Chapter 3: The Captivity of Abram

Genesis 12:10–20

When Abram responds to Yahweh's call in faith and obedience (Gen. 12:1–9), he sets an example for us. All the days of our lives, we should seek to follow in Abram's footsteps of faith (Rom. 4:12), taking God at his word and obeying him even when there is no way (humanly speaking) that God's promises could possibly come to fruition. Of course, we often fail at reaching this high bar that Abram sets. It may surprise us, then, to discover that Abram himself does not always follow his own, godly example from the first part of his story. Immediately after such a faithful display of obedience, Abram takes the preservation of both of Yahweh's promises into his own hands in Genesis 12:10–20. When the Promised Land fails to produce food, Abram leaves the land to sojourn in Egypt. Then, when Abram worries about his life as the recipient of Yahweh's promises, he conspires with Sarai to lie about their marriage. While Abram ends up eating well and preserving his own life, these foolish plans bring great guilt, shame, and dishonor on the household of God.

What should we make of the disobedience and faithlessness of our forefather, Abram? On the one hand, we cannot use this story to justify or excuse our own sin. On the other hand, we also cannot self-righteously condemn Abram in this matter, since we fail in all the same ways. Almost immediately into the story of Yahweh's work to redeem the world through raising up this one man, we find that Abram is not worthy to the glorious task to which Yahweh has called him. Nevertheless, Yahweh shows the same grace toward Abram that he continues to show toward us. This story does not whitewash Abram's sin, but neither do we find Yahweh nullifying his promises in the midst of Abram's disobedience. While Yahweh has not formally instituted his covenant (cf. Gen. 15), he acts with an eye toward that coming covenant by addressing Abram's faithlessness with scandalous grace. In this story, we see another side of what it means to follow in the footsteps of Abram's faith. Yahweh does not love Abram because of *Abram's* perfect obedience. Instead, we find the source for Yahweh's faithfulness to Abram somewhere else: *God's covenant corrects our conspiracies.*

The Conspiracy of Abram (Gen. 12:10–13)

In Genesis 11:31–12:9, we saw the fullness of Abram's faith and obedience to leave his homeland to go to the land Yahweh would show to him. After arriving, Abram goes from site to site, pitching his tents and building his altars as he proclaimed the name of Yahweh to the watching, wicked, Canaanite world. Yahweh promised to give "this land" to Abram's offspring (Gen. 12:7). We have every reason to expect that Abram will sojourn in the land of Canaan until Yahweh brings about the first fulfillment of his promises by giving Abram and Sarai a son of promise. It is shocking, then, to find Abram departing from the promised land to go to Egypt: "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" (Gen. 12:10). What are we to make of this?

Leaving the Promised Land

First, we should evaluate the famine in the land in the context of all the other hardships and trials that Abram has endured since leaving Ur of the Chaldeans. After burying his father in Haran (Gen. 11:32; cf. Acts 7:4), Abram arrives in a land already inhabited by pagan, violent Canaanites (Gen. 12:6). Now, Abram discovers that even the land of Canaan itself presents severe challenges to threaten his life. Gordon Wenham writes that Canaan's "fluctuating rainfall made it susceptible to food shortages until the advent of modern methods of irrigation, and Egypt was the standard refuge in this situation, as the Nile provided a much more certain food supply (cf. Deut 11:10)."[1] Does this famine perhaps signal that Yahweh's gift of this land is not as good as the promise first sounded? Has God deceived Abram?[2] Is this a bait-and-switch? Will Abram's offspring inherit a lemon?

