at the graveside of all his enemies."

The Bible properly explains the Jewish people's role in history. Although various anti-Semitic campaigns have cut down multitudes of Jews, the Jewish people as a distinct entity is indestructible. Jer 31:35-37 indicates that those wishing to obliterate the Jews must first destroy the sun, moon, and stars. Then, and only then, could the Jews' destruction occur.

(b) Arrival in Canaan (12:4-9)

4 So **Abram went**away as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

4 So Abram left there, as the LORD had directed him, and Lot accompanied him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

— "...Abram went" - Abram's obedience was immediate; it was also an act of faith (Heb 11:8)
— It was this obedience that rendered unconditional all the promises of v1-3; once he met the condition of leaving, everything else became unconditional, since he had fulfilled the only condition that was given

5 Abram took his wife Sarai and **his nephew Lot**, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and **the people which they had acquired in Haran**, and they set out for the land of Canaan; so they came to the land of Canaan.

5 Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.

5 Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the servants he had acquired while living in Haran. Then they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan,

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

- "...his nephew Lot" - some condemn Abram for allowing Lot to come, considering the command to separate from his family.

— However, the commandment was for Abram to separate from his family in Haran, and if members of his family chose to go with him, there was nothing wrong.

- "...the people they had acquired in Haran" - these would be slaves or servants, such as Eleazar

6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of **Shechem**, to the oak of Moreh. Now the **Canaanites** were in the land at that time.

6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.

6 Abram traveled through the land to the place called Shechem, as far as the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

- "...Shechem" - city of Shechem = "shoulder"

— It is in this area where Abram chose to first erect his tent

- "...Canaanites" - the Canaanites were antagonists; the Land was promised to Abram by God, but it was occupied by others at the time

— These "others" were pagans, perverse in their reasoning and practices

— Abram resided among them, but did not participate in their pagan practices

7 And **the LORD appeared to Abram** and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he **built an altar** there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I'll give this land to your descendants." So Abram built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

- "...the LORD appeared to Abram" - there is no record of Abram receiving any further revelation until His call had been fully obeyed)
- "...built an altar" - in contrast to the pagan oracle, Abram built an altar to the true God
- The reason he built it there is because that is where God appeared to him
- With this event, the building of altars became a patriarchal habit (v8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:7)
- "...there" - refers to Shechem by the Oak of Moreh
- Abraham is in the land: worship; communion; promise. [Notice: Abraham's "altar-ed" life...]

8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

8 From there Abram traveled on to the hill country east of Bethel and set up his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

- Abram moved from Shechem to the mountain region between it and Bethel, and built another altar. He resided between the cities, so he was separated from the two cities.
- Abram's actions in Bethel included two things: building and worshipping
- He built an altar to God - for the sacrificial purposes
- He called upon the name of Jehovah - this was the institution of public worship in the Land

9 Then Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

9 Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

9 Then Abram traveled on, continuing into the Negev.

9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

- Abram's third geographical move...this time he continued south into the Negev
- This further separates Abram from the inhabitants of the Land
- By traveling the length of the Land from north to south, Abram was staking out his claim to the entire Land God promised him

- Abram didn't own the Land, but traveled in it, showing his faith and patience in God's promises (Heb 11:9)
- He had no documented contact with the Canaanites; the implication is that he lived along the border areas, but he does not move in or live among them

(c) Egyptian stay (12:10-20)

10 Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to **live** there for a time, because the famine was severe in the land.

10 Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

10 There was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to live because the famine was so severe.

10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

- Abraham's faith in God had not yet matured to the point that he knew he could trust God under any circumstances, so there was a lapse in faith that caused him to leave the Land of promise and headed for Egypt.
- Having heard the famine did not affect Egypt, he chose to travel there
- Two other major famines occurred during the Patriarchal period (26:1; 41:56)
- "...live" - temporary residence; shows Abram's intent was to reside in Egypt temporarily until the famine in the Land of Canaan had passed; he did not intend to establish permanent residence in Egypt
- However, his faith was not operational here: due to an immature lapse in faith, he departed the Land that God had led him to (Cf. Is 31:1)

11 It came about, when he was approaching Egypt, that he said to his wife Sarai, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman;

11 It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman;

11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he told his wife Sarai, "Look, I'm aware that you're a beautiful woman.

11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:

- Sarai was 65 and beautiful at this time; she was about half her age (she died at 127). Abraham died at 175.

12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, '**This is his wife**'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

12 When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'She is his wife.' Then they'll kill me, but allow you to live.

12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

- "...This is his wife" - this is not simply a statement of fact: the statement was a threat to Abram's life

— Egyptians during this period were famous for wife abduction

— Abram's lapse of faith in leaving Canaan for Egypt led to the fear of self-preservation, which in turn led to the conspiracy of v13

As he entered Egypt, Abraham noted something about Egyptian ethics: they didn't tolerate adultery. But if Pharaoh saw a married woman that he really liked, he may decide to kill the husband. Killing the husband made the woman a widow, and therefore she qualified for marriage. It was rather a warped concept of ethics, but that is the way it was in Egypt.

13 Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well for me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."

13 Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."

13 Please say that you are my sister, so things will go well for me for your sake. That way, you'll be saving my life."

13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

- She was indeed his sister (actually a half-sister; Cf. 20:12), so he conveyed to the Egyptians only what he wanted them to know.

