

# Recalculating Genesis 12

**INTRODUCTION:** How many of you are over 65? How many are over 75?

Congratulations! You've made it this far, and beyond that, you are living in the Paradise of Amelia Island. Sit back, relax, hunt for sharks' teeth, learn pickleball or pattonk... drink coffee and gripe about the possibility of paid parking.... that's what we do, right? It's the American Dream.... Welcome to retirement.... Unless you are a believer... your story may just be getting started.

That's how it happened for Abram. He was minding his own business, growing old... when God showed up.

**CONTEXT:** So far in our study in Genesis, mankind has been drifting further and further from the Creator. Even after the flood, we see that man chose to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Things begin to change in Genesis 12, when God Himself goes to a man deep in the dark pagan land of Ur, where the moon god was worshipped. He speaks to Abrahm and calls him to...

## 1. The Promte of God's Direction

**TEXT: Genesis 12:1–3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Now, we don't know exactly how this revelation came to Abram - it simply says the Lord **SAID**. Perhaps it was in an audible voice, perhaps it was in a dream - we do not know.

**God Promises Abram 3 Things:**

1. **The Promised Land** - Go, and I will show you a land. It is implied that God would give him this land...
2. **The Patriarchal Family** - I will multiply you into a Nation. So Abram, who had no children and whose wife was barren... will have enough descendants that they would be a nation of people.
3. **The Platinum Rule** -
  - We operate under the *golden rule*: we treat others as we wish to be treated, and God treats us as if we believe and obey that.
  - Abram lived under the *Platinum Rule* - God will bless him - no matter what, by virtue of Abram believing enough to step out in faith... regardless of anything else Abram might do. God will bless Abram, and God will bless the people who bless

Abram. On top of that, if someone curses Abram, God will curse those people. He absolutely couldn't lose... all Abram had to do was simply trust God. And he does..

### Genesis 12:4–20 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Sometimes we can get to an age where we assume that anything great the Lord intends to do through us, He must have already done. Perhaps it's the next generation's turn. But more often than not, God waits till later in life to use his chosen servants.

- **Abraham** – 75 when God called him to leave Haran (Genesis 12:4); 100 when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5).
- **Sarah** – 65 when she followed Abraham into God's calling; 90 when Isaac was born (Genesis 17:17).
- **Noah** – About 500 when he began having children (Genesis 5:32); 600 at the Flood (Genesis 7:6).
- **Moses** – 80 when God called him at the burning bush (Exodus 7:7).
- **Aaron** – 83 when he stood with Moses before Pharaoh (Exodus 7:7).
- **Caleb** – Caleb was 40 when he spied the land, 85 when he received Hebron as his inheritance and declared, "I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me" (Joshua 14:10–11).
- **Simeon** – Described as an old man waiting for the Messiah when he held baby Jesus (Luke 2:25–32).
- **Anna the Prophetess** – A widow of 84 who never left the temple, serving God in fasting and prayer (Luke 2:36–38).
- **Paul the Apostle** – Not precisely dated, but by the end of Acts and his pastoral letters he was likely in his 60s, still writing, traveling, and leading churches.
- **John the Apostle** – The "elder" (2 John 1, 3 John 1); wrote Revelation in exile on Patmos, traditionally in his 80s–90s.

**Acts 13:36** tells us that when David fulfilled his purpose in his generation, he slept.

If you are living, that means you still have a purpose that God put you here to fulfill. Get to it! It's never too late to trust God, it's never too late to say like Caleb, give me this mountain.

<sup>5</sup> And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,

Notice, while in Haran, they found a measure of success - they acquired possessions and they acquired servants. So this is quite a caravan traveling through the Middle East. They come to Canaan land.

<sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

This is land that was settled by the descendants of the fourth son of Ham, Canaan. Now, why is that significant? Because Canaan was the son of Ham, whom Noah had cursed a few chapters back.

Remember who wrote Genesis? Moses. When did Moses write it? During the wilderness wanderings. What was he about to call the people to do? Moses is about to lead the descendants of Abram into Canaan to conquer the Canaanites and take possession of the land. So you will see these regular reminders through the text that this is the land that was inhabited by a people that had been cursed by Noah and Noah's God.

<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Earlier, the text said that the Lord **spoke** to Abram; this time, the Lord **appears** to him. This is what theologians call a theophany. God is Spirit, not matter - but at times, the unseen God visibly manifests Himself. That is what is happening here.

