

Genesis 12
Abraham
Firm but Faltering Faith

I. Directions

- A. 12:1 ***Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.***
- B. ***Abram*** - notice his name is not yet "Abraham¹" God will later change his name but for now he is Abram, a Hebrew name meaning "exalted father" He is not a young man by modern standards, he is 75.
- C. The instructions of God are
1. Leave your country
 2. Leave your kindred and father's house
 3. Go to a land I will (later) show you.
- D. We shall see that Abram does not follow the directions exactly. He does leave the land but not all his kinfolk. He takes Lot² and family with him. This will cause trouble later, which is always the case when we do not follow God's instructions exactly.

II. Declarations

- A. ***2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."***
- B. God does not command without offering a promise. This is an important understanding of the commandments. God does not command to take away our fun or make us jump through hoops. Rather he commands to provide a framework of blessing. Commandments brings blessings. There are many examples of this in the Bible:
1. Ex 19:5 *Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine,*
 2. Deut 28:9 *The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground, within the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.*

¹A Hebrew name meaning "father of a multitude."

²Lot is his Bother Haran's son. Hence, his nephew.

3. Deut 30:9 *The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground; for the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*
4. 1 Kings 6:12 *"Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel."*
5. 1 Kings 6:6 *But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and the house which I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'Because they forsook the LORD their God...*

C. ***by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*** - it is noteworthy that Jews, Christians and Arabs all call Abraham their father. In some sense this promise has been fulfilled. Granted, those of the far east do not claim Abraham for their father, but the rest of the world does.

III. Disobedience

- A. ***4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan.***
- B. ***Abram went, as the LORD had told him*** - granted he did do this
- C. ***and Lot went with him*** - This is disobedient. God gave no such instruction. Abram was to go alone. Later, Lot's presence on the land will cause trouble since the land cannot support both Abram and Lot's kin. They must finally part company (cf Chapter 13).
- D. ***Sarai*** - Abram's wife who will later be called Sarah³

³A Hebrew name which means "princess" It seems only a dialectical variant of Sarai, not a formal name change.

- E. Was taking all their possessions a violation? Not necessarily but it is more difficult to travel by dragging all your things along. Further one may ask wherein lies the trust: in God or in the possessions. Thus while it is not a technical violation, one may ask if there is a spiritual indication given by this detail. Jesus counseled that we travel light:
1. Luke 10:3 *Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road.*
 2. Mat 10:9 *Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart.*
- F. Despite the negative indications given by some of the details here, Scripture reflecting back on this event speaks only glowingly of Abraham: Heb 11:8 *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned*
- G. The point in the reflections of these notes is that Abram's faith was much like our own, imperfect and faltering. In need of purification. The Bible presents honest portraits of our heroes, unlike most other ancient epics which present the heroes as without blemish or fault.

IV. Declarations II

- A. ***When they had come to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.***
- B. If God did not say where to go how did Abram know even what direction to set out? The best explanation might be that he listened to his heart and to followed previous inclinations. This is not wrong, for God speaks to us in the depths of our hearts and through our desires. We must be careful to discern such matters but focusing on what interests us is a good place to begin in discerning what God wants us to do in terms of vocation. Recall that his family had earlier set out for Canaan but had been diverted.⁴ Now God would have Abram complete the journey.
- C. Once at Shechem and near Bethel, God confirms Abram by giving him the

411:31 *Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there.*

- promise of the land of the Canaanites.
- D. Why does God promise some one else's land to the Abram? Recall that the Canaanites were descendants of Canaan who had been cursed by Noah and prophesied to one day be the "slaves" of Shem⁵ Further, the Canaanites were notorious for their wickedness and sexual deviancy. They have forfeited the blessing of any land.
 - E. Abram responds by worshiping God.
- V. Distancing
- A. ***8 Thence he removed 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 on the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.***
 - B. Why does Abram move however from the place of blessing? Is there not a problem here? Granted he does go to a place called "Bethel"⁶ But his direction edges toward Egypt and out of Canaan altogether as he slip further and further south into the Negeb. What is going on here? Abram is wandering out of the promised land. The text says, he "journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb" and Egypt.
 - C. In class we can discuss the significance of "Egypt" but for these notes let it suffice to say that Egypt symbolizes the "world"
- VI. Diversion
- A. ***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.***
 - B. Now the wandering becomes complete when he leaves altogether and goes to Egypt!
 - C. The excuse is that there is a famine. But can God set a table in the desert? Can God feed in time of famine. Abram had been told to go to land, God said, Canaan was that land. But Abram, out of fear and lacking in trust, leaves that land.
 - D. Sure enough, his sin will lead to still more sin and trouble besides. God wil still bless him in spite of himself but this detour will lead to two problems:
 1. When he returns he will be weighed down with cattle too numerous for the land to support

⁵Genesis 9:25 "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave."

⁶A Hebrew name meaning, "House of God"

2. He will have acquired Hagar as a slave and there will be conflict with her and Sarah and well as between Ishmael and Isaac which will continue right down to the present day.⁷

E. When we fail to trust God we end up in a fine mess.

VII. Deception

A. *11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." 14 When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels.*

B. Abram's fear and lack of trust in God now begins to snowball. This is a sad chapter in the story of Abram. In order to save his own hide he is willing to sacrifice his own wife's purity and honor. He is also willing to lie.

C. Evidently he does not think he can trust God so he resorts to a scheme.

D. The point here is that failing to trust God and sinning against faith leads only to further sin and ultimately to degradation. Abram's sin draws his wife Sarai into collusion and puts her at significant risk as well as humiliation. Abram has reached a real low. But as we shall later see with the Hagar incident, sexual ethics are a bit confused in Abram's marriage.

E. Abram collects the wages of his sin. Pharaoh pays Abram well for his "sister"⁸ And he gladly collects and accumulates them.

F. But note these wages are from the devil, not God. These wages will later harm Abram as we have already seen (*cf* 6, D above)

⁷The Arab/ Israel conflict.

⁸She was actually Abram's half sister (*cf* Gen 20:12)

VIII. Disgrace

- A. ***17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 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 be gone." 20 And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.***
- B. Now here's a howdy-do. Pharaoh of Egypt turns out to be more moral than Abram. (In fact it may not be that he is more moral but only regretting the results of the sin.) He rebukes Abram for his actions and he sends him away (note, with his earnings!)
- C. It is a sad truth that sometimes the ungodly must rebuke the Godly for their failings. Recall for example how Jonah had to be rebuked by the pagan sailors around him for his disobedience to God.
- D. It sometimes happens that the pagan world must chastize the Church and be the means by which she is purified. But God allows this here and in other cases.

IX. Direction

- A. ***13:1 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,***
- B. Abram finally makes it back to where he should be. He returns to Bethel (which means "God's house")
- C. He has regained his direction
- D. Yes he is rich but this wealth will cause him trouble. The land was not meant to support all this cattle. Likewise, Lot's presence (recall he had no business being there in the first place) only makes things worse. We shall see all this wealth makes it hard for them to be supported by the land and they must part company.
- E. They should have lived off the wealth of the land of promise. Instead the wealth of Egypt (i.e the world) chokes off the blessings of the land and leads to strife.
- F. So, Abram has made it back, but there are still consequences from what he has done. Soon enough the incident with Hagar will show more consequences!