

December 11 – Gen. 12:10 – 13:18 – Abram To Egypt, Abram & Lot

Torah Readings: Genesis 12:10 – 13:18 – Abram To Egypt, Abram & Lot

Psalm 9 again

Haftorah – Isaiah 65:8-16 + 23

Genesis 12:10 - “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.”

The famine served to both punish the Canaanites for their sins (Psalm 107:34) and to test Abram’s faith.

This journey to Egypt displays a lack of faith. It’s the first of a series of famines during which the patriarchs “leaned on” Egypt rather than wait on God.

(Although it can also be seen either as God providing a provision in Egypt when there was scarcity in Canaan, or as an opportunity for Abram to witness to the one God in a new land.)

But the fact remains this was Abram’s idea, not God’s. God had told him to settle in Canaan.

Don’t depend on Egypt/the world

Isaiah 31:1 - “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!”

Later, God specifically told Isaac not to go to Egypt:

Genesis 26:2-3 - “The LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. 3"Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham.”

At least Abram did not retreat back to Haran, which would be giving up altogether (see Hebrews 12:15). Instead he only planned to “sojourn” for a time. But his presence in Egypt caused some problems.

We learn in Genesis 20:12 he and Sarai had agreed beforehand on a plan to disguise their relationship:

Genesis 20:12 - “...that and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother.'”

This was not exactly a lie - Sarai was Terah’s daughter (Genesis 20:12), though not the

daughter of Abram's mother - but still a deception. This is a low-water mark in Abraham's life.

Genesis 12:14 - "When Abram arrived in Egypt"

And where was Sarah? Abram had locked her in a chest. When he arrived at the gates of Egypt, the tax officers said to him: "What are you transporting in this chest?" Said he to them: "Barley." Said they to him: "You're carrying wheat!" Said he to them: "So charge me the tariff for wheat." "You're carrying peppers!" "Take the tariff for peppers." "You're carrying gold!" "Take the tariff for gold." "You're carrying silks!" "Take the tariff for silks." "You're carrying pearls!" "Take the tariff for pearls." Said they: If he didn't have something truly precious, he would not accept whatever we ask for. At that moment they said to him: "You're not moving from here until you open the chest and show us what's inside." As soon as he opened it, the entire land of Egypt glowed from Sarai's radiance. (Midrash Rabbah)

Genesis 12:17 - "And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife."

It seems unfair - Pharaoh was innocent, Abram was deceptive, unbelieving and cowardly.

Could this have been an agreed-upon exchange of "gifts" or some other customary arrangement? The word "taken," (Genesis 12:15), implies that it was by constraint, and not with Abram's or Sarai's consent.

Actually, Pharaoh and his princes were punished for their lust and for forcefully taking Sarai into his household for his own purposes - what one commentator calls "a deed of ruthless self-will."

Ultimately, God used this incident to show Abram that he had no need of cooking up a deception to avoid some imagined danger in the first place, since God was protecting them.

Psalm 105:14-15 - "And they wandered about from nation to nation, From one kingdom to another people. He permitted no man to oppress them, And He reproved kings for their sakes: 'Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm.'"

Nevertheless, Abram was mute under Pharaoh's reproofs, and did not venture to utter a single word in vindication of his conduct.

The Jewish chronologers say Abram left Egypt after he had been there three months (Seder Olam Rabba, p. 2.); but Artapanus, a heathen gentile writer, says he stayed there 20 years.

Abram and Lot

Genesis 13:6 - "And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together."

A similar situation later led to the separation of Jacob and Esau, (Genesis 36:7).

Midrash Rabbah suggests that, beneath the surface, there was a much deeper rift. Since the Canaanites still occupied the land, the shepherds of Abram were very careful to only graze their flocks on no-man's land, so that they would not be guilty of stealing from the pastures that belonged to the native inhabitants. On the other hand, Lot's shepherds regarded the land as theirs, since they knew that God had promised the land of Canaan to Abram, and that since Abram had no heirs, they were certain that Lot would eventually inherit it all. They disregarded the fact that the Canaanites were still living there and that the land was still owned and controlled by them. "So as of now, they have rights in the land." The shepherds of Abram, who practiced their master Abram's morality, felt that the actions of Lot's shepherds was not only wrong, but were concerned that their deeds would reflect poorly on Abram (especially since according to tradition both Abram and Lot were almost identical in appearance and could easily be mistaken for one another).

Abram, showing humility and wisdom, gives Lot his choice of land, and the part ways.

Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom" and thus came into the vortex of sin that dominated that city.

Why were the Sodomites so bad? They were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned about the needy.

Genesis 13:13 - "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD."

Ezekiel 16:49-50 - "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "Sodom, your sister and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it."

"While eating and drinking himself, one is obligated to feed the stranger, orphan, and widow, along with the other unfortunate poor... [One who does not] is not enjoying a mitzvah, but rather his stomach" (Maimonides, Laws of Yom Tov 6:18).

All Sodom's other sins proceeded from that.

Revelation 11:8 - "Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city--figuratively called Sodom and Egypt--where their Lord was also crucified."

Proverbs 16:5,18 - "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD"

Blessing of Abraham repeated

Genesis 13:15 - "For all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed for ever."

forever = "olam," an indeterminate time period; eternity; the vanishing point of the horizon.

"Olam" does not always signify eternity, but can sometimes mean a long continuance, as is evident from Genesis 17:13; 48:4; Exodus 21:6; Psalm 132:14, and many other places of Scripture; and in particular, when it is applied to the Jewish rites and privileges, it commonly signifies no more than during the standing of that commonwealth, or until the coming of the Messiah.

—Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary'

Christ is the ultimate beneficiary of the blessing:

Galatians 3:16 - "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Genesis 13:16 - And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your seed also be numbered.

The prophets saw fulfillment after the exile, and spiritually in the days of Messiah:

Hosea 1:10 - "Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And in the place Where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God."