Occasionally, someone will say, "I wish the Lord would speak to me, or give me some spectacular sign". To which I would say, "How did you respond to His prompting?"

Notice that before God appeared to Abram, God spoke to Abram. If Abram responded poorly to the voice of God, do you think he would have seen the face of God?

Encounters with God are a stewardship - they are sacred. If you did not honor the last time He spoke, why do you seek another?

Later, the Angel of the Lord will physically visit Abram and reveal to him that Sarai is also to be a vital part of the Covenant, but at this point, that hasn't happened.

*The prompt of God's direction...*

## **2. The Problem of our Detours**

Even when you know you have encountered God, how many of you know you can still get off track? It happened to Abram.

<sup>8</sup> From there he moved to the hill country 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. <sup>9</sup> And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

Now, why would God let a famine hit a land where His chosen servant is dwelling? The text doesn't tell us. We know from a complete study of scripture that Abram's descendants will frequently have dealings with Egypt to the south, and this is only the first introduction.

But walking with God doesn't mean you are immune to Murphy's Law. You are still east of Eden, and you live on a world that is subject to the effects of the curse. That means - your HVAC will go out sometimes, your roof will leak, your tire will go flat.

No man was more favored than Abram, but famine hit him also.

The rain falls on the just and the unjust. Hurricanes don't dodge Christian houses.

Winston Churchill once said, as politicians do, "Never waste a good crisis."

Well, God doesn't waste this famine. He will cause all things to work together for good to them that love the Lord and are called according to His purpose... even famines.

The text doesn't indicate God's leading or God's displeasure about the decision to go to Egypt. Oftentimes in life, circumstances will occur that simply reduce your options. You are expected to use wisdom in those times.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Interestingly, Egyptian texts substantiate that this occurred. A famous painting in the tomb of Khnum-hotep III, shows the arrival of thirty-seven Asiatics, men, women, and children, in Egypt during the time of a great famine.<sup>1</sup> This may have been the caravan of Abram.

Abram was caught between the quintessential rock and a hard place. You see if they stayed in Canaan, they could die of famine. If they went to Egypt they faced a threat also...

<sup>11</sup> When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, <sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.

He comes up with a plan...

<sup>13</sup> Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."

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<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 380.

Perhaps the Pharaohs had a reputation for wife-stealing. It was also common in the ancient world for leaders to strike a peace treaty with a neighboring power by bringing a member of the other dynasty into the harem.

At this point, the only motive we are given for Abram telling Sarai to represent herself as his sister is that they would have a better chance of survival. When a similar circumstance happens again later, he will not be able to plead such ignorance. But for now, possibly, Abram was trying to neutralize a potentially dangerous situation.

To say that Sarai was Abram's half sister, so this was not a complete lie. Although the wording of the Hebrew text suggests that she may have been a half-sister by adoption. In the land of Haran, this was a common practice. The wife would be adopted by the husband's father after they are betrothed to be married, to ensure that she obtained legal rights to the family's possessions.<sup>2</sup>

We cannot overlook the fact that Sarai must have been absolutely gorgeous beyond compare - even at 65 (that for her was middle-aged, she died at 127). We have no record of anyone else in the whole of scripture, or to my knowledge outside of scripture, being concerned about his wife being so beautiful that he was in fear for his life because of her beauty.

Physical beauty is something that the scripture doesn't ignore.

**Places in Scripture where a woman's beauty is explicitly noted:**

- **Sarah (Sarai)** – Described as very beautiful in appearance (Genesis 12:11, 14; 20:2).
- **Rebekah** – Very attractive in form and appearance (Genesis 24:16).
- **Rachel** – Lovely in form and beautiful (Genesis 29:17).
- **Abigail** – Intelligent and beautiful (1 Samuel 25:3).
- **Bathsheba** – Very beautiful (2 Samuel 11:2).
- **Tamar (daughter of Absalom)** – A beautiful woman (2 Samuel 14:27).
- **Tamar (daughter of David, sister of Absalom)** – Described as beautiful (2 Samuel 13:1).
- **Abishag the Shunammite** – Very beautiful (1 Kings 1:3–4).
- **Job's daughters (Jemimah, Keziah, Keren-happuch)** – No women in the land were found as beautiful as them (Job 42:15).
- **Esther** – Lovely in form and features (Esther 2:7).
- **Vashti** – Beautiful to look at (Esther 1:11).
- **The Beloved (in Song of Solomon)** – Her beauty is celebrated poetically throughout the Song (Song of Solomon 1:8, 1:15, 4:1, etc.).

