

Genesis 11:27 – 13:4

^{11:27} Now these are the records of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸ Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Sarai was barren; she had no child. ³¹ Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. ³² The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran. ^{12:1} Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; ² and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; ³ and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' ⁴ So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. ⁶ Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. ⁸ Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. ⁹ Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. 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. ¹¹ It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, 'See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.' ¹⁴ It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁶ Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels. ¹⁷ But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸ Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ 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.' ²⁰ Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him. ^{13:1} So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. ² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. ³ He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Historical and Cultural Background

- Recall that we have just read the account of the Tower of Babel (Gen.11:1 – 9) which separates the narration of the line of Shem ('name') into two parts: Gen.10:21 – 32 and Gen.11:10 – 26.
- Hebrew names:
 - 'Abram' means 'father'
 - 'Sarai' means 'princess'
- Egypt was not dependent on rains because of the Nile River
- Echoes of creation and fall:
 - Blessing: God's blessing on Abram in Genesis 12:1 – 3 is a renewal of the blessing on Adam and Eve, from Genesis 1:28 – 31.
 - Pharaoh's question, 'What is this you have done to me?' in Gen.12:18, repeats God's question, 'What is this you have done?' in Gen.3:13



Questions

1. When you read Genesis 11:27 – 32 (as the leader, have them stop there initially), what are you led to think because of the past story of Genesis 1:1 – 11:26?
 - a. Terah is another man who has three sons (Abram, Nahor, Haran). This is a ‘new creation’ of sorts. Since Adam had three sons (Cain, Abel, Seth) that are mentioned, and one was bad, and Noah had three sons (Shem, Ham, Japheth) and one was bad, we are led to suspect that one of Terah’s sons is bad, and another is going to be faithful to God. Terah’s age (205 years) is likely the last literary reference to the 1,000 year ideal (see Gen.5:1 – 6:8 notes); the long life is a way of describing quality, not quantity, of life.
 - b. In fact, Haran is the name of Terah’s son and a city. This is like Cain having a son named Enoch and building a city of the same name. We don’t know if Terah built the city called Haran. Perhaps it was a coincidence in that sense. But it is significant that Terah had set out for the land of Canaan, but stopped in Haran. Perhaps the name of the city/town made him nostalgic for lost days. That stops his obedience.
 - c. Who do you expect to be the main character for the next section? Lot! He’s the younger one. Abram and Sarai are childless. On the basis of the previous chapters, where genealogy is vital, we would expect the line of faith to be continuing through a couple who is fruitful and multiplying. Now we find what God is able to do when the line of faith has stalled out at an elderly, childless couple.
2. What does it mean that God chooses Abram? It’s ironic, since Abram is 75. We find out later that Sarai is 10 years younger than Abram, so she is 65.
3. Imagine God speaking to your 75 year old grandfather and grandmother and promising to totally change their lives. How would they feel, respond? How would they feel about uprooting themselves and going to a new land?
4. What does it mean that God is renewing the original blessing and placing it on Abram and Sarai?
5. How do you think Abram interprets the ‘you’ in God’s promise? Primarily himself? How much of Sarai is included in it? We will see God clarify that for him.
6. What is Abram’s experience of God as he gets to the land of Canaan?
 - a. Notice that there is an ‘oak of Moreh’ (12:6) – a tree! And God speaks to Abram when he is there. This reminds us of God speaking to Adam and Eve next to two trees.
 - b. Also, Abram is in the new garden land, and goes up a mountain. ‘On a mountain between Bethel and Ai’:
 - i. He is doing this publicly. He’s announcing the name of the LORD to all his neighbors!
 - ii. Literarily and theologically, they are re-enacting ‘Eden’ since Eden was a mountain (Ezk.28:13 – 14; see the notes for Genesis 2).
 - c. This is a ‘new Eden, a new creation’
7. What does it mean that Abram lives in a tent and builds altars? Compare that with the rest of humanity building the Tower of Babel.
 - a. Tent: pilgrimage, trust in God; contrast to the Tower of Babel
 - b. Altar: worship, a public marker that God met Abram there
 - c. Calling on the name of the LORD: instead of naming one’s self (Gen.11:4); witness and proclamation and evangelism to neighbors
8. Why does Abram fear the Egyptians?
 - a. Abram’s first words in Scripture are motivated by fear, and involve lying. Is Abram playing the role of tempter to Eve?
 - b. Abram and Sarai are both probably afraid of their own vulnerability. There were dangerous times. And they were very wealthy – they had livestock, and also lots of servants. In the next chapter, Abram takes 318 men from his own company to be a fighting force; he gets involved in a war to rescue Lot.
 - c. Why would Pharaoh think Sarai was beautiful? Is that just physical beauty? Probably not. Sarah was 65 years old, as we will learn later. She was post-menopausal. But she appears to be wealthy, with her ‘brother’ Abram, and marriage was often used for political alliances. If this was a decently sized company, capable of mustering a strong fighting force, then this explains why Pharaoh thought Sarai was ‘beautiful.’

