

Genesis 12:10-20, 13:1-18! The LORD was with Abram & Sarai continuing to bless them!

This section of Genesis is the continuation of the foundational story of Abraham and his family. The final thirty nine chapters of the book of Genesis will focus upon three main characters: Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. God's interaction and work through these individuals and their families becomes the foundational story for understanding and appreciating God's call to the nation of Israel to be his special covenant people. The first nine verses of chapter 12 introduced us to Sarai and Abram. The first nine verses introduced us to this couple and God's call for them to migrate to the land of Canaan heeding his foundational promise to "**Bless them!**"

This 2nd half of chapter 12, along with all of chapter 13, clarifies and helps us to appreciate God's core promise to be with and to bless Abram and Sarai! This new section, spanning 1 and ½ chapters, focuses upon two main events. First Event: Abram & Sarai's sojourn in Egypt. (C12:10-20). Second Event: The quarrel between Abram and Lot and their resulting separation. Some readers may see the narration of these two events and their stories as merely providing background information for appreciating the upcoming key events that will follow in the book. This is true! However, these stories and the possible lessons gained from both events **provide support for key foundational ideas** of the book. One of these foundational ideas involves the working out God promises to Abram and Sarai. The other foundational idea represented in and through these stories concerns our understanding of God and how we need to see God and his involvement in our lives. Let us take a closer look into each of this section further.

I. Abram and Sarai' sojourn into Egypt. (Gen. 12:10-20) This first episode involves Abram and Sarai travelling to and sojourning in Egypt. The story is both strange and surprising! The episode comes on the heels of a *fabulous beginning and retelling of the fortuitous start* regarding this foundational couple. But suddenly, this tranquil and favorable retelling of their beginning in the land of promise is interrupted by the narrator interjecting the stories of two major threats into the account of their auspicious beginning. Both of these threats are seen primarily as threats to **the fulfillment of God's promises** that have been narrated to us in this second section of chapter 12.

This second section of chapter 12 begins by focusing on the first of two major threats: **a severe famine- the ability to find food to eat was critically short!** The details regarding the nature and scope of this first threat of famine to Abram and Sarai's well being is passed over in favor of detailing in greater depth the second of two threats-**Sarai's abduction by Pharaoh**. Why did they leave Canaan? Why did Sarah and Abram not go from the south of Canaan (the Negeb) to the north (to Shechem) an area that Abraham had previously settled in order to find food? Perhaps the famine was so severe that Egypt and the area by the Nile River was not affected as much, as Joseph and his brothers would discover a couple of hundred years later facing another famine in the region.¹ The main point to take away from the exceedingly brief account regarding the famine is its function! It should be seen as an instigating event. It is the reason for propelling Abram and Sarai to pack up their possessions and migrate **away from the land of promise to another country**. Once again they sojourned amidst another people. They left the land of Canaan in order to save themselves, only to face still another perhaps greater threat.

A. Pharaoh's Abduction of Sarai. This second threat to this couple receives the most attention. Both the famine as well as Sarai' abduction by Pharaoh threatened God's ability to fulfill his promises

¹ See chapters 41 and 42 of Genesis for the parallels.

to Abram and Sarai. Unlike the first threat which Abram had no control over, this new threat by Pharaoh was in part due to Abram's own poor judgment and his deliberate plan to deceive others! This plan by Abram backfires and causes both affliction for Sarai and threatens God' plan for them. Let us take a closer look at this threat.

The story begins with Abram rightly perceiving a possible threat to his own safety. "As they were about to enter Egypt, Abram said to his wife Sarai *"I know that you are a beautiful woman."* When the Egyptians see you they will say, *"This is his wife"* Then ***they will kill me, but let you live.*** Whether or not the Egyptians deserved this reputation is debatable, but Abraham certainly considered that his life was threatened by Sarai's beauty going into Egypt. The plan that Abram came up with, back fired! While he did not completely lie when he said that Sarai was his sister² this was at the same time a deliberate deception. For according to most people, the impression gained from this scheme would be: that Sarai was not Abram's wife and treat Abram favorably. Our story conveys that Abram's plan did not quite work out that favorably. The Egyptians saw that she was *"very beautiful"*. According to verse 16 *"They did treat Abram well because of her"*. But, to Abram and Sarai's horror; the plan back fired. Pharaoh officials reported her beauty to him. Sarai was then taken into Pharaoh's palace. Then Pharaoh took Sarai to ***"be his wife"*** or still another of Pharaoh's wives. While the text is silent on this point, Hamilton is right in commenting: "This is doubtless a case of actual adultery between Pharaoh and Sarai."³ This certainly was not what Abram or Sarai thought would happen! Ultimately, sojourning in Egypt (how long?) may have spared them for a time; yet ultimately, it threatened God's plan for them and the world. For Abram's plan placed both of them outside the land promised to them. More importantly, if a child was born to Sarai at this point, that child would not necessarily be: the child promised to both Abram and Sarai by God.

