

They Speak Of Me

*²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,
he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
(Luke 24:27. ESV)*

*³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;
and these are they which testify of Me.
(John 5:39. NKJV)*

Faith and Division

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Genesis 12:10-13:18

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to Genesis 12:10. We're continuing on with the story of Abraham and we are going to attempt to read this text in two different ways. Most scholars would agree that Genesis 12:10-13:18 is meant to be seen as a single narrative unit. It is a story about Abraham learning to trust in God. The story can be imagined in the shape of a V. First there is the story of Abram's failing to trust in God. He goes down into Egypt, lying and scheming and meeting with disaster. God intervenes. Then he goes up into Canaan and he trusts in the Lord and is greatly prospered. The story in that sense teaches us some more about the walk of faith and we will deal with it first in that sense. Embedded within that however, there is the introduction of a very important Gospel theme; the theme of division unto blessing and curse. In this story we discover that somehow, in some way, the attitude of people toward Abraham determines whether they fall under the blessing or the curse of God. This theme is developed over the course of the Biblical canon until it lands ultimately on the person of Jesus Christ. It is a Gospel theme and we will deal with it in that light. First of all then, we will read the text, beginning at verse 10 of chapter 12. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Genesis 12:10-20 (ESV)

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance,

- ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.
¹³ 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.”
¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.
¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house.
¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.
¹⁷ But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.
¹⁸ 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?
¹⁹ 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.”
²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

Genesis 13:1-18 (ESV)

- ¹ So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.
² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.
³ And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,
⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD.
⁵ And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,
⁶ so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,
⁷ and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.
⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.
⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”
¹⁰ And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)
¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other.
¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.
¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.
¹⁴ The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,
¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.
¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.
¹⁷ Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”
¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Let’s first look at this text in terms of what we can observe about:

Learning To Trust In God:

When we compare it to the text that comes immediately before it I think we can observe that:

1. Tests of faith often quickly follow professions of faith

God often chooses to test faith shortly after it is professed. We tell that to people who get baptized. Do not assume that because you have made a profession and turned your back on the ways of the world and taken a stand for Jesus that all will be roses, in fact, very often, within a week or two, you will face the most severe testing of your life. So it was with Abraham. He had taken his stand, he had left his father's house, he had "walked the aisle" so to speak and now here, shortly thereafter he finds himself in a situation of danger and hardship and he does not know what to do. The promised land is a famine land. Things are not as good as he expected. That is very often the case for those who are young in the walk of faith.

Secondly we notice that:

2. "Unfaith" expresses itself in prayerlessness and compromise

It isn't until after God's dramatic intervention and rescue in verse 17 that anything is said of Abraham praying to God. We don't hear about that until 13:4 when it says, on the other side of his deliverance:

Genesis 13:4 (ESV)

And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD.

Better he had done that at the start, but again, very often when we are young in faith we meet trials and difficulties with frantic planning and deceitful scheming rather than with trust and prayer. That leads to trouble, as indeed it does here. It also usually leads to compromise.

Abraham decides that he will need to lie about his wife Sarai. It isn't a full lie, she is his half sister – they had the same father though different mothers. Abraham is concerned that he will suffer violence in Egypt because someone more powerful will wish to seize Sarai for himself.

Now at this point in the story people often object that Sarai is 60 years old and it stretches the imagination to think that her physical beauty could represent such a danger but that is to forget the age span of the patriarchs. Abraham lived 175 years, he lived when age spans were

shortening down to the 70-80 that we know now – the reasons for that are beyond the purposes of this message, but the point is that Abraham lived basically twice as long as we do and therefore Sarai’s 60’s were quite comparable to our 30’s and it isn’t hard to imagine at all that a woman in her late 30’s or early 40’s could be considered extremely attractive. That isn’t really the point. The point is that Abraham lied. Young faith, or “unfaith” is often characterized by prayerlessness and compromise. Abraham has to be broken of these tendencies if he is to walk with the Lord¹.

Thirdly we notice that:

3. Our faithlessness hurts others

This idea is introduced in the narrative and we’ll unpack it a lot more when we get to the Gospel implications of this text, but here it is enough to notice that contrary to our expectations, Abraham’s faithlessness doesn’t hurt himself, it hurts Pharaoh. Certainly in the Bible there are many stories and reminders that our sin does hurt us, but here the emphasis is on how our faithlessness negatively impacts other people. Abraham was called to be a blessing but when he failed in faith he became a curse. When we fail as covenant people, other people suffer and fall under the curse of God. That is a heavy lesson, but it cannot be avoided.

