
GENESIS 12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Get out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you."

God calls Abram to leave Haran and go into Canaan, Gen 12:1; promises to bless him, and through him all the families of the earth, Gen 12:2, Gen 12:3. Abram, Sarai, Lot, and all their household, depart from Canaan, Gen 12:4, Gen 12:5; pass through Sichem, Gen 12:6. God appears to him, and renews the promise, Gen 12:7. His journey described, Gen 12:8, Gen 12:9. On account of a famine in the land he is obliged to go into Egypt, Gen 12:10. Fearing lest, on account of the beauty of his wife, the Egyptians should kill him, he desires her not to acknowledge that she is his wife, but only his sister, Gen 12:11-13. Sarai, because of her beauty, is taken into the palace of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who is very liberal to Abram on her account, Gen 12:14-16. God afflicts Pharaoh and his household with grievous plagues on account of Sarai, Gen 12:17. Pharaoh, on finding that Sarai was Abram's wife, restores her honourably, and dismisses the patriarch with his family and their property, Gen 12:18-20.

Verse 1

Get thee out of thy country - There is great dissension between commentators concerning the call of Abram; some supposing he had two distinct calls, others that he had but one. At the conclusion of the preceding chapter, Gen 11:31, we find Terah and all his family leaving Ur of the Chaldees, in order to go to Canaan. This was, no doubt, in consequence of some Divine admonition. While resting at Haran, on their road to Canaan, Terah died, Gen 11:32; and then God repeats his call to Abram, and orders him to proceed to Canaan, Gen 12:1.

Dr. Hales, in his Chronology, contends for two calls: "The first," says he, "is omitted in the Old Testament, but is particularly recorded in the New, Act 7:2-4 : The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was (at Ur of the Chaldees) in Mesopotamia, Before He Dwelt In Canaan; and said unto him, Depart from thy land, and from thy kindred, and come into the land (γην, a land) which I will show thee. Hence it is evident that God had called Abram before he came to Haran or Charran." The Second Call is recorded only in this chapter: "The Lord said (not Had said) unto Abram, Depart from thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto The Land, ארץ הארץ HA-arets, (Septuagint, Την γην), which I will show thee." "The difference of the two calls," says Dr. Hales, "more carefully translated from the originals, is obvious: in the former the land is indefinite, which was designed only for a temporary residence; in the latter it is definite, intimating his abode. A third condition is also annexed to the latter, that Abram shall now separate himself from his father's house, or leave his brother Nahor's family behind at Charran. This call Abram obeyed, still not knowing whither he was going, but trusting implicitly to the Divine guidance."

Thy kindred - Nahor and the different branches of the family of Terah, Abram and Lot excepted. That Nahor went with Terah and Abram as far as Padan-Aram, in Mesopotamia, and settled there, so that it was afterwards called Nahor's city, is sufficiently evident from the ensuing history, see Gen 25:20; Gen 24:10, Gen 24:15; and that the same land was Haran, see Gen 28:2, Gen 28:10, and there were Abram's kindred and country here spoken of, Gen 24:4.

Thy father's house - Terah being now dead, it is very probable that the family were determined to go no farther, but to settle at Charran; and as Abram might have felt inclined to stop with them in this place, hence the ground and necessity of the second call recorded here, and which is introduced

in a very remarkable manner; לך לך lech lecha, Go For Thyself. If none of the family will accompany thee, yet go for thyself unto That Land which I will show thee. God does not tell him what land it is, that he may still cause him to walk by faith and not by sight. This seems to be particularly alluded to by Isaiah, Isa 41:2 : Who raised up the righteous man (Abram) from the east, and called him to his foot; that is, to follow implicitly the Divine direction. The apostle assures us that in all this Abram had spiritual views; he looked for a better country, and considered the land of promise only as typical of the heavenly inheritance.

GENESIS 12:2 I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing.

Verse 2

I will make of thee a great nation - i.e., The Jewish people; and make thy name great, alluding to the change of his name from Abram, a high father, to Abraham, the father of a multitude.

GENESIS 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you."

Verse 3

In thee - In thy posterity, in the Messiah, who shall spring from thee, shall all families of the earth be blessed; for as he shall take on him human nature from the posterity of Abraham, he shall taste death for every man, his Gospel shall be preached throughout the world, and innumerable blessings be derived on all mankind through his death and intercession.

GENESIS 12:4 So Abram went, as the LORD had spoken to him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran.

Verse 4

And Abram was seventy and five years old - As Abram was now seventy-five years old, and his father Terah had just died, at the age of two hundred and five, consequently Terah must have been one hundred and thirty when Abram was born; and the seventieth year of his age mentioned Gen 11:26, was the period at which Haran, not Abram, was born. See on Genesis 11 (note).

