

**Genesis 12:10-13:4
A Sermon**

By [Rev. Scott Lindsay](#)

We are continuing this morning with our study of the life of Abraham, as recorded in the Old Testament book of Genesis, picking up at verse 10 of chapter 12, and working through to the beginning verses of chapter 13. Now, in case you are not familiar with the Book of Genesis, let me give you a little bit of background so you can understand where we are in the bible's *plot line*, so far.

In the beginning there was God, and that was it. Then God decided that there were going to be other things – like the universe. So, God creates this world, setting it in the larger context of the universe, and then on this world he places all sorts of plants and animals, as well as the creatures made in his image – man and woman.

In addition to blessing the man and woman with existence and with the privilege of bearing His image, God also determines that he wants to further bless them and so commissions them to the two-fold task of *being fruitful and multiplying his images* across the face of the earth and of also *exercising dominion or managing His creation, on His behalf*. Well, all is well, briefly, and then the man and woman go and do something really stupid and rebel against their Creator, falling into a state of sin and dragging the rest of creation – and indeed their entire line of descendants – through the muck with them. All of this interrupts and complicates humankind's ability to fulfill the commission given to them by God because *now* the human race has to be *reconciled* to God – i.e., their sin has to be fully and permanently dealt with and the creation itself must be restored and redeemed. In short, everything's broken and it has to be fixed.

Well, in order for these things to be accomplished, and because in its fallen state mankind cannot redeem itself, nor can it defeat the Evil One – because of all this, God himself must intervene if any restoration is going to happen. This God promises to do, as seen in the words spoken to the Serpent who is Satan (Gen. 3:15). God promises there, in a figurative, but nonetheless real fashion, that an offspring of the woman, an eventual descendant of hers, will come and will bring all these things to pass.

As the story unfolds from there you see the consequences of the man and woman's sin begin to work themselves out in creation. For example, in the way that Cain murders his own brother, Abel. At the same time, and amidst the multiplication of the effects of sin, you also see God's determination to preserve and protect a godly inheritance. You see the "descendants of the woman" (as Gen. 3:15 puts it), meaning those who call on God. But you see them struggling *against* and *amidst* the descendants of the serpent, i.e., those who depart from God and his ways and who do not call upon him. And all of this

is just what God said would happen in Genesis 3.

So, Cain destroys Abel, as has been said, and God then provides Seth, and from among his descendants, eventually, we come to the figure of Noah who, at that point, finds himself living in an extremely wicked world which gets destroyed, leaving behind Noah and his three sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth, and their wives with them.

However, the flood which wiped *out* the world did not eradicate sin from the human race as even amongst the three sons we see the lines *of* division reforming between the descendants *of* the woman and the descendants *of* the serpent (Gen. 9:18-27). The story then focuses our attention *on one of* Noah's sons, *Shem*, and all those that came from him – a line that would eventually include the deliverer foreshadowed in Genesis 3:15 (see Luke 3:23-38).

Well, from *Shem* we get to the person of *Terah*, who is the father of *Abram* with whom, as we saw last week, the account *of* God's bringing about the fulfillment of his promises kicks into a new gear. And as we began looking at Abram's life last week, we saw God sovereignly calling Abram to pick up his things and follow Him, and with that call we saw the reiteration and expansion *of* those initial promises given in the Garden *of* Eden.

Abram's response to all of this was that *he believed God*, the proof of which is seen in at least 3 ways:

- 1) he left behind some important things, things that were familiar and comfortable – even the security of his extended family
- 2) he went *into* a strange and even threatening new land, and
- 3) he worshiped God as he went along his way.

So, Abram believed God, and went, but as we shall see in the story before us this morning, even though Abram plays an important role in the expansion and fulfillment *of* God's promises, his own sin and weakness begins to show through, thus demonstrating that whoever this promised deliverer is - *it isn't him*. Thus the account *of* Abram, expands the bible storyline, but at the same time keeps us looking forward, waiting to see who *is* this deliverer that is yet to come. Once again, the passage before us now *is* Genesis 12:10-13:4.