B. God intervenes to save Sarai and Abram. (vs. 17-20) How? *"But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household."* What exactly happened? How many people were affected and what period of time is not specified. What is specified is that the diseases and particularly **what caused these diseases, got Pharaoh's attention!** Pharaoh clearly perceived that these diseases were due to taking Sarai –Abram's wife as his wife. (vs. 19) Yet, Pharaoh at the same time perceived and acknowledges and complains to Abram *"why did Abram (falsely say) she is my sister?* Implied in these last verses is also the perception that Pharaoh somehow realizes that he is being afflicted by the LORD for this action of taking Sarai another wife to be his wife. Ultimately, the story ends, after some elapsed period of time, with Abram and Sarai heading back home to Canaan with God's plan to bless them in Canaan with their own offspring back on track!

II. Abram and Lot separate! Lot abandons Abram & Sarai- going off on his own. (C13:1-18)

Chapter 13 follows closely upon the narration of Abram and Sarai's deliverance from two episodes that threatened the fulfillment of God's promises to them. Chapter 13 does not immediately seem connected to these events narrated previously. Surely, this new chapter has value for us in providing details and background necessary for understanding and appreciating the upcoming rescue (C14) of Lot and his family from their being abducted as prizes of war. But is there more? Is there a stronger connection and a stronger theme being demonstrated by this story than merely the story of how Lot and Abram became separated from each other.⁴ My reflection suggests that this

² According to Gen. 20:12 Sarai is Abram's half sister. Same father (Terah) different mother.

³ Hamilton, Victor The Book of Genesis Eerdmans Pub. 1990 p. 382

⁴ The text raises so many interesting questions but not answers. When does this event occur? Was Lot married at this time for according to Gen. 19: 14 Lot had two daughters who were pledged to be married to them.

story involving Lot who chooses to separate from Abram-his almost adopted father- represents how the LORD delivered Abram once again from a threat. This time the threat is from the fear of not having someone-particularly a family member to be the intended recipient of God's promise of offspring to them. With Lot gone from the picture, who then will be the recipient of **God's promises of land and offspring**? In the climax and conclusion of this chapter, God reaffirms his promises of giving both the land of Canaan and the promise of innumerable offspring once again to Abram. Let us see if this interpretation is warranted!

A. Life is good. (vs. 1-5) Chapter 13 begins with two strong detailed verses connecting this chapter with the events of chapter 12. *"So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife (Sarai) and everything he had."* This is what a good editor, like Hugh Rutledge would like to see in a well written novel. This is a good smooth connection. The writer gives us two fascinating details for us to consider right from the start. Furthermore in verse two, the writer introduces us to his next upcoming story by including the following detail concerning Abram: *"Abram had become very wealthy in livestock, and in silver and gold."* The careful reader will remember that this key detail- the increase in Abram's wealth happened because of his stay in Egypt. But the final clause in the beginning verse of this chapter is also very illuminating and worth taking note of! During Abram's entire time in Egypt, Lot was with his uncle for the text states that **"Lot went with him"**.

Lot returned to Canaan and specifically the Negev with Sarai and Abram. Big deal? So what? It is a big deal for it sets the agenda and main theme for the chapter. Up until now, Abram, Sarai, and Lot are presented by the writer as constituting one cohesive family. This impression of oneness continues on through the next several verses where the writer describes Abram, Sarai, and Lot **moving together** from the Negev retracing their steps northward to Bethel once again. Verse four may even highlight this Oneness of family further for us. It is my contention that Abram's entire family Sarai, Lot, and extended family worshiped at the altar at Bethel. Sarai, and Lot as well (not just Abram) called on the LORD at the altar that Abram had built years(?) earlier.

