

## Comments on Genesis 12

This chapter presents the origin of the Abrahamic covenant with little fanfare (v. 1-3). The change in the Lord's tactics and this new covenant was intimated at previously in 8:21-9:11, so it logically follows that some new thing should appear after Deluge. It does here, and is the origin of a nation.

The Lord promises Abram the land, and clears the land of the current inhabitants, via drought, so it may be his. The chapter recounts some historical events of Abram's traveling to and in the land of Canaan (v. 4-9) and subsequently to Egypt (v. 10), motivated primarily because of the need to graze his flocks during a time of famine. Upon coming to the borders of Egypt Abram finds himself in a very difficult situation (v. 11-13), which is ultimately resolved by the Lord's Providence (v. 14-20).

Casting one's eyes ahead, Abram's wandering through Canaan can be seen as predicting Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Sara's captivity and miraculous delivery from Pharaoh could be taken as prefiguring Israel's captivity in Egypt and ultimate delivery by Moses.

**1 NOW the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.**

v1-4 Moses' recounting of the initiation of the covenant with Abraham is rather terse for such a pivotal event. Compare it with the Pearl of Great Price Abraham account which is first-person. Moses' intent in making it so terse is to have the reader focus solely on the covenant. The Lord makes a promise to Abram to give him land and many children. In order to accomplish this the Lord must aid Abram in overcoming numerous challenges, and that is precisely the theme of the rest of the chapter.

Any obscurities in these verses are explained in considerable detail in the Pearl of Great Price Abraham account, which appears below in parallel with the Genesis account.

**4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram [was] seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. 6 And Abram passed through the land unto the**

place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite [was] then in the land. 7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. 8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, [having] Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

v4-9 Abram and caravan, apparently a modest group of several people and flocks, set out as the Lord commanded towards the land of Canaan (v. 4-5). In his travels into the valley of Canaan he sees the lands are inhabited (v. 6). Despite the land being inhabited, the Lord tells Abram this is the land the Lord has chosen for him, and Abraham builds an altar there (v. 7). Abram continues traveling south, building altars to sacrifice to the Lord as he goes (v. 8-9).

Abram's travels are detailed in Map 2 of the LDS edition KJV Bible.

v4 "Lot went with him", this detail included to set up subsequent events of ch. 13, 14, and 19.

"seventy and five years old", the Pearl of Great Price account indicates he was in fact 62.

v6 "the Canaanite was then in the land", there is nothing describing what the Canaanites are like in the present text because the Canaanites are infamous for their idolatry and lasciviousness (cf. Lev. 18:1-30, Deut. 18:9-14). Any Semitic reader would immediately recognize the implications of the name.

The land Abraham is to inherit is already populated, and the population is quite immoral. The underlying message here is the Lord's intent is to replace the current wicked inhabitants with more righteous inhabitants, cp. Deut. 9:3-5. This also serves to explain why there was a famine (v. 10) in the land, as famines are a common curse the Lord casts on the wicked. The famine is also used to remove the Canaanites from the land so as to free it up for Abraham.

v7 "Unto thy seed will I give this land", the Lord indicates the ultimate fulfilment of possession of the land is well in the future as it is to be inherited by "thy seed" and not by Abram.

"he builded an altar", the Pearl of Great Price account indicates the altar was built prior to the Lord's appearance to Abram. Abram apparently built the altar to keep himself devout and committed to the Lord in the presence of the idolatrous

locals.

Subsequent to the Lord's promise the altar would clearly represent that promise. The land would be used to worship the Lord rather than idols, and that altar was just the first of the altars Abram's children would create in that land.

v8-9 The Pearl of Great Price account makes it clear the primary reason he continued to travel was because of the severity of the famine.

His continuing to build altars as he traveled would demonstrate his continuing faith in the Lord, indicating he was not being swayed by the traditions of the locals.

**10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine [was] grievous in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou [art] a fair woman to look upon: 12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This [is] his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. 13 Say, I pray thee, thou [art] my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.**

v10-13 The severity of the famine drives Abram's caravan into the land of Egypt (v. 10), which is in the fertile Nile delta. Abram knows the Egyptians by reputation (v. 12) and fears for his life because of Sarai's beauty (v. 11). He therefore asks Sarai to tell them she is his sister rather than wife fearing their desire to have her will motivate them to dispose of him (v. 13).