Second, we do not know what prompted Abram to depart from the Promised Land to go into the land of Canaan. We should remember, after all, that "Abram had to feel his way forward (8, 9) without a special revelation at every step, guided like us largely by circumstances (cf. Ruth 1:1; Matt. 12:14, 15)."[3] Furthermore, the text is silent in terms of judging Abram's the legitimacy of going to Egypt.[4] It is possible, then, that the circumstances of the famine were providential promptings to lead Abram into Egypt to seek food. The word for *sojourn* conveys the idea of temporarily dwelling Egypt until the famine passed.[5] So, it seems that Abram only intends to dwell in Egypt for as long as necessary until the end of the famine. Furthermore, famines prompt the descendants of Abram to migrate several times to find food: Isaac remains in Canaan, but goes to Gerar to escape a famine (Gen. 26:1); Jacob and his eleven sons join Joseph in Egypt during a famine (Gen. 47:4); Ruth the Moabitess only meets her Israelite family when they leave Bethlehem to sojourn in Moab because of a famine (Ruth 1:1); Elisha declares an explicit instruction from Yahweh to send the Shunammite woman into the land of the Philistines for seven years during a famine (2 Kgs. 8:1). At the very least, we should acknowledge that Abram's departure from the land of Canaan is not a light decision that he make on a whim, but a decision he feels forced to make on the basis of real, legitimate needs. John Calvin writes, "he is not to be torn away by any violence, except for a short time, from the place where he was commanded to dwell. In this respect he is very unlike many, who are hurried away, by every slight occasion, to desert their proper calling."[6]

Nevertheless, there are indications in the text to suggest that Abram has made a foolish, disobedient decision. Most importantly, the word of Yahweh told Abram to go to the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1), and we have no indication that Yahweh has given him different instructions. Additionally, the rest of this narrative makes clear that Abram acts on the basis of fear rather than faith in at least four ways: (1) he schemes with Sarai to lie about their marriage (Gen. 12:13); (2) he does not fight for his wife's purity when the scheme backfires, and Sarai is taken into Pharaoh's house (Gen. 12:15); (3) rather than fighting, he passively receives great wealth as payment for prostituting his wife (Gen. 12:16); and (4) he fails to reply to Pharaoh's "stinging rebuke."[7] Additionally, the author of Genesis writes this story as Abram's *fall*, borrowing language and themes from the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3.[8] Finally, the great wealth that Abram receives from the Egyptians (Gen. 12:16) will split up the holy family, dividing Lot from Abram (Gen. 13) and bringing strife into the marriage of Abram and Sarai (Gen. 16). Therefore, the long-term consequences of this event in Egypt will be heartache and misery. While the text may not give us any explicit condemnations of Abram for the mere act of going into Egypt, it is also true, as Allen Ross writes, that "There are no

indications in the narrative…that faith was operative."[9]

The Type

Still, we should also recognize that the author of Genesis is telling us *more* than only this story in this passage. In fact, the author deliberately writes this narrative to serve as a *type* (a pattern) that will be re-enacted by an *antitype* (a greater fulfillment of the first pattern) later on in the history of Abram's offspring. Typology is something like prophecy, in that it tells us about something to come in the future. Typology, however, is less explicit than prophecy. Rather than directly *saying* that something is going to happen, typology tells a story in a such a way that it gives us a thumbnail sketch of what will happen in the future. Or, we might say that the *type* is a shadow whose substance we cannot discern until we later discover the greater *antitype* that the type foreshadowed (cf. Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). The reasons for this use of typology throughout the Scriptures are complex. For now, it will suffice to say that typology invites comparisons and contrasts between types and antitypes that help us to learn more about each text without *saying* more in every episode. Furthermore, typology helps us recognize that the same God works faithfully in similar ways throughout all of history to protect and preserve his people.[10]

In Genesis 12:10–20, a famine prompts the family of Abram to go down to Egypt to be taken into captivity in the house of Pharaoh until Yahweh sends plagues to prompt Pharaoh to let his people go. This story is true in itself, but it is also a type that foreshadows a much greater story: the exodus. The antitype fulfillment of this story will begin again at the end of the book of Genesis, where another famine will prompt the family of Abram (Jacob and his sons) to go down to Egypt (Gen. 47:4). There, Abram's family will eventually be taken into captivity in the house of Pharaoh (Ex. 1:8–14) until Yahweh sends plagues to prompt Pharaoh to let his people go (Ex. 7–12). Certainly, the narrator is telling us a bit of the history of Abram. More than that, the narrator is also telling us about how Yahweh works *throughout* the generations of his people to save them out of their troubles.

