

Genesis 12– From marrying your sister to the promised land!

CHAPTER 12 - God's call and promise to Abraham; Abraham's response; Abraham's lapse of faith.

The chapter before us brings us to the other side of the Grand Canyon which runs through Genesis. The atmosphere is altogether different here, and we are going to slow down to a walk. The emphasis turns from events, stupendous events, to personalities—not all of them were great but all of them were important personalities. In Genesis there are four, and others will follow in subsequent books of the Bible.

In the first eleven chapters we have seen four great events: the Creation, the fall of man, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. In all of these tremendous events God has been dealing with the human race as a whole. Other than Adam and Abraham, God did not appear to anyone else. God was dealing with the entire race of mankind. There is a radical change at chapter 12. Now there will be brought before us four individuals. God will no longer be dealing with events, but with a man, and from that man He will make a nation. In the first section we will see Abraham the man of faith (Gen. 12–23). Then there will be Isaac the beloved son (Gen. 24–26). Next there will be Jacob the chosen and chastened son (Gen. 27–36), and then there will be Joseph's suffering and glory (Gen. 37–50). These four patriarchs are extremely important to the understanding of the Word of God. We will be taking up their stories in the rest of the Book of Genesis.

After the Tower of Babel, God turns from the race of mankind to one individual. From that individual He is going to bring a nation, and to that nation He will give His revelation, and out of that nation He will bring the Redeemer. Apparently, this is the only way that God could do it. Or let me put it like this: If there were other ways, this was the best way. We can trust God to do the thing which is the best.

God said that Abraham was a man of faith. In the Bible record the greatest thing that is said about Abraham is that he believed God: "... Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom_4:3). As we go through these chapters in Genesis, we will find that God appeared to this man seven times, each time to develop faith in his life. This does not mean that he was perfect. The fact of the matter is that he failed many times. God gave him four tests, and he fell flat on his face on all four of them. But, like Simon Peter, he got up, brushed himself off and started again. May I say to you, if God has touched your heart and life, you also may fall, but you are surely going to get up and start over again. We will see this happen in Abraham's life as we go through the chapter before us.

Gen 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

12:1-3 The call of **the LORD** had come to **Abram** when he was still in Ur (compare v. 1 with [Act 7:1-2](#)). Abram was called to leave his **country**, his **family**, and his **father's house**, and to embark on a life of pilgrimage ([Heb 11:9](#)). God made a marvelous covenant with him which included the following significant promises: **a land**—that is, the **land** of Canaan; **a great nation**— namely, the Jewish people; material and spiritual prosperity for Abram and his seed; a **great name** for Abram and his posterity; they would be a channel of **blessing** to others; friends of Israel would be **blessed** and anti-Semites would be cursed; **all the families of the earth** would be **blessed in** Abram, pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be a descendant of Abram. This covenant was renewed and enlarged in [Gen 13:14-17](#); [Gen 15:4-6](#); [Gen 17:10-14](#); and [Gen 22:15-18](#).

Gen 12:4 So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

"So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him." Now he will follow God's leading to the land of Canaan. "And Lot went with him"—oh, oh! It is still incomplete obedience; he is taking his nephew Lot with him.

Gen 12:5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.

Abram took Sarai, his wife, and that was all right, of course.

“And Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran.” The time Abram had spent in Haran was a period of just marking time and of delaying the blessing of God. God never appeared to him again until he had moved into the land of Palestine, until he had separated at least from his closer relatives and brought only Lot with him.

Gen 12:6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.

Here is the record of the fact that the Canaanites were the descendants of Ham's son Canaan. I want to add something very important right at this point. A great many people think that Abram left a terrible place in Ur of the Chaldees and came to a land of corn and wine, a land of milk and honey, where everything was lovely. They think that Abram really bettered his lot by coming to this land. Don't you believe it. That is not what the Bible says. And through archaeology we know that Ur of the Chaldees had a very high civilization during this time. In fact, Abram and Sarai might well have had a bathtub in their home! Ur was a great and prosperous city. Abram left all of that and came into the land of Canaan, “and the Canaanite was then in the land.” The Canaanite was not civilized; he was a barbarian and a heathen, if there ever was one. Abram's purpose in coming to Canaan was certainly not to better his lot. He came in obedience to God's command. Now he has obeyed, and notice what happens—

Gen 12:7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Abram builds an altar unto the Lord when He appears to him this second time. While he was in Haran, the place of delay, God had not appeared to him.