The Pearl of Great Price account differs significantly from the Genesis account in the subject of these verses. The Pearl of Great Price account indicates it is the Lord who warns Abram concerning the murderous and adulterous nature of the Egyptians and tells him to have Sarai tell people only that she is his sister and say nothing of being his wife.

Interpreting such actions and determining motives is problematic in the Genesis account, and even more difficult in the Pearl of Great Price account. The common Rabbinical reading on the Genesis account is the text is exposing a flaw in Abram to exhibit his humanity and therefore discourage subsequent generations from committing ancestor worship. While this may seem like fault-finding, it is a consistent theme throughout the OT to expose the shortcomings and foibles of various characters, particularly the more prominent leaders of Israel (e.g., Jacob, David, Solomon, etc.).

While this reading may shed some light on the context, it does nothing to explain the gravity of the situation this "little

white lie" or "artful omission" places the future of Israel in as at present Abram has no children and Sarai is his only wife. The Rabbinical view on this point is the story recounts the faithfulness of the Lord in delivering Sarai from Pharaoh and prospering Abram in the process. According to this reading, it is therefore an example of the Lord's Providence and zealousness in keeping His word to create a nation through Abram.

While these readings shed light on the Genesis account, they do nothing to explain the Pearl of Great Price account. In this latter account the Lord has Abram tell Sarai to be deliberately selective, and therefore somewhat deceptive, in what information she shares with locals. Why would the Lord do such a thing? If we look to similar incidents this question is answered. Let us compare the incident of Abraham, Sariah, and Abimelech king of Gerar and that of Israel's exodus from Egypt.

First, the case of Israel's exodus from Egypt closely parallels the present text. In both cases famine results in captivity with the Lord stepping in to deliver the captives. In the case of Israel in Egypt the Lord's motives are explicitly spelled out: to show both Egypt and Israel who the true God is (cf. Exod. 7:4-5). The Egyptians considered Pharaoh a god, and his hubris is demonstrated amply (cf. Exod. 5:2). The Lord seeks not only to demonstrate His power to Israel, but also to knock down the terrible pride of all men (cf. ch. 11:1-9). In this case, one that is plain, the Lord accomplishes both.

Next, a very similar set of circumstances as in the present text occurs when Abraham is in Gerar near the land of Canaan (cf. ch. 20). Sariah is taken by king Abimelech and then warned by the Lord he will be killed if he violates her. Abimelech pleads his case by saying he has not violated her so he should not be punished, the Lord agrees with him and indicates that is why He is only warning him and has not already punished him. The Lord also flatly tells Abimelech that Abraham is His prophet, and if Abraham prays to Himself on his behalf then he will be spared. Otherwise, he and his whole house will be killed. Abimelech does release Sariah, but in doing so he accuses Abraham of being at fault for lying to him. Abraham's defense is that he did not lie, because Sariah is truly his half-sister. But, Abraham points out the more serious issue is that Abimelech and his people are murderous and adulterous, so had they known Sariah was his wife they would have murdered him to get her. Abraham also states flatly, "the fear of God is not in the place". Abimelech relents in his accusations and effectively admits his guilt, tacitly acknowledging Abraham's summation of their murderous and adulterous nature, by paying off Sariah. Abraham then prays for Abimelech and the Lord then lifts the curse. As in the case of Israel in Egypt, the Lord has the opportunity to demonstrate His power to the faithful while striking down the pride of the

unfaithful. The Lord demonstrates His power and identifies His prophet unequivocally. Where there was formerly no "fear of God" in Gerar, there was after this incident.

Returning to the present text, which is very similar to the events with Abimelech, although less verbose, we can now shed light on what is happening with Abram and Pharaoh. As demonstrated in the two examples above, the context is the Lord wants to make it clear to Pharaoh the Lord is God and he isn't. And, that Abram is the Lord's prophet. There is no "fear of God" in Egypt because hubris reigns supreme, and the Lord wants to change that. In order to accomplish this, the Lord deliberately engineers a situation where the appropriate confrontation can take place. An inappropriate confrontation would be Pharaoh or his minions murdering Abram to get Sarai. As the Lord prefers to influence people's agency passively, He engineers an alternative. He chooses to get Sarai into Pharaoh's court and then call him on his actions. The Lord can then justifiably punish Pharaoh, identify Himself as God, and identify Abram as His prophet.