Solomon warns that charm is deceptive and beauty is vain, because it is fleeting... but be a woman who fears the Lord, she will be praised.

Peter warns us not to let your beauty be external only, but also the hidden person of

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<sup>2</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 381.

the heart.

Nevertheless, physical beauty is a blessing and should be amplified when possible.

The text does not indicate that Sarai objected to this suggestion that she represents herself as Abram's sister. AND, she was not the sort of woman who would not speak up for herself.

- She laughs out loud when the Angel of the Lord says she will be pregnant.
- She volunteers Hagar to produce a child for Abram.
- She speaks up when Hagar becomes pregnant with Abram's child.

So why did she not speak up here? We may only assume that she agreed that this was the best idea in a bad situation.

<sup>14</sup> When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

When something similar happens later in Genesis with Abimelech, the narrative indicates that the King is kept from being intimate with Sarai, but this time, we have no such indication. The relationship was likely consummated. Abraham's plan had completely backfired.

What was Abram thinking? We can't be certain - later, when Lot was taken captive, Abram went to war to deliver him. Why was he being so passive with his wife?

*The prompt of God's direction... The Problem of our Detours.*

### **3. The Promise of Redirection**

Let me see if I can help us understand how Abram was processing this scenario.. Remember, at this point, Sarai wasn't involved in God's covenant promise to make Abram a great nation. If God was going to fulfill this promise to give Abram offspring, Abram had to, at the very least, survive this situation. Perhaps this is a situation of Abram trying to help God out. He will do that from time to time, see also the situation with Hagar... but it always ends badly, as it does here.

Faith can be that way - like a muscle, it grows or atrophies. Later, he would put Isaac on the altar, because according to **Hebrews 11**, his faith had grown to a point that he believed if God told him to take Isaac's life, God could raise Isaac from the dead. But at this point, the walk of faith is new to Abram, so he attempts to prop up the Lord.

<sup>16</sup> And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

Remember - Abram operated under the platinum rule of the covenant. He was blessed, even in his foolishness. Pharaoh makes Abram a very rich man for Sarai's sake. Through all of this, Sarai was silent, Abram was silent, but God wasn't silent.

<sup>17</sup> But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

It was clear to Pharaoh who sent the suffering and why the suffering was sent. God was not pleased. Even if Abram wouldn't fight valiantly for his marriage, God would.

How many of you know, ***God cares more about your marriage than you do?***

This was a sin of ignorance on Pharaoh's part - but even sins of ignorance have consequences. Let me say that again - even sins of ignorance have consequences.

Pharaoh had unwittingly brought the judgment of God on his house. This is why you ought to strive to know the word of God and to know what you are doing.

Let this also be a warning against rushing into a marriage covenant... **Percy Sledge** sang a song that said, *"Take time to know her"*. That's good advice. If only Pharaoh had slowed down a bit.

The only solution for Pharaoh was total and complete repentance...

<sup>18</sup> So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

What a sad day, when the unbeliever rebukes the behavior of the believer. A pagan king exhibits greater moral sensitivity than the Patriarch of Israel. Here we are thousands of years removed, yet we are still discussing the bad decision of Abram.

That's the nature of sin; you will be fortunate if you live long enough to outlive its effects.

Yet, God is faithful, even when we are faithless...even amid his moral lapse of judgement... Abram is blessed.

### **CONCLUSION/INVITATION:**

I thank God for GPS, but I can't stand to hear it talk to me, telling me turn by turn. So I mute the voice and just watch the screen from time to time. But sometimes, I get off in my own world, maybe I get caught up in a book, or a song, or a conversation... next thing you know, I've gone far off the intended course... It's then I turn the voice back on... and it always says the same thing... ***recalculating***.

**LISTEN:** Maybe like Abram, you've gotten a bit off course. You don't know how you ended up so far off course, but here you are.... The good news is... God's GPS is remarkably good at recalculating. In fact, it doesn't matter how much you've missed the mark; it's never too late... just turn the voice back on and listen.