Let's pray, and then we'll begin looking at these verses together:

Father in heaven, as we hear the account of our brother Abram, who is in fact our very own ancestor, help us to hear not only the things which you said and did in his life, but to hear and see the things you are doing in our own lives as well. Make these more than interesting words. Make them living words as, by Your Spirit, these truths find their mark in human hearts. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

As we turn now to the text, the first thing I want you to notice is that, despite the fact that Abram was indeed *the man of faith*, (he is portrayed as such *in* the New Testament), the reality is that he remained a sinner – just like you and me. And the evidence *of* that will appear in several places in the passages before us, including *this* passage as we see how, in the midst *of* trying circumstances, Abram relies *on* his own cleverness, and even deception, more than he relies on God.

Genesis 12:10 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. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, " I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife. ' Then they will- kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake"

Now, we don't know how much time has passed between what we see here and the events described earlier in chapter 12, but it couldn't have been too much earlier than this that Abram had received all the amazing promises that we saw last week, including promises of descendants and *protection*. And now here he is, having listened to God and traveled to and even *through* Canaan, from north to south, when he finds himself in the midst of a terrible *famine*. There is little or no rain, and no food is growing anywhere. And Abram has responsibilities – to his wife, to his nephew, and to all those that travel with him, including his livestock. He can see that the food supplies are running low, and water is scarce, and he is most likely getting a little nervous about all of this. *What is Abram supposed to do?*

Well, from the deserted regions of Southern Canaan, Abram travels southward toward the land of Egypt. He has no doubt heard about the fact that, because of the Nile River that runs through that country, the conditions there were much better as they were able to grow crops in the land irrigated by the river. So, Abram decides to enter into the land, to take his chances at acquiring food there.

Now, the commentators I have seen are divided on the question of whether Abram was wrong to leave the promised land in the first place. Some seem to definitely take that view, others don't. Personally, I think it is a bit of a toss-up, as there are arguments to be made for each side. On the one hand, you could say that because God was the one that had made all these great promises to Abram, then surely He would not lead him into a land, only to let him starve to death – and thus nullify the promises made. Surely Abram should have been able to wait and trust God to provide, without doing something which could potentially place both himself and Sarai at great risk.

On the other hand, you could say that Abram, in the absence of any specific directions on what to do about the famine, was simply making the best decision he knew how to make. And so, he enters Egypt, which he knew was a *risky* thing, but only because from his perspective it was either *that* or starve to death. And so, whatever was going

through his mind, whatever his full motivations were, he decides to enter into the land of Egypt.

But Abram is no fool. He realizes his vulnerable situation – a stranger in a strange land – and he apparently has this drop-dead, gorgeous wife who is *so beautiful* that he fears that someone would even go so far as to kill him, in order to have her. Of course, the pagans don't do this sort of thing at all – as we shall see – but, quite ironically, it is one of God's own people David, who much later on, will do this very thing to another man. But that's a story for another day.

So anyway, fearing the worst, Abram comes up with a plan to deceive any Egyptian that might show an interest in his wife. He instructs Sarai to say, if she is asked, that she is his *sister*, which, technically, was true in that she was his *half-sister* (Gen 20:12) – Terah had fathered Abram through one wife, and Sarai through another. And so, Abram concocts this scheme to protect himself by saying things which were *technically* true, but ultimately still a *deception*.

Now it is a fair question to ask what Abram was hoping to accomplish through all of this scheming. And, most likely, what he was hoping was that a person seeing Sarai as his sister would then see her as *available*, whereas if she was married, she was not available – at least not while Abram *lived*. And if she was seen as *available*, then there would be no need to resort to violence to have her but, instead, they could enter into negotiations to have her as a wife – all of which takes a certain amount of time. And so, most likely, Abram's plan, should someone begin to make inquiries, would have been to acquire as much food as possible while the negotiations were going on and then *skip town* before anything was finalized. We can't say for sure, but his plan was likely something along those lines.

