

SOUTH ASIA BIBLE COMMENTARY

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12:10-20 Abram and Sarai in Egypt

Yet despite his repeated demonstrations of his trust in God, Abram did sometimes forget the Lord's promises to him, particularly his promise of protection. One example of this happened when severe famine in the land of Canaan forced Abram to move even further south into Egypt (12:10).

Sarai, Abram's wife, was strikingly beautiful, and Abram feared that he might be murdered by an Egyptian man who wanted to marry her (12:11-12). To prevent this, he told Sarai not to admit their true relationship and to present herself as his sister. This was half true, for she was indeed his half-sister (20:12). Abram presumably hoped that any potential suitors would treat him well, and that he – as her brother and guardian – would be able to fend off any offers of marriage (12:13).

However, what Abram did not foresee was that her suitor would be Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, whose offer to take her into his palace could not be refused (12:14-15). Sarai was accordingly taken into Pharaoh's harem, treated as just another of the beautiful women whom a king at that time could take as a concubine. Not that Pharaoh was ungrateful to Abram – he showered him with gifts in exchange for his "sister" (12:16).

In a strongly patriarchal society, Sarai had very little say in what happened to her. But Abram had lost more than his wife; he had also broken faith with his God. The Lord had promised to bless and to protect him and Abram should have trusted him and told the truth. Nowhere do we read that he called on the Lord while in Egypt.

Despite Abram's sin, the Lord intervened to protect both him and Sarai. Pharaoh and his household were afflicted with *serious diseases* that probably prevented Pharaoh from committing adultery by having sexual relations with Sarai (12:17). As a result Pharaoh somehow discovered the truth about her and confronted Abram (12:18-19). Pharaoh was furious that he had been lied to. It is a sign of God's protection of Abram that he was not executed or stripped of all he owned for lying to the king. Amazingly, all that happened was that Sarai was returned to him and he was expelled from Egypt along with *everything he had* (12:20).

Abram and Sarai were a special couple with a special place in God's plan for the whole world. We cannot assume that he will intervene miraculously in every case where a wife is placed in a difficult situation or forced into sin because of the sin of her husband or family. What we can say is that God does not allow his promises and purposes to be obstructed by human mistakes and sin. He will ensure that they are fulfilled. He will be faithful even when we fail him.

13:1-14:16 Abram and Lot

Abram was childless, and Lot was the orphaned son of his deceased brother, Haran. Accordingly, Abram was

responsible for him and they had travelled together, but they did not share the same outlook on life and so they separated. God's plan was to work only through Abram and his immediate descendants. Nevertheless, Abram still felt a continuing responsibility for his nephew, and worked to protect him.

13:1-4 Return to Canaan

Expelled from Egypt, Abram returned to the Negev with his family and his many possessions. The gifts he had received from Pharaoh had helped to make him very wealthy (13:1-2). Eventually his wandering brought him back to the place where he had earlier built an altar (13:3-4). There he *called on the name of the LORD* once again. Perhaps this was a sign that he was rebuilding his relationship with the Lord who had protected and blessed him while he was in Egypt.

13:5-13 Separation from Lot

Seemingly, the Lord had also blessed Lot as a member of Abram's extended family, for he too had accumulated many flocks and herds (13:5). It soon became clear that the land could not sustain them both, especially as the local inhabitants were also trying to live off the land (13:6-7). Predictably, this caused friction as the herdsmen quarrelled about grazing land, water and living space for their families.

Abram did not want the tension to spill over and tear the family apart in a cycle of violence. So as leader of the group, he suggested a solution (13:8-9). In a gracious attempt to avoid future conflict and resentment, he asked Lot to choose where he wanted to settle with his possessions. Looking around, Lot desired the fertile *plain of the Jordan* towards Zoar in the east. This land is now covered by the Dead Sea, but then it was a green plain, which seemed to Lot to resemble Eden, *the garden of the LORD* (13:10). Lot focused only on the good grazing and not on the wicked nature of the people of the city of Sodom where he chose to settle, even though he probably had heard reports about their wickedness (13:11-13). Abram was left with the drier, less profitable pastures of Canaan in the west.

We admire the humility and the generosity of Abram in letting Lot select the area of his choice. As the leader and the older man, Abram could simply have told Lot to leave the fertile plains to him and sent him off in the opposite direction. But Abram believed that the Lord intended to bless him and did not seek to quarrel about an issue of land. What a leader!

Today, we are often so busy accumulating possessions that we forget Abram's example of quiet trust. It is not unusual for family members to quarrel over a piece of land or some other possession and to go to the court or even kill in the hope of acquiring it. However, God's people are called to live in peace and humility with one another. Like Abram, we should be "looking forward to a city ... whose architect

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