

Chapter 12

While the Abrahamic covenant does not take place until chapters 15 & 17 (different accounts of the same covenant), chapter 12 is the first time God makes amazing promises to the son of Terah -Abram. Abram's father and brother are dead, his wife is barren, but he has a good life in Haran. But, God sends Abram away from what he knows (when he's 75 years old!) and promises a personal relationship with Abram's family that will overflow into the other nations of the world. God promises 1. To make Abram a great nation, 2. To make Abram's name great (contrast this with the Tower of Babel story where the people selfishly wanted to make a name for themselves), 3. To bless the world through Abram's family. Through these few verses, Abram's family took on a nomadic lifestyle. When they travelled through Canaan (a place where the Canaanites already lived) God promised that this would be the land Abram's family would inherit. Abram worshipped the Lord, and then travelled by stages toward the Negeb desert.

Vs. 10-20, there is a famine, so Abram's family travels to Egypt (with the lush Nile delta, Egypt was frequently spared from famines that affected Canaan). Abram's family would reside in Egypt as resident aliens, meaning they'd have no rights and be vulnerable to abuse by Egyptian citizens. Sarai is about 65 years old at this point, but must have been a knock out, because Abram is convinced that when the Egyptians see her they would kill him in order to take his wife. This story shows that even though God made a promise to Abram, Abram himself was not perfect. Abram sacrificed Sarai's safety to save his own skin -turning her over to Pharaoh to become a concubine in exchange for preserving his life and his property -and even reaping additional property from this arrangement. But, God made clear to Pharaoh and then to Abram that this arrangement was an immoral abuse of power, afflicting Pharaoh's house with the first of many plagues. Unlike the Pharaoh of the Exodus story, this Pharaoh opens his heart to the message God's sending and sends Abram and Sarai packing.

Chapter 13

Abram's family travels back the way they came (up from Egypt and into the Negeb). Abram's financial blessings are growing and growing, as are his nephew Lot's. Abram sees that there are not enough resources in the land to support both of their families, so Abram generously allows his nephew to choose which part of the land he'd like to settle in to pasture his flocks. As the elder uncle, it ordinarily would have been Abram's choice, but he defers

to his nephew out of kindness. Lot selfishly picks the more appealing land (fertile like the garden of Eden, like the land of Egypt), but this fertile plain will become a desert because of the evil of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot gets into trouble again and again because he chose this portion of land for his flocks. Beginning in vs. 14, God reminds Abram of the promise and offers him a visual of what his blessing will look like. So far God has blessed Abram with much property, but still no heirs. So, God gives Abram a visual survey of the land that Abram's family will come to possess, and tells him that his offspring will be as numerous as the dust of the desert. Abram settled by the oaks of Mamre and built another altar for worship of this God of promises.

Chapter 14

War breaks out in the region where Abram and Lot have settled. Historically speaking, none of these kings are known, but this story was likely included to describe the unfavorable choice that Lot made when he chose the lush land -for he got caught up in this war and taken as a spoil of war. This is a coalition of kings of the East (likely Babylon) vs. Sodom and Gomorrah. As Sodom and Gomorrah rebelled against Mesopotamian rule after 13 years, they lost the battle, retreated, and then some of them fell into bitumen pits (tar pits), and the coalition of the East took their property and some of their citizens as spoils of war. When Abram hears about this, he launches a rescue operation with 318 of his warriors "born in his house" -slaves. Abram's forces caught up with them in Dan and the battle raged as far as Damascus, where they prevailed -recovering the property and the people that were taken, including Lot. As a result of this rescue mission, the King of Sodom and the King of Salem (Jerusalem) -Melchizedek- celebrate Abram's victory and name God's blessings for Abram. Melchizedek brought wine and bread for them to share, this is a Eucharistic image, one which would later be connected in the book of Hebrews to the person of Christ. Melchizedek was a king of Jerusalem and a priest of God Most High. He blessed Abram, and Abram tithed his property to the king, this is a kind of covenant between peoples. The king of Sodom tried to allow Abram to keep the property that he had recovered from the kings of the East, but Abram said that he would not take anything that rightly belonged to the king. The only thanks he took from the king of Sodom was the rightful rations his warriors had earned for their service. Again, this text reveals the amazing generosity of Abram. He's not out to make a buck off the backs of others, he's out to be a blessing to the world, just as God promised he would be. His identity is "blesser."