Does this mean the Lord will lie in order to achieve His ends? Not at all, as Abraham points out the selective presentation of information is true (cf. 20:12), it is merely selective. Neither Pharaoh nor his minions were interested enough to find out all of the truth, only that part which served their interests. And had they known the full truth they would not have honored the marriage, they would have sought to murder Abraham. They didn't care if she was married, all they cared about was getting Sarai. The omission of this detail did not change their desires, it only changed the manner in which they went about pursuing their desires. But, regardless of their sinful nature, what about the Lord's command to tell Abram to have Sarai say they are just brother and sister? The Lord used guile to engineer a situation to the benefit of all involved, the Lord acted wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove (cf. Matt. 10:16), even as He admonishes us to be.

v10 Famine is employed to drive the Canaanites from the land, making it available to Abraham in the long term. But, in the short term, Abraham must also flee the land, necessitating his moving towards Egypt, which creates the problem of putting him at the mercy of the natives.

**14 And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she [was] very fair. 15 The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. 17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh**

called Abram, and said, What [is] this [that] thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she [was] thy wife? 19 Why saidst thou, She [is] my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take [her], and go thy way. 20 And Pharaoh commanded [his] men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

v14-20 As feared, the Egyptians covet Sarai because of her beauty (v. 14), so much so she is gossiped of among the princes all the way up to Pharaoh, and is ultimately taken by him (v. 15). After she is taken, Pharaoh showers Abram with gifts of animals and slaves (v. 16). However, the Lord intervenes and curses Pharaoh for his actions (v. 17). Pharaoh summons Abram and seeks to blame him for the situation (v. 18-19), and then tells his men to get rid of him (v. 20).

v15 "the woman was taken", Rabbinical commentators interpret this as an effective kidnaping. Note Pharaoh doesn't pay off Abram until after she is "taken", clearly indicating this was not a case of bartering for a bride, but an after-the-fact attempt to placate.

Being a foreigner in need of hospitality Abram was clearly not in any position to resort to any kind of physical resistance. The Pearl of Great Price account also clearly forwards the view Abram had at least some inkling of what the Lord had planned as far as the outcome.

Additionally, consider the fate of women in such a society. Had Sarai said "He is my husband" instead of "He is my brother", her fate would have been the same. She would have been "taken", the difference being the murder of Abram. There is no protection for women in societies such as this that do not respect the marriage relationship. The women become pawns between men with social and political power. This kind of powerlessness in the Egyptian society becomes the ironic undoing of Pharaoh later in the Exodus account. There it is Pharaoh's daughter who rescues the baby Moses from the Nile, and the Hebrew midwives and women defy Pharaoh and literally give birth to the Israelite rebellion.

v16 "he asses...she asses", the donkeys are accounted for by gender because they had to be kept entirely separate. Males of the species are so intractable in the presence of females they are entirely useless and a complete nuisance. For this reason the females were used as draft animals and males were largely kept for breeding. That Abram had any male donkeys, let alone more than one, indicates the number of females he had was numerous to the point where he could reserve a considerable portion of them for breeding. The implicit message here, which is made explicit in 13:2, is by the time he leaves Egypt Abram is

fabulously wealthy. He increases during a time of famine where everyone else is decreasing. Clearly, the Lord is blessing Abram for his righteousness while cursing the wicked around him with famine.

v17 The nature of the plagues are not explicitly detailed here, but are probably similar to those cast on Abimelech's house under similar circumstances, cf. 20:17-18.

v18-19 The questions presented here by Pharaoh appear as though they are rhetorical. This is because the reader already knows the answers. Abram knew he would be killed because the Egyptians are adulterous and murderous. This is simply a case of projection on Pharaoh's part. He has been caught and punished, and rather than humbling himself he lashes out at Abram, seeking to blame him for his own sinful nature. This pride foreshadows that of the Pharaoh which Moses ultimately contends against.

v20 Pharaoh not only wants to blame Abram for his troubles, he wants him out of his sight so there is no reminder of the debacle or his guilt.