GENESIS 12:5 Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls whom they had gotten in Haran, and they went to go into the land of Canaan. Into the land of Canaan they came.

Verse 5

The souls that they had gotten in Haran - This may apply either to the persons who were employed in the service of Abram, or to the persons he had been the instrument of converting to the knowledge of the true God; and in this latter sense the Chaldee paraphrasts understood the passage, translating it, The souls of those whom they proselyted in Haran.

They went forth to go into the land of Canaan - A good land, possessed by a bad people, who for their iniquities were to be expelled, see Lev 18:25. And this land was made a type of the kingdom of God. Probably the whole of this transaction may have a farther meaning than that which appears in the letter. As Abram left his own country, father's house, and kindred, took at the command of God a journey to this promised land, nor ceased till he arrived in it; so should we cast aside every weight, come out from among the workers of iniquity, set out for the kingdom of God, nor ever rest till we reach the heavenly country. How many set out for the kingdom of heaven, make good progress for a time in their journey, but halt before the race is finished! Not so Abram; he went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan he came. Reader, go thou and do likewise.

GENESIS 12:6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. The Canaanite was then in the land.

Verse 6

The plain of Moreh - מִלְאֵל elon should be translated oak, not plain; the Septuagint translate την δρυν την ύψηλην, the lofty oak; and it is likely the place was remarkable for a grove of those trees, or for one of a stupendous height and bulk.

The Canaanite was then in the land - This is thought to be an interpolation, because it is supposed that these words must have been written after the Canaanites were expelled from the land by the Israelites under Joshua; but this by no means follows. All that Moses states is simply that, at the time in which Abram passed through Sicheim, the land was inhabited by the descendants of Canaan, which was a perfectly possible case, and involves neither a contradiction nor absurdity. There is no rule of criticism by which these words can be produced as an evidence of interpolation or incorrectness in the statement of the sacred historian. See this mentioned again, Gen 13:7 (note).

GENESIS 12:7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your seed." He built an altar there to the LORD, who appeared to him.

Verse 7

The Lord appeared - In what way this appearance was made we know not; it was probably by the great angel of the covenant, Jesus the Christ. The appearance, whatsoever it was, perfectly satisfied Abram, and proved itself to be supernatural and Divine. It is worthy of remark that Abram is the first man to whom God is said to have shown himself or appeared:

1. In Ur of the Chaldees, Act 7:2; and

2. At the oak of Moreh, as in this verse. As מורה Moreh signifies a teacher, probably this was called the oak of Moreh or the teacher, because God manifested himself here, and instructed Abram concerning the future possession of that land by his posterity, and the dispensation of the mercy of God to all the families of the earth through the promised Messiah. See on Gen 15:7 (note).

GENESIS 12:8 He left from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the LORD's name.

Verse 8

Beth-el - The place which was afterwards called Beth-el by Jacob, for its first name was Luz. See Gen 28:19. בית אל beith El literally signifies the house of God.

And pitched his tent - and - builded an altar unto the Lord - Where Abram has a tent, there God must have an Altar, as he well knows there is no safety but under the Divine protection. How few who build houses ever think on the propriety and necessity of building an altar to their Maker! The house in which the worship of God is not established cannot be considered as under the Divine protection.

And called upon the name of the Lord - Dr. Shuckford strongly contends that קרא בשם kara beshem does not signify to call On the name, but to invoke In the name. So Abram invoked Jehovah in or by the name of Jehovah, who had appeared to him. He was taught even in these early times to approach God through a Mediator; and that Mediator, since manifested in the flesh, was known by the name Jehovah. Does not our Lord allude to such a discovery as this when he says, Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad? Joh 8:56. Hence it is evident that he was informed that the Christ should be born of his seed, that the nations of the world should be blessed through him; and is it then to be wondered at if he invoked God in the name of this great Mediator?

GENESIS 12:9 Abram travelled, going on still toward the South.

GENESIS 12:10 There was a famine in the land. Abram went down into Egypt to live as a foreigner there, for the famine was severe in the land.

Verse 10

There was a famine in the land - Of Canaan. This is the first famine on record, and it prevailed in the most fertile land then under the sun; and why? God made it desolate for the wickedness of those who dwelt in it.

Went down into Egypt - He felt himself a stranger and a pilgrim, and by his unsettled state was kept in mind of the city that hath foundations that are permanent and stable, whose builder is the living God. See Heb 11:8, Heb 11:9.

GENESIS 12:11 When he had come near to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman to look at.