Lastly, in terms of learning to trust in God, we notice here that:

4. It is the presence and the promise of God that ultimately secure prosperity and blessing

We see that in the Genesis 13 side of this story. Abraham has learned the folly of compromise and striving and he now exhibits a steadfast trust in the Lord. When prosperity and increase force he and Lot to part company, Abraham offers Lot the first choice of the land. Now, by rights, Abraham as the older party, as the patriarch and as the bearer of the promises, had every right to claim first choice, but Abraham is reformed by his experiences in Egypt. He knows now that if he is with God, if he has the Lord’s promise and favour, then there is no need to strive, scramble and

¹ Commentators disagree as to whether it was wrong for Abraham to go to Egypt in the first place. Some argue that he should have prayed before going down into Egypt and locate the sin of prayerlessness at the start of the journey. Kidner’s argument runs along those lines. Others, like Calvin, locate the sin of prayerlessness just before the lie about Sarai. All agree that prayerlessness and compromise are in focus but I have been a little vague about where the sin of prayerlessness is committed as the text itself doesn’t make that explicit.

compromise. Being close to the means of wealth, is far less important than being close to the giver of wealth. Abraham understands that now as he matures in the walk of faith.

Matthew Henry comments on this verse saying:

Note, sensual choices are sinful choices, and seldom speed well. Those who in choosing relations, callings, dwellings, or settlements, are guided and governed by the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, or the pride of life, and consult not the interests of their souls and their religion, cannot expect God's presence with them, nor his blessing upon them, but are commonly disappointed even in that which they principally aimed at, and miss of that which they promised themselves satisfaction in.²

I recently met a man and his wife at Redeemer City Church who moved here from Toronto in large part, because they wanted to go to our church. My understanding is that he works from home and could live either in Toronto or anywhere within driving distance from it and he made his decision based first and foremost upon finding a spiritual home for his family. Now, I share that not suggest that there is something special or unique about our church, in fact, I would imagine that you could here similar stories at any good church within 90 minutes of Toronto, rather I share that story because that is how such decisions should be made. When a Christian person is making decisions about career or about where they should live, the presence of the Lord should be uppermost in their mind. Where can I be assured of hearing God's Word? Where can I be assured of the fellowship of true believers? Settle that question first, and let the other pieces fall into place and in the end, as with Abraham, you will be far better off then those who live in Sodom.

I mentioned off the top that we would need to deal with this story in two distinct ways. First of all, under the counsel of Hebrews 11 we look at it as a template for the walk of faith. But this story also contains within it the introduction of a significant Gospel theme. Jesus said that the entire Old Testament ultimately spoke about him and in this story a theme is introduced that grows and narrows until it comes to rest ultimately on the person and work of Jesus Christ. In this story we are introduced for the first time to:

The Object Of Division

² Matthew Henry, *Genesis To Deuteronomy*, Matthew Henry's Commentary (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1935), 92.

Go back in your Bibles to Genesis 12:2-3:

Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)

² 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.**

³ 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.”

Hebrew scholars suggest that the second half of verse 2 should actually be a command: “You will be a blessing”. Then verse 3 becomes the very strange description of how Abraham will be a blessing. It doesn’t sound like he will really do much of anything. He will just be there, under the promise and favour of God and God will work it such that people will see and know that God is at work there and they will either embrace that work or oppose it and in so doing bring blessing or curse upon themselves. Abraham is to be the object of division.

Genesis 12:10-20 is the illustration of that principle. Abram goes down to Egypt; Pharaoh dishonours Abram by taking Sarai into his home as though to marry her. Now here is what is interesting – it isn’t really Pharaoh’s fault is it? Pharaoh could seemingly cry foul, he could say that his wasn’t a fair test, he could say that he hadn’t been given enough information. All of that is true in a sense, but none of it matters. All that matters is the posture of Pharaoh towards Abraham; the object of division. Pharaoh is against Abraham and therefore Pharaoh is cursed. Only when he is restored to right relationship with Abraham is Pharaoh out from under the plague and curse of God. That powerful reality is the theological focus of this story.

This is a big development. I told you before that the Gospel in the Bible is like a snowball, it gathers content and clarity as it rolls along. Back in Genesis 3 we had the first giving of the Gospel – it had very little content, but it promised a coming Seed.

Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

A Seed would come and he would renew, restore and bless. That’s Good News! That’s the Gospel, as far as it goes, in Genesis 3. But here, now it goes further. In Genesis 12 we learn something new about the Gospel. A Seed has come into the world carried in the line of

Abraham. This is the Seed that will renew and restore and bless but in order to participate in the blessing and in the renewal that it promises you have to be in positive relationship with the Seed and with the object that carries it. That's new information. The blessing isn't willy nilly, it isn't universal, it requires relationship and response. Now, as this Gospel snowball rolls forward in the Bible it gathers further content and clarity. Let me show you some of that. Turn in your Bibles quickly to Psalm 2.

The line of Promise narrows in the Bible from the family of Abraham generally to the line of David specifically. We begin to notice that everyone who is opposed to David suffers and everyone who aligns with David is blessed. David casts that ministry of division forward in a prophesy about Messiah, the ultimate Object Of Division. Let me read to you:

Psalm 2:1-12 (ESV)

¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed....