## Comparison of Genesis 12 and Abraham 2

Genesis 12

1 NOW the LORD  
had said unto Abram,  
Get thee  
out of thy country, and  
from thy kindred, and  
from thy father's house,  
unto a land that  
I will shew thee:

Abraham 2

1 NOW the Lord God  
caused the famine  
to wax sore in the land of Ur,  
insomuch that Haran,  
my brother, died;  
but Terah, my father,  
yet lived in the land of Ur,  
of the Chaldees.  
2 And it came to pass that  
I, Abraham, took  
Sarai to wife, and  
Nehor, my brother,  
took Milcah to wife,  
who was the daughter of Haran.  
3 Now the Lord  
had said unto me:  
Abraham, get thee  
out of thy country, and  
from thy kindred, and  
from thy father's house,  
unto a land that  
I will show thee.  
4 Therefore I left  
the land of Ur,  
of the Chaldees,  
to go into the land of Canaan;  
and I took Lot,  
my brother's son, and  
his wife, and  
Sarai my wife; and  
also my father  
followed after me,  
unto the land  
which we denominated Haran.  
5 And the famine abated;  
and my father  
tarried in Haran and  
dwelt there,  
as there were many flocks  
in Haran; and  
my father turned again  
unto his idolatry, therefore  
he continued in Haran.

2 And I will make of thee  
a great nation, and  
I will bless thee,  
and  
make thy name great;  
and  
thou shalt be a blessing:

6 But I, Abraham, and  
Lot, my brother's son,  
prayed unto the Lord, and  
the Lord appeared unto me, and  
said unto me:  
Arise, and take Lot with thee;  
for I have purposed  
to take thee away  
out of Haran, and  
to make of thee  
a minister to bear my name  
in a strange land  
which I will give  
unto thy seed after thee  
for an everlasting possession,  
when they hearken to my voice.  
7 For I am the Lord thy God;  
I dwell in heaven;  
the earth is my footstool;  
I stretch my hand  
over the sea, and  
it obeys my voice;  
I cause the wind and  
the fire to be my chariot;  
I say to the mountains--  
Depart hence--and behold,  
they are taken away  
by a whirlwind,  
in an instant, suddenly.  
8 My name is Jehovah, and  
I know the end  
from the beginning;  
therefore my hand  
shall be over thee.  
9 And I will make of thee  
a great nation, and  
I will bless thee  
above measure, and  
make thy name great  
among all nations, and  
thou shalt be a blessing  
unto thy seed after thee,  
that in their hands  
they shall bear this ministry  
and Priesthood  
unto all nations;  
10 And I will bless them  
through thy name;

3 And I will bless them  
that bless thee, and  
curse him  
that curseth thee: and  
in thee

shall all families  
of the earth  
be blessed.

4 So Abram departed,  
as the LORD had  
spoken unto him; and  
Lot went with him: and

for as many as receive  
this Gospel shall be called  
after thy name, and  
shall be accounted thy seed,  
and shall rise up and  
bless thee, as their father;  
11 And I will bless them  
that bless thee, and  
curse them  
that curse thee; and  
in thee  
(that is, in thy Priesthood)  
and in thy seed  
(that is, thy Priesthood),  
for I give unto thee a promise  
that this right shall continue  
in thee, and  
in thy seed after thee  
(that is to say,  
the literal seed, or  
the seed of the body)  
shall all the families  
of the earth  
be blessed,  
even with the blessings  
of the Gospel,  
which are the blessings  
of salvation,  
even of life eternal.  
12 Now, after the Lord  
had withdrawn  
from speaking to me, and  
withdrawn his face from me,  
I said in my heart:  
Thy servant  
has sought thee earnestly;  
now I have found thee;  
13 Thou didst send thine angel  
to deliver me from  
the gods of Elkenah, and  
I will do well  
to hearken unto thy voice,  
therefore let thy servant  
rise up and depart in peace.  
14 So I, Abraham, departed  
as the Lord had  
said unto me, and  
Lot with me; and

Abram [was]  
seventy and five years old  
when he departed out of Haran.  
5 And Abram took Sarai  
his wife,

and Lot his brother's son, and  
all their substance  
that they had gathered, and  
the souls that  
they had gotten in Haran; and  
they went forth to go  
into the land of Canaan; and

into the land of Canaan  
they came.

6 And Abram passed  
through the land  
unto the place of Sichem,  
unto  
the plain of Moreh. And  
the Canaanite [was] then  
in the land.

I, Abraham, was  
sixty and two years old  
when I departed out of Haran.  
15 And I took Sarai,  
whom I took to wife  
when I was in Ur, in Chaldea,  
and Lot, my brother's son, and  
all our substance  
that we had gathered, and  
the souls that  
we had won in Haran, and  
came forth in the way  
to the land of Canaan, and  
dwelt in tents  
as we came on our way;  
16 Therefore, eternity  
was our covering and  
our rock and  
our salvation,  
as we journeyed from Haran  
by the way of Jershon,  
to come to the land of Canaan.

