

Genesis 12-13:4 The Preservation of God's Promise

I. Abram Doubts God's Promise (10-13)

A. Abram Flees to Egypt to Avoid Famine (10)

1. Abram faces a famine in the land God promised him
 - a. Canaan is wholly dependent on rainfall for its crop production (Unlike Egypt, which is watered in large part by the Nile river stages)
 - b. Abram's faith is tested by a famine in the land God brought him to.
 - i. Abram probably questioning why God would allow a famine after Abram faithfully obeyed the command to come to the land
 - ii. Abram may have doubted the decision to leave his country and family
2. Abram Decides to Go To Egypt to Find Food
 - a. It is debated whether Abram's decision to go to Egypt represents a lack of faith or not
 - i. Some believe Abram was right to go to Egypt because God provided food and wealth for him there
 - ii. Some believe Abram should have stayed in the land rather than risk sojourning in Egypt without a command from God
 - b. Abram definitely did not seek the Lord's counsel before fleeing to Egypt
 - i. Abram finds himself afraid of the famine and does what he knows to do
 - ii. Although this may not be an outright sin, it seems to be a reflex action to fear
 - iii. Abram is doing what many of us do – when faced with a problem, we make our plans and expect God to bless our plans (rather than seeking God's plan)
 - iv. The Test – Obedience to God looks like it will end in disaster and going our own way looks like the right thing to do
 - c. Would God Have let Abram starve to death in the land?
 - i. If Abram dies of starvation in the land, the promise of God would have failed
 - ii. It is much easier to see this when we aren't the ones who are hungry

B. Abram Fears For His Life in Egypt (11-12)

1. Abram's Wife Sarai is extremely beautiful
 - a. At this point she is at least 65 years old
 - b. Sarai will live to be 125, so she is "middle-aged"

2. Abram Believes The Egyptians Are Murderous Barbarians
 - a. Abram knows that the Egyptians will be taken with Sarai's beauty
 - b. Abram believes they will kill him in order to have Sarai
 - c. Is this also a lack of faith?
 - i. Will God's promise be fulfilled if Abram is killed in Egypt?
 - ii. In Abram's every thought it seems that he gives no consideration to God's promise or purposes

C. Abram's Plan To Protect Himself (13)

1. Abram Instructs Sarai to Lie and Say she is his sister
 - a. This is in fact a "half-truth." Sarai is his half sister.
 - b. Later Abraham will try this same tactic in Gerar and there he defends his lie by saying - *And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.* (Gen. 20:12)
 - i. Although, Abram is technically telling the truth, he is not telling the whole truth which means he is instructing his wife to lie
 - ii. By leaving out the fact that she is his wife, he is deceiving all those who will come into contact with them
 - c. Notice that he doesn't take Sarai's well being into account at all
 - i. "it may be well with me for thy sake"
 - ii. "my soul shall live because of thee"
2. Abram Probably Wasn't Selling Out His Wife's Virtue
 - a. Posing as brother and sister was meant to buy time for Abram and Sarai to get food and prosper
 - i. Without a father in the picture, the older brother had guardianship over his sister
 - ii. Suitors who desired to marry a woman would have to seek the blessing of the older brother
 - This means men interested in taking Sarai as a wife would have to treat Abram well and give him gifts to curry his favor
 - b. Abram Probably Thought He Could Delay Her Suitors Long Enough To Leave Egypt
3. Abram Now Not Only Doubts God's Protection But He is Risking Everything
 - a. God Promised Abram Protection - "those who bless you, I will bless and those who curse you I will curse"
 - b. By Risking Sarai - Abram is putting the promise of a seed in jeopardy

II. Abram Benefits From His Deceit (14-16)

A. Sarai is Taken Into Pharaoh's House (14-15)

1. Abram Never Planned On Pharaoh Himself Taking an Interest in Sarai
 - a. Unlike regular suitors, the ruler of all of Egypt didn't have to curry favor or obey social norms
 - b. Pharaoh sends people and simply "takes" Sarai
2. Sarai is taken and becomes part of Pharaoh's Harem
 - a. NOTE: Just like Esther, the taking of Sarai into the Harem doesn't mean that she immediately went to Pharaoh's bed. There was a preparation time of approximately six months before women would be brought to the ruler (See the book of Esther)
 - b. NOTE: notice that in these verses Sarai is simply called "the woman" as if she is a bargaining tool or property
 - c. I wonder what Abram thought as they took her away?
 - d. I wonder what Sarai thought?