— Abram's statement was true, but it was still a lie because its intent was to hide something

— His motive was undoubtedly based on society laws (Cf. Laban, 24:29-61)

— In enemy territory a husband could be killed for his wife. But if Abram were known as her brother only, he would be the one to negotiate for her in any marriage proposal. During the negotiations, he would have time to escape.

- Can something be accurate, yet untruthful?

— The claim that she is "my sister" occurs 3x in the patriarchal narratives (v13; 20:2; 26:7)

— In the second instance Abram explained that this was their policy wherever they went (20:13)

- Abram's good will was for Sarai's benefit, and that he might stay alive

— Abram's fear now led to living a lie

14 Now it came about, when Abram entered Egypt, that the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

14 It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

14 As Abram was entering Egypt, the Egyptians noticed how beautiful Sarai was.

14 And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair.

15 Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's **house**.

15 Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

15 When Pharaoh's officials saw her, they brought her to the attention of Pharaoh and took the woman to Pharaoh's palace.

15 The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

- "...house" - harem

- Abram's worst fears are realized: his wife was taken from him and placed into Pharaoh's harem

— Since there was no negotiation period, Abram did not negotiate and he did not have the opportunity to escape

— As a result, Abram had placed the ancestry of the Jewish people in danger, and endangered the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, since the seed would only come through Sarai and no other.

16 Therefore he **treated** Abram well for her sake; and he gave him sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants and **femaleservants**, female donkeys, and camels.

16 Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

16 He treated Abram well because of her, so Abram acquired sheep, oxen, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

16 And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.

- "...treated" - Pharaoh gave Abraham the bride price for Sarah, deviating from the standard custom of the day

- The ancient law code states that if the father was dead, the brother was the legal guardian of an unmarried sister. Since Abram had been passed off strictly as her brother, Pharaoh paid Abram the bride price.
- This is ironic based on Abram's fear in v13: Abram was enriched for Sarai's sake
- A later Pharaoh treated of Abraham's great-grandson Joseph, 41:41-43, and of Abraham's grandson Jacob, 45:16-20, well.]
- "...female servants" - the origin of the Arab people; see (3) below

Observations

Three observations can be made from this passage:

- (1) Prosperity does not automatically mean divine blessing on proper action because here the prosperity was received through subterfuge. God had promised to bless Abram as part of an unconditional covenant; and so even when Abram fails, God still fulfills His promises.
- (2) This increase in Abram's animal wealth, the sheep, the oxen, the he-asses, the she-asses, and the camels, will lead to the conflict with Lot in the next chapter.
- (3) Abram received a number of maid-servants. Later there will be a focus on one particular maid-servant named Hagar, who was an Egyptian. In the context of Genesis, the only place that he would have gotten an Egyptian handmaid is in this chapter. This, in turn, sets the stage for the conflict between Sarai and Hagar in Gen 16, the conflict between Isaac and Ishmael in Gen 21, and the Jewish/Arab conflict that is continuing to this very day.

17 But the LORD **struck** Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

17 But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.

- "...struck" - this is the first outworking of the cursing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant
- The plagues affected both Pharaoh and his household
- The Hebrew text emphasizes the severity of the plagues
- The fault here was not entirely with Pharaoh, as he had no way of knowing that Sarai was Abram's wife
- Nevertheless, because of the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant, God will intervene to fulfill His covenantal promises, although the covenanted one may not be

thoroughly righteous.

18 Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, **"What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"**

18 Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?

18 Pharaoh summoned Abram and asked, "What have you done to me! Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife?

18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?

- Through the plagues, Pharaoh was able to discern the problem

— Perhaps Sarai may have confessed, or possibly it was revealed by divine revelation (as was the case with Abimelech (20:3)

- "...What is this *that* you have done to me?" - Pharaoh suffered greatly because of Abram's lie

- "...Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?" - this was the truth Abram hid

At this point, Abram is learning that he would survive not by human strategy, as he thought, but by divine covenantal protection. It is God Who intervenes to save the situation and not Abram. Although it was Abram who sinned, God still intervenes because the Abrahamic Covenant is indeed unconditional.

19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for myself as a wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go!"

19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go."

19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as a wife for myself? Now, here is your wife! Take her and get out!"

19 Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.

- The third question shows that Pharaoh took Abram at his word, and intended to make Sarai the royal wife

— However, through God's providence, the plagues struck before any sexual union took place

- Pharaoh returned Sarai and expelled them from Egypt, back to the Land of promise

— Under normal circumstances, Pharaoh could have had Abram executed, but Pharaoh experienced the power behind Abram, so Pharaoh didn't want to go any further

20 And Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

20 Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

20 So Pharaoh assigned men to Abram, and they escorted him, his wife, and all that he had out of the country.

20 And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

- Pharaoh gave Abram and his people an escorted trip out of the country

— He was allowed to keep all the gifts of the bride price, including maidservants. He left Egypt a richer man than when he came in (Cf. 13:1)

— Lot went to Egypt with Abram, and he returned to Canaan with Abram as well

The Abrahamic Covenant has now begun to work in earnest: Pharaoh was cursed for cursing Abram, and Abram was blessed in spite of his wrong actions. This all shows evidence that the covenant was unconditional.