⁶ "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

David foresees a coming Son in his line who will be the ultimate, universal force of Division, dividing all the world, rich and poor, great and small into categories of wrath and favour, blessing and curse, life and death. A person's attitude toward this Son will determine his standing before Almighty God. This Object of Division becomes a common prophetic theme. Fast forward now to Isaiah 28:16. There we read:

Isaiah 28:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone *for* the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed.

Here the Object of Division is described as a Stone; a Corner Stone; and whoever believes in this Stone will never be disturbed. The Apostle Paul understands this as referring to Jesus. He uses this quotation to explain why so many Gentiles have come to faith in Christ and so few Jews. He says:

Romans 9:30-33 (ESV)

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;

³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

³³ as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile is not the issue, Paul says. The issue is your standing before the Stone. Being a Jew won't help you, being a Gentile doesn't hurt you. Kiss the Son and you will be saved. Stand on the Stone and you will be not be moved. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him. Jesus is the Ultimate Object Of Division. He is the Son and he is the Stone and he divides all the world into blessing and curse. Jesus clearly understood this line of prophesy as fulfilled in himself which is why he went around saying things like:

Matthew 10:34 (ESV)

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

John 11:26 (ESV)

everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Matthew 21:42-44 (ESV)

“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

Jesus is the Stone that crushes and the Son that saves. He is the Object of Division and whoever believes in him will not be shaken.

Summary And Exhortations:

When you pull on this thread, first introduced in Genesis 12 and climaxing finally in the person and work of Jesus Christ, I think you are left with one fairly obvious implication:

- 1. Your relationship with Jesus (The Son and The Stone) will determine your eternal destiny**

Like Pharaoh, I don't think your excuses or even your reasonable complaints will alter in any way the final impact of ending your days in opposition to the Son and Stone of God. I'm sure many people have a story they mean to take refuge in. I didn't grow up in a Christian home, or I did grow up in a Christian home but my parents were hypocrites, or I went to a bad church, or I had a bad experience or I never really had all the information. None of those excuses appear to matter a great deal. What is your posture towards the Son? Do you kiss his feet? Do you acknowledge his Sovereignty and Glory? Or do you resist? Do you rebel? Do you negotiate? Do you hide?

What you do with Jesus will determine how you spend eternity. The Son is the Ultimate Object of Division. He is the Sword. You cannot avoid it. You have been given one human life of indeterminate length to fall on one side of this sword or the other. Even today, in the preaching of the Word God has held out this Sword to you. He has moved the Son through our midst. Pray for a heart that draws near. Pray for a knee that would bend. Pray for a mouth that would kiss. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.

Secondly and lastly, I leave you with this final, though less obvious observation and exhortation:

2. The Object Of Division identifies with his people

Last week we read Galatians 3:16 which states pretty emphatically:

Galatians 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

Its very clear that the focus of all these promises, the real Object of Division that causes some to be blessed and others to be cursed is Jesus, the singular, capital "S" seed. In an ultimate sense it was Jesus inside Abraham that cursed Pharaoh and it was Jesus inside David that blessed anyone who blessed David. Jesus is the Seed and Jesus is the issue, we are agreed on that and yet, Pharaoh was cursed for opposing the Abraham he could see not the Jesus he couldn't see. The Object Of Division was effectively identified with his people. We see the same thing in the New Testament.

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells a story depicting the final judgment. He says that on that day he will separate all people unto their eternal destinies based on their attitude towards him; but here is the strange thing, the proof of their attitude towards him is the evidence of their behaviour towards his people, 'the least of these my brethren'. Matthew 25:40 says:

Matthew 25:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Now, one of the most important questions in all the Bible therefore is this: Who are the brothers of Jesus? How you answer that could have eternal consequences according to Matthew 25.

Thankfully we have the answer in the inspired pages of the New Testament. In Mark 3 someone came and told Jesus that his biological mother and brothers were outside looking for him and he replied this way:

Mark 3:32-35 (ESV)

"Who are my mother and my brothers?"

³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!

³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

The brothers of Jesus are his disciples, be they Jew or Gentile and Jesus is saying in Matthew 25 that your attitude toward him, the Ultimate Object Of Division is inseparable from your attitude towards the people with whom he has identified. Seed and saints are not one and the same, but neither can they be separated. Love for one will manifest as love for the other. Indeed this is the point made by John in his epistles. According to John the sum of all religion is simply this:

1 John 3:23 (ESV)

²³ And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

Who are my mother and my brothers? The one who does God's will. What is God's will? What does he command? Believe in Jesus and love the saints! The people who believe in Jesus and love the saints do the will of God and are revealed as the brethren of Jesus. Believing in Jesus and loving the saints are not the same thing but neither can they ever be separated. The absence of one is the absence of both! That's why John says:

1 John 4:20 (ESV)

²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Let me bring this down to street level: You cannot love Jesus and hate the church. Kiss the Son and serve the saints; this is all our religion, Old Testament and New and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.