Verse 11

Thou art a fair woman to look upon - Widely differing in her complexion from the swarthy Egyptians, and consequently more likely to be coveted by them. It appears that Abram supposed they would not scruple to take away the life of the husband in order to have the undisturbed possession of the wife. The age of Sarai at this time is not well agreed on by commentators, some making her ninety, while others make her only sixty-five. From Gen 17:17, we learn that Sarai was ten years younger than Abram, for she was but ninety when he was one hundred. And from Gen 12:4, we find that Abram was seventy-five when he was called to leave Haran and go to Canaan, at which time Sarai could be only sixty-five; and if the transactions recorded in the preceding verses took place in the course of that year, which I think possible, consequently Sarai was but sixty-five; and as in those times people lived much longer, and disease seems to have had but a very contracted influence, women and men would necessarily arrive more slowly at a state of perfection, and retain their vigor and complexion much longer, than in later times. We may add to these considerations that strangers and foreigners are more coveted by the licentious than those who are natives. This has been amply illustrated in the West Indies and in America, where the jetty, monkey-faced African women are preferred to the elegant and beautiful Europeans! To this subject a learned British traveler elegantly applied those words of Virgil, Ecl. ii., ver. 18: -

Alba ligustra cadunt, vaccinia nigra leguntur.
 White lilies lie neglected on the plain,
 While dusky hyacinths for use remain.
 Dryden.

GENESIS 12:12 It will happen, when the Egyptians will see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife.' They will kill me, but they will save you alive.

GENESIS 12:13 Please say that you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that my soul may live because of you."

Verse 13

Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister - Abram did not wish his wife to tell a falsehood, but he wished her to suppress a part of the truth. From Gen 20:12, it is evident she was his step-sister, i.e., his sister by his father, but by a different mother. Some suppose Sarai was the daughter of Haran, and consequently the grand-daughter of Terah: this opinion seems to be founded on Gen 11:29, where Iscah is thought to be the same with Sarai, but the supposition has not a sufficiency of probability to support it.

GENESIS 12:14 When Abram had come into Egypt, Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

GENESIS 12:15 The princes of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

 Verse 15

The woman was taken into Pharaoh's house - Pharaoh appears to have been the common appellation of the Cuthite shepherd kings of Egypt, who had conquered this land, as is conjectured, about seventy-two years before this time. The word is supposed to signify king in the ancient Egyptian language. If the meaning be sought in the Hebrew, the root פָּרַע para signifies to be free or disengaged, a name which such freebooters as the Cuthite shepherds might naturally assume. All the kings of Egypt bore this name till the commencement of the Grecian monarchy, after which they were called Ptolemies.

When a woman was brought into the seraglio or harem of the eastern princes, she underwent for a considerable time certain purifications before she was brought into the king's presence. It was in this interim that God plagued Pharaoh and his house with plagues, so that Sarai was restored before she could have been taken to the bed of the Egyptian king.

GENESIS 12:16 He dealt well with Abram for her sake. He had sheep, cattle, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

Verse 16

He had sheep, and oxen, etc. - As some of these terms are liable to be confounded, and as they frequently occur, especially in the Pentateuch, it may be necessary to consider and fix their meaning in this place.

Sheep; צֹאן tson, from tsaan, to be plentiful or abundant; a proper term for the eastern sheep, which almost constantly bring forth twins, Sol 4:2, and sometimes three and even four at a birth. Hence their great fruitfulness is often alluded to in the Scripture. See Psa 65:13; Psa 144:13. But under this same term, which almost invariably means a flock, both sheep and goats are included. So the Romans include sheep, goats, and small cattle in general, under the term Pecus pecoris; so likewise they do larger cattle under that of Pecus pecudis.

Oxen; בָּקָר bakar, from the root, to examine, look out, because of the full, broad, steady, unmoved look of most animals of the beeve kind; and hence the morning is termed boker, because of the light springing out of the east, and looking out over the whole of the earth's surface.

He-Asses; חֲמֹרִים chamorim, from חָמַר chamar, to be disturbed, muddy; probably from the dull, stupid appearance of this animal, as if it were always affected with melancholy. Scheuchzer thinks the sandy-coloured domestic Asiatic ass is particularly intended. The word is applied to asses in general, though most frequently restrained to those of the male kind.

She-Asses; אֲתוֹנוֹת athonoth, from אֵתָן ethan, strength, probably the strong animal, as being superior in muscular force to every other animal of its size. Under this term both the male and female are sometimes understood.

Camels; גְּמָלִים gemallim, from גָּמַל gamal, to recompense, return, repay; so called from its resentment of injuries, and revengeful temper, for which it is proverbial in the countries of which it is a native. On the animals and natural history in general, of the Scriptures, I must refer to the

Hicrozoicon of Bochart, and the Physica Sacra of Scheuchzer. The former is the most learned and accurate work perhaps, ever produced by one man.