This may also help explain why the narrator does not give an explicit condemnation of Abram's faithless sojourn in Egypt. In the antitype fulfillment, Yahweh explicitly authorizes Jacob to leave the Promised Land by taking his sons down into Egypt (Gen. 46:3–4). In this earlier story (the type), we find no such permission for Abram. As we compare the type and the antitype, the judgment is clear enough without needing to be made explicit: Abram and his family must *not* depart from the Promised Land apart from the direct word of Yahweh. While Jacob and his sons receive such direction, Abram does not.

The Conspiracy

The text offers much greater clarity to condemn Abram's sin in his faithless, dishonest conspiracy with Sarai:

> [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." (Gen. 12:11–13)

Sarai is ten years younger than Abram (cf. Gen. 17:17), so if Abram is seventy-five as they enter Egypt (cf. Gen. 12:4), then Sarai is now sixty-five years old. Sarai may even be older than sixty-five if additional time has elapsed between Genesis 12:4 and Genesis 12:10. Is it unreasonable to believe that a sixty-five year old's beauty would incite violence? There are two plausible explanations to understand Abram's concern. First, lifespans were much longer in those days, so that Abram's father died at the age of 205 (Gen. 11:32), and Sarai herself will live to the age of 127 (Gen. 23:1). It is possible, then, that Sarai is so beautiful because she has the equivalent physical features of a thirty-something woman in our day. A second option that John Walton articulates may be closer to the mark:

> Our culture has persuaded us that beauty is closely connected with sensuality, nubility, youth, and certain facial and bodily features. We need not think that every culture is so superficial in their assessments of beauty as ours is. The phrase used here is also used to describe a fine specimen of cow (Gen. 41:2). We need not therefore assume that Sarai has miraculously retained the stunning beauty of youth. Her dignity, her bearing, her countenance, her outfitting may all contribute to the impression that she is a striking woman.[11]

Ultimately, we do not know what made Sarai such a beautiful woman at an advanced age. Nevertheless, the reactions of the Egyptians toward Sarai confirm Abram's judgment (Gen. 12:14–15).

In view of Sarai's beauty, Abram fears that the Egyptians may kill him in order to take Sarai as a wife. So, before they enter into Egypt, Abram takes Sarai aside and gives her some advice to help them navigate the situation into which they are entering. At one level, this is prudent planning, and Joseph will do the same thing by advising his brothers what to "say" to Pharaoh when they get to Egypt (Gen. 46:31–34).[12] It is not so much *that* Abram makes a plan with Sarai as it is *what* he plans for them to say: Abram instructs Sarai to lie about their marriage. While it is difficult to know what the Egyptians might have done if Abram had simply told them the truth, we do know that a future Pharaoh will decree *specifically* that male Hebrew infants should be drowned while the girls are allowed to live (Ex. 1:16).[13] To avoid this danger, and so that it may "go well" with him because of Sarai, Abram advises Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she is merely Abram's sister. As we learn the next time Abram tries pulling this trick (!), this is partially true: "Besides, she is my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife" (Gen. 20:12). Sarai is either Abram's biological half-sister or, possibly, his adopted sister.[14]

Why would Abram do something so foolish? What could compel God's chosen servant to prostitute his wife in order to preserve his life? In part, Abram may believe that he must do so in order to preserve the promises that God has made to him, so that his overarching desires are right, even if his methods are thoroughly wrong.[15] Victor Hamilton explains this line of thinking well:

> It is impossible for God to make of Abram a great nation if Abram is dead before he fathers one child. How can God give Canaan to Abram's seed if he has no seed? To prevent such a possibility, Abram must do all he can to stay alive. He is giving Yahweh a little assistance in a

> potentially embarrassing situation! Here is the first threat to the realization of God's promises: a dead Abram, dead either through starvation or through execution.[16]

Rather than believing that Yahweh can provide for him in the Promised Land, Abram goes to Egypt. Then, rather than believing that Yahweh can preserve his own life in order to prepare the way for his offspring, Abram lies about his relationship to Sarai. After setting an example of the victorious life of faith in his departure from Ur and Haran, and then his conquest through the land of Canaan (Gen. 11:31–12:9), Abram now takes everything into his own hands, conspiring according to his own wisdom rather than trusting in the promises of Yahweh.

Almost certainly, Abram has no actual desire to give his wife away as a prostitute. Ancient peoples opposed adultery much more strictly than we do today, so Abram probably hopes "that by claiming to be Sarai's brother he could fend off suitors by promising of marriage without actually giving her away."[17] In theory, this seems like a good plan that will keep Abram safe while also keeping Egyptians at arms-length; nevertheless, the scheme will almost immediately go off course into even greater danger.

The Captivity of Abram (Gen. 12:14–16)

Just as Abram imagined, "When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful" (Gen. 12:14). Abram's paranoia is vindicated. As readers, we are (for a moment) relieved that Abram already made preparations to avoid disaster in Egypt. But before we can relax, we immediately encounter an unforeseen complication: "And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house" (Gen. 12:15). Just as Joseph (Pharaoh's chief official; Gen. 41:40–43) will go in to tell Pharaoh about the arrival of his father and his brothers (Gen. 47:1), so Pharaoh's princes come before Pharaoh to alert him about the arrival of a very beautiful woman, whom they praise in Pharaoh's presence.[18] While Abram keeps Sarai from common Egyptians, he cannot resist the advances of Pharaoh, who takes Sarai into his house.

Pharaoh's Wicked Wedding

We do not know whether Pharaoh actually committed physical adultery with Sarai. The word translated as "was taken" (Gen. 12:15) "denotes the formal taking of a woman as a wife and is distinguished from the act of marital intercourse (cf. 20:2–4; 34:2; 38:2; Deut 22:13–14). However, it can be used more loosely to describe all aspects of marriage (25:1; 34:9, 16; Lev 21:7, 13; Deut 20:7)."[19] So, we do not know whether Pharaoh simply acquired Sarai into his harem for his future use (cf. Esth. 2:12), or whether he immediately consummated his new marriage. The narrative leaves that matter in doubt while still underscoring its wickedness. In part, this unlawful marriage should perhaps remind us of the wickedness of the sons of God who sinfully took the daughters of men in marriage because of their beauty (Gen. 6:1–4).[20] Additionally, it is here that we see some of the language connected to the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3: "These two first scenes have several terms and ideas in common with Gen 2–3. Both Sarai and the trees of the garden are described as 'beautiful'/'pleasant' in appearance (2:9; 12:11). Subsequently there is a seeing and a taking of the desirable person or fruit (3:6–7; 12:15–16)."[21] This marriage is wicked, whether or not Pharaoh

consummates it, and even though Pharaoh acts in ignorance.[22]

Abram's Wicked Wealth

In an ironic twist, Abram's plan actually goes exactly according to plan. He and Sarai conspired to lie "*that it may go well* with me because of you, and that my life may be spared *for your sake*" (Gen. 12:13), and this is precisely what happens. So, the narrator uses the same phrases "go well" and "for your/her sake" to describe Abram's ill-gotten gain: "*And for her sake* he *dealt well* with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels" (Gen. 12:16). In one sense, Abram gets exactly what he wanted, and even far more wealth than he conspired to gain. Moreover, when Abram lies *again* about his marriage to Sarai (Gen. 20:14–16), and when Isaac follows in his father's footsteps (Gen. 26:12–14), the patriarchs gain additional wicked wealth in exchange for the purity of their wives.[23] While this enrichment is the shame of the patriarchs, it also foreshadows the good enrichment that Jacob and his sons will experience when they go back to Egypt. So, just as Abram gains much livestock here, the future Pharaoh will also put all of his own livestock under the supervision of Israel's family (Gen. 47:6), and the holy family will gain many of their own possessions in the land of Egypt (Gen. 47:27).[24]