B. Life became too good! (vs.6-7) These two verses draw attention to God's blessing on Abram prospering their work. Abram's flocks and herds together with Lot's increased to such an extent that the land could not support both men's herds. Twice the text draws attention to this saying: *"But the land could not support them while they stayed together."* The text realistically also draws attention to the fact that Abram and Lot and their families and herdsmen were not the only people living in the vicinity of Bethel and Ai. Other groups including the Perizzites and Canaanites were dwelling there and probably had their own herds too. The problem is simple: **Overcrowding!**

C. Uncle Abe's Solution: (vs. 8-9) Uncle Abe graciously offers Lot the first choice of land. First of all, Abram offer is grounded in Abram's desire to make peace between his own herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen who had settled into quarrelling over grazing rights. Abram's solution: Separate the two groups so that you eliminate the "cause of the fighting". So Abram said to Lot: *"You choose!" "If you go left, I'll go to the right."* This was extremely gracious and generous on Abram's part. Abram, not Lot remember **was the patriarchal head of the family**. This meant that Abram had the first right to choose. The story goes on saying: *"So Lot looked up and saw the whole plain of Jordon which was well watered."* (vs10) The story goes on to narrate how Lot chose the well watered plain which was a lush fertile land being compared to the garden of Eden (garden of the LORD).

D. Bad Decision by Lot Implied (vs 11-14a) This next section is focused upon Lot's decision to part from Abram and the evaluation of that decision from the narrator's point of view. The decision to part from each other, to settle, and graze herds in two different places was initiated

by Abram. This decision is not viewed negatively. The decision to go east out of the land of Canaan is viewed negatively by the writer. For Abram the text states that Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but *Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.* Explicit Point: “The men of Sodom were wicked and sinning greatly against the LORD.” Vs 13 **Implied Point:** The land that Lot chose to settle in was outside the area promised by God to Abram and Sarai. According to Victor Hamilton, he remarked that Abram offered to go North, if Lot went South or vice versa. Abram never offered Lot the choice of going East- to an area outside the land promised by God. Thus, Lot not Abram made a bad decision.

E. The LORD appears to Abram and reaffirms his promises of land and offspring. (vs. 14-18)

This is the climax and conclusion involving the story of Lot’s decision to settle away from Abram, and choosing to live outside the land of promise. Chapter 13 is sandwiched between two great stories concerning how God delivered Abram and his family from several threats to their well being and the fulfillment of God’s promises to them. So the main question that must be answered is how does this final section of chapter 13 not only conclude our story regarding Abram and Lot; but how do these concluding five verses **help us discover and appreciate the main theme and message of this chapter.** Let us take a closer look at three key ideas that will be forcefully conveyed in these concluding five verses. 1) God appears to Abram for the third time. 2) God strongly reiterates his two main promises of land and offspring to Abram. 3) Reflection: Abram needed this reassurance!

1) God appears to Abram for the third time. (14a) Like the previous appearances by God, this appearance by God comes at a critical time. Lot has just abandoned his uncle and aunt. Lot had been a close member of this childless couple for years. He not only puts a geographical distance between the two families, but I think jeopardizes himself to becoming the heir to inherit Abram and Sarah’s inheritance and God’s promises to him as a result. Thus Abram is particularly feeling vulnerable at this point.

2) The content of God’s encounter with Abram. (4b-17) The focus of of this concluding section is upon what God communicates and directs Abram to do. In this third appearance by God to Abram, God commands Abram to see and do something. What? Two main things! First: God calls Abram to look all around him “Lift up your eyes” carefully survey the surrounding land from which recently Lot had been standing with him in Canaan. God then said this to Abram: “*All the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring forever.*” This is a reiteration of the two main elements of God’s promises to A & S when they had initially arrived in Canaan. (Gen. 12:7) It is the same promise that God has given to the couple before, yet more detailed. Here God promises and intensifies his promise to include a vast number of descendants as vast as “**the dust of the earth**”. And God promises to give the land of Canaan to Abram’s offspring **forever.**

3) The intent of God’s appearance and promises at this time. This is conjecture on my part. My reflection on God’s appearance to Abram at this point soon after Lot departs from him is not accidental. Abram need encouragement! Abram and Sarai need reassurance by God that at this moment in time. This was a moment in time again when his promises to them appeared to be threatened. Yet, God was in control. The two main promises given before to Abram and Sarai were still in operation. God would fulfill his promises in his way to them. The following chapters will demonstrate how faithfully God kept his promise of giving the land of Canaan to Sarai and Abram’s numerous offspring!