But there were at least two problems with Abram's plan. One problem was, as has been said, that in all of his scheming and planning, he failed to turn to God, or to show any confidence in God to deliver on His promises – specifically His promise to "bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" – in other words, to *protect* Abram and his family. The other promise that Abram seems to have doubted God's ability to deliver on was His promise that from *Abram's family* would come a great or a *large* nation. If Abram had been truly confident of those things, he might have entered into Egypt, without any plan to deceive anyone about his wife, but trusting that God would protect him and the promised inheritance/and not allow Sarai to be taken away by anyone.

The other problem with Abram's scheme, and this leads to the next main thing I want us to see this morning, is that he fails to consider or take into account *all* of the possibilities for what might happen, with the result that his plans unravel when something that he did not foresee occurs. In short, all of his clever scheming backfires, with *disastrous results*.

Genesis 12:14-16 When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's

house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

In all of his planning as to what should be done and said should the average Egyptian *citizen* inquire about his wife, Abram failed to consider the possibility that standing amongst those citizens might be representatives of the great Pharaoh himself. But that is precisely what happened. And so, at that point his plan was useless because, while the average *citizen* might enter into negotiations to marry his "sister," Pharaoh, the Ruler of Egypt, felt no need to negotiate about *anything* with *anybody*. If he saw an available and desirable woman walking about he would simply take her and settle the details later. After all, who was going to argue with him?

And so now, even though Abram's life *has* been spared, the great irony is that *his wife* has been taken and, in her place, he has sheep and camels and donkeys and servants, which certainly made him a wealthy man. But what good is all the wealth in the world now that his wife is gone and the promises of God hang precariously in the balance?

Well, into this sorry picture steps God. If you remember from last week, one of the things we saw was that while *Abram* is the person whose life we are recounting, *God* remains the *main character* behind and throughout every story. And we see that here as, in spite of all that Abram has done to jeopardize the promises – at least from a human standpoint – God nevertheless remains faithful to His own Word and intervenes to bring about the deliverance of Sarai and Abram.

Genesis 12:17-13:4 - But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 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? 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." And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. 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 livestock, 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 upon the name of the LORD.

As a result of his taking Sarai for himself, and in spite of the fact that he was deceived by Abram, Pharaoh and his people still fell under the curse of God as terrible plagues. Of what type we do not know – but terrible plagues broke out amongst them. Following this, Pharaoh correctly concludes (we are not told how) that the source of the trouble is the fact that in taking Sarai, he had not just taken Abram's sister – had taken Abram's *wife*.

And, interestingly enough, Pharaoh's reaction to this whole thing seems to be one of

genuine distress. He seems to be quite aware that in doing this he has crossed some sort of line. Indeed, far from being the wife-stealing, husband-murdering, no good sort of pagan that Abram's scheming has led us to anticipate, Pharaoh actually comes across fairly honorably and, in fact, ends up rebuking Abram for his actions. The pagan ruler is rebuking Abram, the man of faith. After delivering the rebuke, Pharaoh returns Sarai to Abram and gives order for them to go, taking all that they had acquired with them.

Upon hearing Pharaoh's command, Abram and Sarai leave straight away and actually go back to a previous location in Canaan. And you have to think that, as they go, they are a somewhat chastened couple and *must* have recognized that they had been delivered from a potential disaster.

Not surprisingly then, once they return to a previous worship location – in the region between Bethel and Ai – they again call upon the name of the Lord, no doubt thanking him for his mercies toward them.

Well, as we saw last week, the primary audience for these accounts, or the first people to have received these stories about Abram *as Scripture* were the people of God, under Moses. Further, as he was writing these accounts near the end of his life, it would have been the people of God who are now poised on the edge of the promised land, preparing to enter in. And, similar to last week, one of the main significances of this passage for *them* would have been the fact that in this account of Abram's sojourn and subsequent deliverance from Egypt, they would have seen the foreshadowing of their own, fairly *recent*, sojourn and deliverance from Egypt.

In other words, there are a number of clear and undeniable parallels between what happened to Abram here, and what happened many years later, when an entire nation of Abram's descendants would be delivered from Pharaoh, under the leadership of Moses. In the account before us this morning, for example, Abram goes into Egypt, initially, because of a famine. Similarly, much later on Jacob will enter into the land of Egypt, also because of famine, and is well treated because of his son Joseph's unlikely rise to power.