- d. Notice the phrase ‘saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house’ is an echo of the fall of Adam and Eve, when Eve ‘saw’ fruit that was a ‘delight to the eyes’ and ‘took’ it.
 - e. What do Pharaoh’s words ‘What is this you have done?’ remind you of? God’s words to Eve (Gen.3:13). This must have stunned Abram and Sarai a bit, if they knew the story of Adam and Eve (I think they did). This was a kind of fall, but Abram and Sarai’s marriage was the thing that was forbidden to Pharaoh, which could not be broken by him.
 - f. Pharaoh’s reaction: In the ancient near eastern world, adultery was severely condemned. Cassuto quotes an old Assyrian law which may reflect the general consensus of all nations in the Fertile Crescent. It stated that if a man should happen to go on a journey with a married woman (a man other than her father, brother, or son), and he was not aware that she was married, he had to swear in an oath that he did not violate her, and then he to pay a fine to her husband. (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part II, From Noah to Abraham* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), p.357 – 358)
9. What lesson do Abram and Sarai learn from how God protects their marriage?
- a. God is faithful to His word of blessing. God was teaching this to His people again. He had said in creation, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was.
 - b. Pharaoh was unwittingly but implicitly cursing Abram and Sarai, by pulling them apart. So, God was being faithful to His word in 12:1 – 3. He was cursing those who curse them. Because of God’s word and selection of Abram and Sarai, God can bring plagues (like He brought the flood) – He had announced it beforehand. Sickness and curses happened in the fall (Gen.3). I think this is a logical consequence (not just an arbitrary punishment) of breaking the creation order of God’s vision of marriage. Pharaoh didn’t know he was breaking it, but it still had consequences.
 - c. When God spoke His blessing of fruitfulness onto Abram, God was going to work through Sarai, his wife. God was honoring His original creational order, where husband and wife were one. Notice that this ties in with the creation vision echoed by them being in a new garden land, hearing God next to a tree, and calling on the name of the Lord.
 - d. Abram learns that God’s promise to make ‘you’ a great nation is not individualistic. It necessarily involves Sarai as his wife. She is now the ‘chosen woman’ through whom the ‘seed of the woman’ will come. And their marriage is what is holy and forbidden.
 - e. How many times does the word ‘wife’ appear in this passage? Ten times. Surely that is significant!
 - f. This is a mini-fall and restoration. Creation-blessing is tied to creation-order, the creation-vision.
 - g. God does not necessarily give ‘punish’ their own disobedience, at least right away! Abram and Sarai lied and sinned but they came out of Egypt richer than before. But generally, our actions do have consequences. And Abram and Sarai are learning that their motivation has to be at least, ‘I don’t want diseases to fall on other people.’
 - i. What if God had made diseases fall on Abram and Sarai? They would get the impression that God just gets His way no matter what. And they would have a fear based motivation rather than a love based motivation. This way, God is cultivating their motivations to be like His.
 - ii. This makes us look ahead to the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt. What if God was also tutoring Israel to feel towards Egypt that they didn’t want the plagues to affect the Egyptians.
 - h. Sarai might be learning that God is better at protecting her and taking care of her than even her husband.
 - i. What do you want for Abram going forward?
 - i. Pity
 - ii. Scorn
 - iii. Ambivalence
 - iv. Can’t God move on?
10. Why does Abram go back to the altar and the mountain between Bethel and Ai?
- a. It’s the place where he encountered God before, and worshiped. It’s where he had spiritual integrity and life.
 - b. This is a place that symbolizes spiritual life and health.
11. What do we learn about God here?