17 Now I, Abraham,  
built an altar  
in the land of Jershon, and  
made an offering  
unto the Lord, and  
prayed that the famine  
might be turned away  
from my father's house,  
that they might not perish.  
18 And then we passed  
from Jershon through the land  
unto the place of Sechem;  
it was situated  
in the plains of Moreh, and  
we had already come into  
the borders of  
the land  
of the Canaanites, and

I offered sacrifice there in  
the plains of Moreh, and  
called on the Lord devoutly,  
because we had already come  
into the land  
of this idolatrous nation.

7 And the LORD  
appeared unto Abram,  
and  
said,  
Unto thy seed  
will I give this land:  
and

there builded he an altar  
unto the LORD,  
who appeared unto him.

8 And he removed from thence  
unto a mountain  
on the east of Bethel, and  
pitched his tent, [having]  
Bethel on the west, and  
Hai on the east: and  
there he builded an altar  
unto the LORD, and  
called upon  
the name of the LORD.

9 And Abram  
journeyed, going on  
still toward the south.

10 And there was

a famine in the land: and  
Abram  
went down  
into Egypt to sojourn there;  
for the famine [was]  
grievous in the land.

11 And it came to pass,  
when he was come near  
to enter into Egypt,  
that he said  
unto Sarai his wife,  
Behold now,  
I know that thou [art]  
a fair woman to look upon:

12 Therefore it shall  
come to pass,  
when the Egyptians  
shall see thee,  
that they shall say,  
This [is] his wife: and  
they will kill me,  
but they will save thee alive.

19 And the Lord  
appeared unto me  
in answer to my prayers, and  
said unto me:

Unto thy seed  
will I give this land.  
20 And I, Abraham,  
arose from the place  
of the altar which I had built  
unto the Lord, and

removed from thence  
unto a mountain  
on the east of Bethel, and  
pitched my tent there,  
Bethel on the west, and  
Hai on the east; and  
there I built another altar  
unto the Lord, and  
called again upon  
the name of the Lord.

21 And I, Abraham,  
journeyed, going on  
still towards the south;

and there was  
a continuation of  
a famine in the land; and  
I, Abraham,  
concluded to go down  
into Egypt, to sojourn there,  
for the famine  
became very grievous.

22 And it came to pass  
when I was come near  
to enter into Egypt,  
the Lord said unto me:

Behold,  
Sarai, thy wife,  
is a very fair woman  
to look upon;

23 Therefore it shall  
come to pass,  
when the Egyptians  
shall see her,  
they will say--  
She is his wife; and  
they will kill you,  
but they will save her alive;

13 Say,  
I pray thee,  
thou [art] my sister:  
that it may be well with me  
for thy sake; and  
my soul shall live  
because of thee.  
14 And it came to pass,  
that, when Abram  
was come into Egypt,  
the Egyptians beheld the woman  
that she [was] very fair.  
15 The princes also of Pharaoh  
saw her, and  
commended her before Pharaoh:  
and the woman was taken  
into Pharaoh's house.  
16 And he entreated Abram well  
for her sake: and  
he had sheep, and  
oxen, and  
he asses, and  
menservants, and  
maidservants, and  
she asses, and  
camels.  
17 And the LORD plagued  
Pharaoh and his house  
with great plagues  
because of Sarai Abram's wife.  
18 And Pharaoh called Abram,  
and said,  
What [is] this  
[that] thou hast done unto me?  
why didst thou not tell me  
that she [was] thy wife?  
19 Why saidst thou,

therefore see that ye  
do on this wise:  
24 Let her say  
unto the Egyptians,  
she is thy sister, and  
thy soul shall live.  
25 And it came to pass  
that I, Abraham,  
told Sarai, my wife,  
all that the Lord  
had said unto me--  
Therefore say unto them,  
I pray thee,  
thou art my sister,  
that it may be well with me  
for thy sake, and  
my soul shall live  
because of thee.

She [is] my sister?  
so I might have taken her  
to me to wife:  
now therefore behold thy wife,  
take [her], and  
go thy way.  
20 And Pharaoh commanded  
[his] men concerning him: and  
they sent him away, and  
his wife, and  
all that he had.

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