However, over many years, the warm welcome they received went away, and their freedom was taken from them as they became enslaved and were held captive by Pharaoh – much as Sarai had been taken captive many years before. Even further, just as the captivity of Sarai was brought to an end by God's sending plagues upon Pharaoh and his house, so too was the captivity of God's people many years later brought to an end by a similar sending of plagues.

Finally, in both the early account with Abram and the later account of the Exodus, after the plagues accomplish their goal, Pharaoh agrees to let his captives go and they *do go*, plundering and *having* plundered the Egyptians in the process – taking all sorts of riches with them.

Again, the parallels are very striking. But they are not *just* striking, they serve a

purpose. As God's people are reminded of these various foreshadowings and parallels between their own lives and that of their ancestors, they would have been, I suggest, quite encouraged and their confidence boosted upon seeing the faithfulness of God in action, even in spite of the failures and shortcomings of his people. And being thus encouraged, they might be more ready to now do what they were reluctant to do before – to actually enter the land before them, believing that God would be faithful once again to His people.

Well, in addition to thinking about how this story might have been significant for God's people in Moses' day, we need to think about the New Testament and whether the further revelation of God contained there, and centered in the person of Jesus Christ, helps to deepen our understanding of this account.

And, not surprisingly, when we look to the New Testament we see that it certainly *does* deepen our understanding. We see it almost straight away, as soon as we consider the person and work of Christ himself. See, unlike Abram who, under the pressure of extreme circumstances, did not turn to God but instead relied on his own cleverness, Jesus did just the opposite.

Consider for a moment the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness (Matt 4). There he is, at the end of a forty day fast, the victim of his own self-imposed "famine" if you will, and in that difficult place. Satan comes to him and tempts him, not once but three times to abandon God's agenda and purpose for one of His own. And what does Jesus do in those extreme circumstances? He says, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by *every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" In other words, the Word of God is even more fundamental *than food.*

And so, Jesus passes the test that Abram fails, and in winning that early skirmish with Satan, foreshadows the coming complete overthrow of the Evil One that was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ. Further, this victory of Jesus on the cross has a direct bearing upon God's people today, especially as we seek to apply these Scriptures to our own lives. Because the reality is that just as Abram, in difficult circumstances, relied on his own cleverness and even deception rather than look to God – well, you and I do the same sorts of things all the time, don't we?

Perhaps, for example, we find ourselves in a difficult spot, financially. And, in the midst of this sort of "monetary famine," we begin to worry and fret and wonder if God will take care of us, if we will get what we need. And somewhere in the mix, we lose our way and, instead of relying on God, and continuing to do the things we know are right – working hard, being good stewards, being honest and fair, being generous to meet needs that are around us – instead of continuing to do the things that we know are good and right, because of our financial fears, we take matters into our own hands and resort to clever, worldly, and even deceptive practices in order to achieve the financial security we think we need to survive. Corners get cut, half-truths are told, strings get pulled, justice and truth get compromised.

And, just as with Abram, while we think that we are being quite clever, we are nevertheless plagued with the same limitations as he had. We simply are not capable of accounting for or considering every eventuality and, as such, are just as prone to be caught off guard, or to have all of our plans overturned by the occurrence of something which simply was unforeseen. And we too may find ourselves in a potentially disastrous situation.

And it is precisely in these situations – and in other ones like it – that the victory of Jesus on the cross can have a great bearing, for a couple different reasons. For one thing, if we understand and appreciate that in the death and resurrection of Christ, we have been made *right* with God, then in the sufficiency of *that* we have the means for renouncing anything that might make any sort of claim to be more ultimate to us than the promises which are ours in Christ including how we feel about things like our *finances*.

Even further, the victory of Jesus on the cross, also rescues us in all those moments when, like Abram, we in fact *are* done in by our own self-reliance and cleverness and worldliness and find ourselves in the midst of yet another complete disaster of our own making. When we are in the midst of those sorts of circumstances, enjoying our "banquet of consequences," so to speak, we look to the cross and are reminded of God's great love and faithfulness toward us, and the grace by which He delivers us – as surely as He, in his mercy, delivered Abram and Sarai.

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