- a. God makes promises, so He can't (and won't) just move on. This affects us, too, because God has made promises to us.
- b. God's promise gives rise to hope: 'If we had lived in the second millennium B.C., the millennium of Avram, and could have canvassed all the nations of the earth, what would they have said of Avram's journey? In most of Africa and Europe, where prehistoric animism was the norm and artists were still carving and painting on stone the heavenly symbols of the Great Wheel of Life and Death, they would have laughed at Avram's madness and pointed to the heavens, where the life of earth had been plotted from all eternity. His wife is barren as winter, they would say; a man cannot escape his fate. The Egyptians would have shaken their heads and disbelief. 'There is none born wise,' they would say, repeating the advice of their most cherished wise men. 'Copy the forefathers. Teach him what has been said in the past; then he will set a good example.' The early Greeks might have told Avram the story of Prometheus, whose quest for the fire of the gods ended in personal disaster. Do not overreach, they would advise; come to resignation. In India, he would be told that time is black, irrational, and merciless. Do not set yourself the task of accomplishing something in time, which is only the dominion of suffering. In China, the now anonymous sages whose thoughts would eventually influence the *I Ching* would caution that there is no purpose in journeys or in any kind of earthly striving; the great thing is to abolish time by escaping from the law of change. The ancestors of the Maya in America would point to their circular calendars, which like those of the Chinese repeat the pattern of years in unvarying succession, and would explain that everything has been comes around again and that each man's fate is fixed. On every continent, in every society, Avram would have been given the same advice that wise men as diverse as Heraclitus, Lao-Tsu, and Siddhartha would one day give their followers: do not journey but sit; compose yourself by the river of life, meditate on its ceaseless and meaningless flow – on all that is past or passing or to come – until you have absorbed the pattern and have come to peace with the Great Wheel and with your own death and the death of all things in the corruptible sphere.'¹
- c. That He is still trying to undo the sin of the world, and now is drawing Abram and Sarai into a partnership with Him.
 - i. APPLICATION: Be restored to the spiritual inheritance God had for you. If you have any spiritual background whatsoever
 - ii. APPLICATION: God is developing partners with which to carry His blessing to restore the original garden creation order. Abram and Sarai worried about their future and their family. God cared about that, too. But God cared about more than that. God's memory goes back further than that. So God cares about all peoples, and not just them and their family, according to the blessing in Genesis 12:1 – 3.
- d. God trains our heart motivations.
 - i. God is working towards the undoing of sin and death, so he will bring cleansing, healing, and resurrection life. This points us to the need for a new Adam, one who doesn't fail like Adam, Noah, and Abram did. Without Jesus, we don't have a picture of what it means to be human in the best possible sense, in the original sense God intended.
 - ii. Reflection: How have each of us been trained to respond to God? To be motivated? Note that the best is a combination of loving God, loving self, and loving others. But sometimes people are trained to respond with an incomplete motivation or set of motives.
 - iii. Illus: Not only the growth of our missionality but also the deepening of our motivation (in love) for that mission. Like the Moravian missions.
 - iv. Illus: For me (Mako), I started to seek Jesus more sincerely when I realized that I had hurt my high school girlfriend, my sister, and my mom. I wanted my healing for my own sake, yes, but also for the sake of others, so that I wouldn't hurt them. And I started to want Jesus' healing for others, too.

¹ Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.74 – 75