

ABRAHAM:

Calling, Compromise, and Redemption



A Reflection on Genesis 12
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A Study
Through
The
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Genesis chapter 12 is arguably one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It shifts the focus of the entire Bible from the sin of the human race to the faith of a single man named *Abram*, whose name means “*exalted father*” or “exalted with regard to the father” (in Hebrew the word **ab**, means “**father**” and **ram** comes from a verb meaning “**high**” or “**exalted**”).

Paul reminds us in various letters that God’s promises to Abraham are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring. It does not say to your “offsprings” (or “seeds”) as to many, but to your “offspring,” as to one, which is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

As we move through Genesis 12, which is made up of just 20 verses, I’ve divided them under 5 headings.

1. CALLING
2. RESPONSE
3. LACK/FEAR
4. LOSS
5. REDEMPTION

Let’s take a quick look at the chapter and see how it sets the stage for the larger story that unfolds in the Bible.

CALLING (vv. 1-3)

The LORD had said to Abram, “Come out from your country, from your people, and your father’s house to the land I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and curse whoever curses you; and through you, all people on earth will be blessed.”



Abraham was a native of the Chaldean city of Ur, a thriving metropolis in Southern Mesopotamia, which is modern day Iraq.

Abram begins his story as a native of Ur, an ancient city near Babylon. Keep in mind that at this point in history there are no Hebrew Scriptures, no Israelites (or “Jews”), and no Temple of God (at least not the God of the Bible).

In fact, Abram is the first person in the Bible to be called a “Hebrew” (cf. Gen. 14:13), which was not originally the name of a nation or a language, but a way of referring to Abram himself as a foreigner or immigrant.

He is called “Hebrew” (*עִבְרִי* pronounced *ib-ree'*) because he is a foreigner in the land in which he dwells after Genesis 12:3. The word “Hebrew” literally means “*from the other side*” or “*from across*,” and was also used as a way of speaking about the descendants of Eber (*עֵבֶר* pronounced *ay'-ber*), cf. Gen. 10:21.

“Hebrew” may possibly carry a double meaning in Genesis, seeing as Abraham is both a foreigner (one who has come from across the waters to dwell in a different place) and a physical descendant of Eber.

The Bible does not tell us the exact circumstances around Abraham's call from God, only that at some point God speaks to him, telling him to leave his country, his people, and his father's house behind. His calling has the radical effect of stripping away his entire identity.

It is the same call that we who are made Abraham's "seed" through Christ (*Gal. 3:29*), receive as well.

"Therefore, come out from among them and be ye separate." (2 Cor. 6:17)

Remember, Abraham's job was not to become important or make himself into somebody great. *God's promise is that He Himself is going to do that for him.* Rather, Abraham's job is simply to let go of the things from his past and follow God.



RESPONSE (VV. 4-9)

Abram's response to God's call is marked by obedience and trust...*at least initially.* As Genesis 12:4 tells us:

Abram went forth, as the LORD told him...

The writer of Hebrews sums it up this way...

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country... (Hebrews 11:8–9)

God appears to Abram again, promising to give his offspring the land he is dwelling in, and Abram responds by building an altar and worshiping Him. As he continues to journey through the land, he builds another altar in another region, and again worships God.

LACK/FEAR (VV. 10-13)

Verse 10 is where we are introduced to the first of the problems faced by Abram after following God out of Haran.

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

Abram responds to the problem of famine by leaving the land that God had brought him to. It is a perceived lack or “want” that causes Abram to leave the place of promise. By taking matters into his own hands and failing to trust God however, Abram’s situation progressively worsens and leads to him not only endangering his wife, but the very calling on his life.

¹¹ As he was about to enter Egypt, Abram said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.”



It is concern for his own safety that leads to Abram's moral compromise in Egypt. A compromise which risks the wellbeing of the very wife through whom God has promised to make him a father.

LOSS (VV. 14-16)

Perceived lack. Failure to trust God. Fear. Moral compromise. The next problem Abram faces is loss.

¹⁵ And when Pharaoh's officials saw Sarai, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace.

Though Abram is treated well for the sake of Sarai, who is "taken" into Pharaoh's palace, his newfound "comfort" costs him the sanctity of his own marriage.

REDEMPTION (VV. 17-20)

¹⁷ But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" ²⁰ Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

While the Bible does not answer the question of why God punishes Pharaoh when it is Abram who has told the lie, the punishment serves the dual purpose of demonstrating God's judgment on sin as well as the redemption He brings to the life of His covenant people.

CONCLUSION: DID YOU RECOGNIZE THE PATTERNS?

Genesis 12 marks the beginning of the Bible's "patriarchal history," which tells the story of Israel's earliest ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Genesis 12 also introduces us to the pattern of redemption that later unfolds in Exodus and then the Gospel. Remember, patterns are an important part of Genesis (as well as the rest of the Bible).

The distress that Abram and his wife suffer in Egypt is a prelude to the bondage and salvation of their descendants in the same land much later. Here are a few other patterns found in Genesis 12.

- In Genesis 12 it is famine that causes Abram to leave Canaan for Egypt, which is the same reason that Jacob sends his sons to Egypt in Genesis 42.
- God sends plagues on Pharaoh's house because of His people's bondage, which prefigures the plagues in Exodus. Both plagues result in the release of God's people.
- After the plagues, Abram is called to stand before Pharaoh, *cf. "Pharaoh called Abram and said" (Gen. 12:18)*, which parallels the role of Moses (and Aaron) in Exodus, *cf. "Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said" (Ex. 8:25)*.

Reader Challenge: Read Genesis 12 and see if you can spot any of the other recognizable patterns that show up later in the Bible.