Still, two factors make this passage even worse than it might seem on the surface. First, Abram seemingly does nothing to stop Pharaoh's taking his wife. He passively accepts the wealth that he receives and does nothing to rescue his wife. This passivity looks all the worse when we compare Abram's response here during the captivity of his wife with his response to the captivity of Lot in Genesis 14: "In the latter case he was anything but passive. He immediately mustered all the men at his disposal and pursued the armies that had taken Lot."[25] Perhaps Abram learns from this experience so that he will respond better in Genesis 14.

Second, this wealth that Abram gains will have long-term, negative consequences.[26] The combined wealth of Lot and Abram prove more than the land can handle (Gen. 13:5–6), causing quarreling and strife between each man's respective herdsmen (Gen. 13:7). Eventually, Abram and Lot must separate, bringing the spiritually weak Lot closer to the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13:8–13). Later on, after Abram and Sarai have waited ten years in the Promised Land without receiving their son of promise, they take matters into their own hands to produce an heir. Sarai gives her *Egyptian maidservant* (Gen. 16:1; cf. Gen. 12:16) to Abram as a surrogate mother. Almost certainly, this Egyptian maidservant who brings such great division in Abram's marriage came as a gift from Pharaoh for dividing Abram from his wife!

The Correction of Abram (Gen. 12:17–20)

Through all of this, two critical figures have been silent: Sarai (despite her being at the center of the plot) and Yahweh.[27] At this point, Yahweh intervenes to protect the silent, suffering Sarai: "But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife" (Gen. 12:17). More literally, we might translate this as "But YHWH *plagued* Pharaoh with *great plagues* and his house." Most obviously, these plagues foreshadow the plagues that Yahweh will later pour out on Egypt to free his people from their captivity (Ex. 7–12).[28] Here, the text does not specify the exact nature of the plagues. Sometimes, though, this word for *plague* refers specifically to skin diseases (cf. Lev. 13–14; 2 Kgs. 15:5), which may link this plague with the plague of boils (Ex. 9:9).[29]

The Guilt of Abram

Still, there are major differences with these plagues on Abram's behalf and the plagues that Yahweh sends during the days of Moses. While the people of Israel under Moses are suffering innocently, we cannot say the same thing about Abram. In Abram's case, he is the truly guilty party. After disobediently leaving the land of Canaan, he lies about his marriage and then does nothing to keep his wife from being taken into the house of Pharaoh. The intervention of Yahweh has nothing to do with Abram and everything to do with Yahweh's mercy and faithfulness to keep his promises to Abram.[30]

The guilt of Abram becomes even more clear when Pharaoh calls Abram to rebuke him:

> [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. (Gen. 12:18–20)

Here is where we see the next set of similarities with the story of the fall of Adam and Eve. After they sinned by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Yahweh God similarly "called" to summon them into his presence (Gen. 3:9). Then, after Adam revealed that he ate from the forbidden tree, Yahweh turned to Eve and asked her virtually the same question that Pharaoh asks Abram here: "What is this you have done [to me]?" (Gen. 3:13).[31]

The Exodus

The fact that Pharaoh takes the role of God as the righteous judge of Abram is striking. Even if Pharaoh is not justified for taking Sarai as his wife, the text certainly portrays Pharaoh in a sympathetic light. Additionally, John Calvin notes in a sermon on this passage that the quick repentance of this Pharaoh after one round of plagues stands in stark contrast with the Pharaoh of Moses's day, who would not release the people of Israel until enduring *ten* plagues:

> We can now make a comparison between the Pharaoh whom Moses is talking about and the one who succeeded him a long time afterwards, about four hundred and thirty years. It is the one who, after receiving correction from God, humbles himself, calls Abraham immediately, and returns his wife to him. So that is the fruit of the chastisement he received after he reacts so quickly that he does not expect Abraham to come plead his case, but anticipates it. He does not delay until the next day. He does not use pretence in an effort to deceive God. He does not wait to see whether the plagues will continue or increase, for it is enough for him to feel but once that God is unhappy with him and is displeased with his behaviour. There, then, we have Pharaoh, the first to yield under God's hand.[32]

Not only does this Pharaoh shame Abram, but he also shames the Pharaoh who reigns during the days of Moses.

In the future story, the new Pharaoh "calls" Moses and Aaron (Ex. 12:31; cf. Gen. 12:18) to "take"

their people and "go" out from the land (Ex. 12:32; cf. Gen. 12:19), "sending them away" (Ex. 12:33; cf. Gen. 12:20).[33] This narrative clearly foreshadowed the exodus story as a type, even down to the fact that the word here for "sent away" (Gen. 12:20) is "the verb used most often to describe Israel's exodus from Egypt (Exod 3–11)."[34] This first exodus, however, is not a victory for God's people, but a humiliating defeat. Abram and Sarai depart Egypt with great wealth, but with great shame from what they have done.

Typology and Repetition

Now that we have studied the passage, let's return to that theme of typology in this narrative. The "sister-wife" narrative will be repeated two more times (Gen. 20; 26:6–16), but the major typological foreshadowing points toward the exodus story. Why, then, does the author of Genesis cast this story of Abram's sojourn in Egypt in light of the sojourn in Egypt that Abram's offspring will endure? John Sailhamer writes this:

> …the similarities are intentional and part of the larger scheme of parallels found throughout the Pentateuch. For example, within the Joseph narratives sets of parallel dreams with marked similarities are recounted. Though different in their details, each set of dreams is about the same thing (37:5–7, 9; 40:5–19; 41:17–21, 22–24). In his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph voices the meaning lying behind not only the repetition of the dreams but also, apparently, to all the repetitions and parallels within the Pentateuch: "The reason the dream was repeated in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon" (41:32). The reason for repetitions and recursions of similar narratives throughout the Pentateuch is to show that the matter has been firmly decided by God and that God will act quickly to bring about his promise.[35]

So, the function of these repetitions is to emphasize the seriousness and surety of what Yahweh is doing on behalf of his people. Although Yahweh's plan does not move as quickly as we might wish, he shapes many events along the way in such a manner as to communicate to us that he has not been sidetracked, but is still accomplishing his mission.

In this story, the repetition of the sister-wife narrative stands as an encouragement to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob not to doubt God's promises of land and of offspring. Abram and Isaac fall into temptation again by lying about their wives, but after this the patriarchs at least do not leave the land without specific authorization from Yahweh. Additionally, the foreshadowing of the exodus stands as a benchmark to judge the future Pharaoh's repentance as well as a warning to the nations not to harm God's chosen people. Yahweh will protect his people, even when his people conspire to deceive the nations!

For us, these typological events unfold into an even greater antitype. That is, by foreshadowing the exodus, these events also foreshadow the *ultimate* exodus (cf. Luke 9:31) of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, God's people go free from their bondage and captivity through plagues that God pours out; however, God pours out his plagues not on the *enemies* of God, but on his only Son. It is *Jesus* who bears the wrath of God for the sins of his people so that his sinful people may go free. In some ways, then, we may see an even closer connection between the type of Abram's sojourn in Egypt in the antitype of Jesus than we do in the antitype of the Exodus story. In Exodus, where God's people

suffered innocently. In both Abram's story and in Jesus' story, on the other hand, God's people are the sinners who *cause* the plagues to be poured out. We, like Abram, have conspired and deceived our way into great loss and devastation, and we need God to pour out his plagues on his only begotten Son so that we might go free. God acts not on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of his covenant love and promises to us. Even when the cost is as great as the blood of the King of Glory, God's covenant corrects our conspiracies.