From this enumeration of the riches of Abram we may conclude that this patriarch led a pastoral and itinerant life; that his meat must have chiefly consisted in the flesh of clean animals, with a sufficiency of pulse for bread; that his chief drink was their milk; his clothing, their skins; and his beasts of burden, asses and camels; (for as yet we read of no horses); and the ordinary employment of his servants, to take care of the flocks, and to serve their master. Where the patriarchs became resident for any considerable time, they undoubtedly cultivated the ground to produce grain.

GENESIS 12:17 The LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Verse 17

The Lord plagued Pharaoh - What these plagues were we know not. In the parallel case, Gen 20:18, all the females in the family of Abimelech, who had taken Sarah in nearly the same way, were made barren; possibly this might have been the case here; yet much more seems to be signified by the expression great plagues. Whatever these plagues were, it is evident they were understood by Pharaoh as proofs of the disapprobation of God; and, consequently, even at this time in Egypt there was some knowledge of the primitive and true religion.

GENESIS 12:18 Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this that you have done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife?"

GENESIS 12:19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now therefore, see your wife, take her, and go your way."

GENESIS 12:20 Pharaoh commanded men concerning him, and they brought him on the way with his wife and all that he had.

Verse 20

Commanded his men concerning him - Gave particular and strict orders to afford Abram and his family every accommodation for their journey; for having received a great increase of cattle and servants, it was necessary that he should have the favor of the king, and his permission to remove from Egypt with so large a property; hence, a particular charge is given to the officers of Pharaoh to treat him with respect, and to assist him in his intended departure.

The weighty and important contents of this chapter demand our most attentive consideration. Abram is a second time called to leave his country, kindred, and father's house, and go to a place he knew not. Every thing was apparently against him but the voice of God. This to Abram was sufficient; he could trust his Maker, and knew he could not do wrong in following his command. He is therefore proposed to us in the Scriptures as a pattern of faith, patience, and loving obedience. When he received the call of God, he spent no time in useless reasonings about the call itself, his family circumstances, the difficulties in the way, etc., etc. He was called, and he departed, and this is all we

hear on the subject. Implicit faith in the promise of God, and prompt obedience to his commands, become us, not only as His creatures, but as sinners called to separate from evil workers and wicked ways, and travel, by that faith which worketh by love, in the way that leads to the paradise of God.

How greatly must the faith of this blessed man have been tried, when, coming to the very land in which he is promised so much blessedness, he finds instead of plenty a grievous famine! Who in his circumstances would not have gone back to his own country, and kindred? Still he is not stumbled; prudence directs him to turn aside and go to Egypt, till God shall choose to remove this famine. Is it to be wondered at that, in this tried state, he should have serious apprehensions for the safety of his life? Sarai, his affectionate wife and faithful companion, he supposes he shall lose; her beauty, he suspects, will cause her to be desired by men of power, whose will he shall not be able to resist. If he appear to be her husband, his death he supposes to be certain; if she pass for his sister, he may be well used on her account; he will not tell a lie, but he is tempted to prevaricate by suppressing a part of the truth. Here is a weakness which, however we may be inclined to pity and excuse it, we should never imitate. It is recorded with its own condemnation. He should have risked all rather than have prevaricated. But how could he think of lightly giving up such a wife? Surely he who would not risk his life for the protection and safety of a good wife, is not worthy of one. Here his faith was deficient. He still credited the general promise, and acted on that faith in reference to it; but he did not use his faith in reference to intervening circumstances, to which it was equally applicable. Many trust God for their souls and eternity, who do not trust in him for their bodies and for time. To him who follows God fully in simplicity of heart, every thing must ultimately succeed. Had Abram and Sarai simply passed for what they were, they had incurred no danger; for God, who had obliged them to go to Egypt, had prepared the way before them. Neither Pharaoh nor his courtiers would have noticed the woman, had she appeared to be the wife of the stranger that came to sojourn in their land. The issue sufficiently proves this. Every ray of the light of truth is an emanation from the holiness of God, and awfully sacred in his eyes. Considering the subject thus, a pious ancient spoke the following words, which refiners in prevarication have deemed by much too strong: "I would not," said he, "tell a lie to save the souls of the whole world." Reader, be on thy guard; thou mayest fall by comparatively small matters, while resolutely and successfully resisting those which require a giant's strength to counteract them. In every concern God is necessary; seek him for the body and for the soul; and do not think that any thing is too small or insignificant to interest him that concerns thy present or eternal peace.