B. Abram Prospers By The Egyptians (16)

1. Although Sarai is taken, Pharaoh sends extravagant gifts to Sarai's "brother"
2. This list of servants and animals is indicative of someone who is very wealthy in ancient near eastern society
 - a. Abram is being well compensated for the removal of his sister
 - b. I wonder what Abram is thinking as these gifts come rolling in
3. Abram has now officially bit off more than he can chew
 - a. His sequence of stupid unfaithful decisions has led to a hopeless situation
 - b. To announce that Sarai is actually his wife now could lead to Pharaoh killing them all
 - c. Abram's lack of faith in God's promise has backed him into a corner
 - d. How can God's promise possibly be fulfilled now?

III. Abram's Promise is Protected By God (17-20)

A. Pharaoh is Punished By God (17)

1. God intervenes to protect the promise he has made to Abram
2. Pharaoh's entire house is stricken with plagues
3. God will not allow even Abram's stupidity and unfaithfulness derail the promise that He has made
4. By doing things his own way, Abram has gotten himself into a mess that he cannot fix – God steps in to correct what Abram has done

B. Pharaoh Rebukes Abram's Deceit (18-19)

1. How did Pharaoh find out Sarai was actually Abram's wife?
 - a. Possible that Sarai told him

- b. Possible that Pharaoh put it together as she was probably the only person in all of Pharaoh's household not stricken with a plague
 - 2. Pharaoh chastises Abram for Deceiving him
 - a. Pharaoh asks why Abram would do such a thing
 - b. Pharaoh implies that if he would have known Sarai was his wife, he never would have taken her
 - i. How ironic – this pagan king of Egypt is lecturing God's chosen man on morality
 - ii. Pharaoh evidently holds the sanctity of marriage much higher than Abram. – Abram bargained with the well being of his wife
 - C. Pharaoh Allows Abram to Leave With His Belongings (20)
 - 1. Pharaoh tells Abram to take his wife and possessions and leave Egypt
 - a. Interesting that Pharaoh doesn't want his property back from Abram
 - b. Perhaps the fear of the Lord is upon Pharaoh because of the plagues and he just wants the couple gone
 - 2. Pharaoh tells all his men to give Abram and Sarai safe passage out of Egypt with all their possessions
 - a. Abram never returns to Egypt
 - b. This episode was no doubt a shameful embarrassment and low point in Abram's life
 - c. I wonder what Sarai thought when she returns to Abram and sees all the wealth he accumulated.
- IV. Abram Returns To Calling Upon The Name of The Lord (13:1-4)
 - A. Abram And Sarai Return To the Negev (1)
 - 1. Abram and his whole caravan return to the land of Canaan
 - 2. They return to the land God originally sent them to
 - B. They Return to the Land with all the wealth from Egypt (2)
 - 1. Abram is now a very wealthy man
 - 2. Abram was probably well to do before he went to Egypt, but now after the Egypt episode, he is described as very wealthy. He now has servants, and herds of animals
 - C. Abram Returns to the Altars He Had Built (3-4)
 - 1. Abram goes back to the place where God re-affirmed his promise and once again worshiped God
 - 2. The entire episode has been used to grow Abram in his faith
 - 3. Abram again calls upon the name of the Lord

NOTE: While Abram indeed prospered even though he demonstrated a lack of faith and deceitfulness, he will face consequences because of his sin in this journey. The next section shows the separation of Abram and Lot because they had accumulated too much property – and in chapter 16 we will be introduced to an Egyptian

handmaiden of Sarai named Hagar (where do you think they got an Egyptian handmaid?)