God is never sidetracked from his main mission. From before the foundations of the earth were laid, God's definite plan and foreknowledge had determined to send the Son to be crucified and killed at the hands of lawless men (cf. Acts 2:23). The repetition of types in Genesis and through the rest of the Scriptures that lead up to, and find their fulfillment in, Christ all serve to underscore the same message: Christ's redemption of his people has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. Let us cling to these promises and these types as we await our final liberation on the day that we will "obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21) when Christ returns. God will unfailingly bring all his promises to fulfillment soon!

Discussion Questions

1. Under what kind of circumstances have you found it most difficult to believe God's covenantal promises? What are the pressure points where pain causes you to take matters into your own hands most quickly? Why do you think God tests our faith in these areas? Where do you need to repent from your conspiracies by believing God's promises again?

2. What do you make of the heavy use of typology in this passage, so that the basic pattern of this story will be played out again in the story of the Exodus? Why do you think God uses repetition with patterns, shadows, and types in his word? How does this use of typology help us understand the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament?

3. Why does God allow Abram to gain so much wealth through this conspiracy? Does wealth necessarily reflect God's approval with our actions? Do you ever wonder why sinful people become wealthy when faithful people struggle with such hardship? How does God's word help us to nuance our view of what God's favor looks like?

4. Why does God bail Abram out of this situation? Does Abram come through this experience consequence-free? In how many ways does God's covenant *correct* Abram's conspiracies? What is the cost of this correction for Abram? For Pharaoh? For God? What do we learn about God's covenant promises and his grace for our own lives from this story?

Notes

1. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 287.
2. Calvin, *Genesis*, 357. Available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xviii.i.html>
3. Kidner, *Genesis*, 127.

4. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 379.

5. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 275.

6. Calvin, *Genesis*, 358. Available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xviii.i.html>

7. "Yet all the indications are that Abram did not stop to enquire, but went on his own initiative, taking everything into account but God. His craven and tortuous calculations are doubly revealing, both of the natural character of this spiritual giant (cf. Jas 5:17a) and of the sudden transition that can be made from the plane of faith to that of fear. Entangled in this deception, he found himself unable to refuse his questionable earnings (16), if indeed he wished, to, and unable to answer Pharaoh's stinging rebuke. Yet if this experience lay behind his fine reply to the king of Sodom in 14:22f. there was something salvaged from it." (Kidner, *Genesis*, 127.)

8. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 289, 291.

9. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 275.

10. For extended thoughts, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 291–92.

11. Walton, *Genesis*, 397.

12. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 142.

13. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 291.

14. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 381.

15. Calvin, *Genesis*, 358–60. Available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xviii.i.html>

16. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 383.

17. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 288.

18. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 142.

19. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 289.

20. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 272.

21. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 289.

22. "It is true that Pharaoh acted in ignorance, but he is nonetheless culpable. The sin of ignorance takes two forms in the OT. Such a sin may be committed through negligence (the sinner knows that what he did is wrong, but he did not do it on purpose) or through ignorance (the sinners does not know that what he did was wrong). Clearly, Pharaoh's sin was the latter type. And yet the OT does not exonerate the sinner on the basis of either negligence or ignorance." (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 384.)

23. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 289.

24. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 142.

25. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 383.

26. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 278.

27. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 384.

28. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 142.

29. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 290.

30. Calvin, *Genesis*, 363–64. Available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xviii.i.html>

31. For the connections in this paragraph, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 290.

32. Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapter 11:5–20:7*, 157.

33. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 142.

34. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 290.

35. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 143.