You see, one of the reasons that you and I are not always blessed in the reading of the Bible is because the Bible condemns—we are not living up to the light which God has already given to us. If we would obey God, then more blessing would come. We see in Abram's experience that God did not appear again to him until after he had moved out and had begun to obey God on the light that he had. Now God appears to him again. Then Abram builds an altar, and we will see that he is a real altar-builder.

Gen 12:8-9 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched 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. So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

Abram next relocated between Bethel (house of God) and Ai. True to form, he not only pitched a tent for himself but also built an altar to the LORD. This says a great deal about the priorities of this man of God. Verse 9 finds Abram moving toward the South (the Negev).

Gen 12:10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.

I think that if you had met Abram going down to Egypt and had said, “Wait a minute, Abram, you're going the wrong direction—you should be staying in the land,” that Abram could have given you a very good reason. He might have said, “Look, my sheep are getting pretty thin and there's not any pasture for them. Since there's plenty of grazing land for them down in Egypt, we're going down there.” And that's where they went.

However, immediately there is a problem, and it concerns Sarai because she is a beautiful woman.

Gen 12:11-13 And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."

As you probably know, over along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, ancient scrolls were found in the caves there, and they are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. At first the unbelieving scholars thought that they had found something that would disprove the Bible. But have you noticed how silent the higher critics have become? They just don't seem to have found anything that contradicts the Bible.

Among the scrolls was a set which couldn't be unrolled because they were so fragile—they had been wrapped so long that they would just shatter and come to pieces. One name could be seen, the name Lamech, so they were called part of the book of Lamech and said to be one of the apocryphal books of the Bible. Boy, how incorrect that was! The nation Israel bought them, and in the museum the experts began to moisten and soften them until they were unrolled. The scholars found that they contained Genesis 12, 13, 14, and 15, not in the Bible text but rather an interpretation of it. In the part that deals with chapter 12, it tells about the beauty of Sarai, actually describing her features and telling how beautiful she was. It confirms what we read of her in the Word of God.

The same scroll gives a description of Abram's exploration after God told him to "walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it" (Gen_13:17). The scroll gives a first person account by Abram of his journey. It confirms what the Bible has said about the land's beauty and fertility. The eyewitness (whether or not it was really Abram, we do not know) certainly confirmed the Bible record. A great many people who visit that land today can't understand how it could be called a land of milk and honey. Well, in the Book of Deuteronomy we learn what caused the desolation that is seen there today. But it was a glorious land in Abram's day.

However, there were periods of famine, and Abram left the land and went down to Egypt during such a time.

As Abram neared Egypt, he recognized that he would get into difficulty because of the beauty of his wife. So he said to Sarai,

Gen 12:14-17 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Gen 12:18-20 And 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'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way." So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

God, you see, was overruling in the lives of Abram and Sarai, but God did not appear to him while he was in the land of Egypt. – McGee

Faith, however, has its lapses. During a time of serious famine, Abram left the place of God's choosing and fled to Egypt, a symbol of the world. This move bred trouble. Abram became obsessed with the fear that the Pharaoh might kill him in order to seize his beautiful wife Sarai for his harem. So Abram prevailed on Sarai to lie by saying that she was his sister. Actually she was his half-sister (Gen_20:12), but it was still a lie, with deception as its motive. The ruse worked for Abram (he was rewarded handsomely) but it worked against Sarai (she had to join the Pharaoh's harem). And it worked against the Pharaoh (he and his household contracted plagues). The latter acted more righteously than Abram when he learned of the deception. After rebuking Abram, he sent him back to Canaan.

This incident reminds us that we should not wage a spiritual warfare with carnal weapons, that the end does not justify the means, and that we can't sin and get away with it.

God did not forsake Abram, but He did allow the sin to work itself out. Abram was publicly humbled by the Pharaoh and deported in disgrace.

The word "Pharaoh" was not a proper name but a title, such as king, emperor, president, etc. – Believers Bible Commentary