

Mapped Out

Genesis 12:11-13 Genesis 20

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I. The Provision vs. 1-3

- a. Go forth
 - i. Most commentators have regarded this divine imperative as a test of faith: Abram is to give up all he holds dearest for an unknown land promised by God.
 - ii. Abram cut the strongest family bond by leaving his father's domain, which provided his own household's socio-economic viability. He trusted the veracity of God's promised generosity and received more than he would have had he remained in Haran.
- b. I will
 - i. Show
 - 1. The commitment rests with the Lord to "show" the patriarch the land that awaits him. In relating the promises of vv. 2–3, God is the initiator and consummator. Abram is dependent on the Lord to achieve the promises; he only has the divine word to rely on. Abram is the passive recipient of the divine will. His status in the arrangement between the two parties is illustrated when the covenant is formally ratified (15:8–15). Abram is a witness to the covenant ceremony, not a participant (15:17);
 - ii. Make you a Great Nation
 - 1. Make - proscribed action
 - 2. Make Grammatically, the main verbs—"make," "bless," "make great," "be," "bless," "curse," "find blessing"—are all subordinate to the imperative "Go" (v 1). Most of them are imperfects or cohortatives prefixed by weak *waw* which indicates purpose or consequence. (The other grammatical forms used here have the same function). The divine intentionality could also be expressed by translating these verses "Go ... so that I may make you ... bless you ... etc."
 - 3. Nation
 - a. These verses are of fundamental importance for the theology of Genesis, for they serve to bind together the primeval history and the later patriarchal history and look beyond it to the subsequent history of the nation.
 - iii. Bless

1. Within these verses the promise of blessing is central: five times the verb or the noun derived from בָּרַךְ “bless” is used. The root בָּרַךְ occurs more frequently in Genesis than in any other part of the OT: 88 times in Genesis as against 310 times elsewhere. God’s blessing is manifested most obviously in human prosperity and well-being; long life, wealth, peace, good harvests, and children are the items that figure most frequently in lists of blessings such as 24:35–36; Lev 26:4–13; Deut 28:3–15. What modern secular man calls “luck” or “success” the OT calls “blessing,” for it insists that God alone is the source of all good fortune
 2. But the blessing so bountifully promised is preceded by a word of command, “Leave ...” (v. 1a). His answer to the command is not by word but by deed: “So Abram left” (v. 4a). Emboldened by his faith in the sure word of the Lord, the patriarch embarked on the divine scheme. Abram’s obedience is described in vv. 4–9 by the itinerary of his travels in Canaan.
- iv. your Name Great
 1. Behind the fourfold promise of nationhood, a great name, divine protection, and mediatorship of blessing, E. Ruprecht (29 [1979] 445–64) has plausibly detected echoes of royal ideology. What Abram is here promised was the hope of many an oriental monarch (cf. 2 Sam 7:9; Ps 72:17).
 - v. Bless Those who Bless You
 - vi. Curse those who Curse You
- c. You will
 - i. Be a blessing

II. The Journey vs. 4-9

- a. Went Forth
 - i. Took His Wife and Lot
 - ii. Possessions Accumulated
 1. The call of Abram is related in vv 1–3, while vv 4–9 tell of his obedience. More precisely, v 1 is answered in v 4, “Abram went as the LORD had told him.” The divine speech consists of a command “Go ... to the country ...” followed by a series of promises (vv 2–3)
- b. Set Out
 - i. Passed Through
- c. The Lord Appeared
 - i. Showed
 1. I will give you this Land
- d. Journeyed On 8-9

III. Abram's Plan vs. 10-13

a. Famine

i. Settle in Egypt

1. It is striking that Abram is said to have gone to "settle in" Egypt, to be an immigrant there. To live as an immigrant (גור) suggests the intention of long-term settlement, which is somewhat alien to Abram's wandering lifestyle. It also comes as quite a surprise to hear that Abram is ready to settle in Egypt so soon after he has been promised "this land"
2. "To live there for a while" translates the term *gûr*, meaning "sojourn," which usually describes a temporary residence.

b. I know

i. Sarai Wife

ii. Beautiful

1. Fearing that the woman's beauty might become a source of danger to himself as the husband, the man resorts to the subterfuge of passing himself off as the woman's brother.
2. Stranger still is Abram's supposition that Sarai, aged about 65 (cf. 12:4; 17:17), should be regarded as outstandingly attractive. The narrative insists that this is not merely the opinion of a neurotically jealous husband, for the Egyptians heartily concurred
3. Abram feared that Sarai's looks would prove irresistible to the Egyptians, and since he had no family in Egypt to protect his interests, they might simply kill him so that they could marry her. He therefore proposed that she should describe herself as his sister.

c. Will Kill me

i. Let You Live

1. Escaping the danger of famine in Canaan, Abram fears that in Egypt he will run another sort of risk. As an immigrant there he would lack the support and protection afforded by the wider family network.

d. Sister

i. I will live on YOUR account

1. It was the LORD who saved Sarai from the plight in which her husband's cleverness had landed her (v 17), and Abram's silence in the face of Pharaoh's remonstrations shows that the author did not approve of his conduct. This is confirmed by comparing this tale with the similar ones in Gen 20 and 26.
2. When reading the incident together with Abram's later confession to Abimelech (20:11-13), we discover the full rationale and the premeditated plan of the deception. Abram fears two things: (1) Sarai's beauty will draw the attention of powerful men (12:11-12),

and (2) since these men do not abide by the ethic of Abram's God, they will murder him and take her for a wife (20:11). By a ruse Sarai presented herself as his sister (12:13) and, accordingly, acknowledged Abram as "my brother" (20:13). The genius of the ruse was its half-truth. Abram could claim the truth—"she really is my sister" (20:12)—since they had the same father, and at the same time he avoids reference to her as wife (12:12). But the folly of Abram's plan was its consequences. Although he would save his life, he jeopardized his future by placing at risk Sarai, the mother of the promised son. Moreover, others suffered because of the deception, bringing guilt on themselves unknowingly (12:17–18; 20:9; 26:10).