

Genesis Chapter 12

1. The purpose of God

I believe that God has two main purposes for mankind, one heavenly and the other earthly.

The heavenly purpose is being fulfilled presently in the Church, and is defined for us by Paul in Ephesians Ch 1.

" God who hath blessed us with every kind of spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

Thus God had an eternal purpose for the heavens and it was to fill those heavens with a people who would be just like His Son. In I Peter Ch 1, the Lord is described as the Lamb – without spot and without blemish. And we have been chosen to be holy and without blame. This is our calling in Eph 1, and in chapter 4, Paul beseeches the saints that they should walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we have been called.

God's purpose for earth was to have men on earth who would be like Himself, and who would live to represent Him on earth. God did this by a series of "new beginnings". The first of these was of course Adam. God said of man in Gen Ch 1 – "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". Adam was therefore placed in a garden and was there to represent God. Adam was given dominion over all the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and this was seen by Adam giving names to all these creatures. Psalm 8 describes the place of Adam in all this. "What is man that thou art mindful of him or the son of man that thou visitest him. Thou crownedst him with glory and honour – thou hast set all things under his feet ". The writer to the Hebrews in Ch 2 goes on to underline the point – "For in that He put all things under him, He left nothing that was not put under him".

But Adam soon fell and lost his place in Paradise. Paradise too was lost, and soon it would produce thorns and thistles. But the purpose of God for this earth remained the same – to have a people on earth to represent Him here.

After the expulsion from Eden, things got steadily worse as far as man was concerned. Gen 6:5 reads "And God saw the wickedness of man that it was great in the earth". "It repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth". God therefore needed another man to live for Him, and this man was Noah. God said to him, "Thee have I found perfect in all thy generations". But God had to act first in judgment. The result of this was the Flood. This was yet another "new beginning", and on the other side of flood there came out just one family – that of Noah, his wife, his 3 sons, and their wives. A total of eight people. However, by Gen 9, we read of the failure even of Noah himself – he lay naked and drunken in his tent. As we move on to Gen Ch 11, we read of man's attempt to rectify the situation – Babel. It appeared to have spiritual aspirations – the tower was to reach up to heaven, up to God Himself. But the Bible reveals man's true motive – "Let us make us a name" ie let's make a name for ourselves. The tower was to be the focal point - "lest we be scattered upon the face of the earth". But God came down and scattered the people by dividing their languages. So they were scattered upon the face of the earth, and they left off building the tower. This was the beginning of nations. So the "new beginning" after the flood has also ended in failure. But there was to be no second flood – the covenant that God made with Noah precluded that.

Nearly two thousand years passed between Adam and the events of Gen 12. God's next "new beginning" was to start with one man, and to make of him a great nation. God had given up on all men as a race, and was going to concentrate His attention upon one man and the nation that would come forth from him.

2. The sovereignty of God in election

It is interesting to look very briefly at the genealogies which are found in Chapters 10 and 11 of Genesis. In chapter 10, we have the genealogies of all 3 of Noah's sons – Japheth, Ham, and Shem. But in Ch 11, after the fall of Babel, the genealogy of Shem is repeated, but in much more detail. We read of how long each man lived before he begat his children, and how long he lived afterwards. Why does God repeat the genealogy of Shem? It is surely to indicate that this is to be the true line, the line from which Abraham and then Israel would come.

In Gen 11 : 26, we are introduced for the first time to Terah, the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. They lived, according to verse 28, in Ur of the Chaldees. We are talking here of a time 2100 years BC, yet the great city of Ur is said to have been one of the great civilisations and cultures of the ancient world. God was about to establish a new nation in a new land – in the land of Canaan. Why did He not just choose a man from Canaan itself. That would surely have been a much simpler thing to do. Yet He goes off to a land which is 1,200 miles away and chooses Abram out of the household of Terah. The call of Abram is an interesting illustration of the sovereignty of God. Joshua 24 :2 tells us that at this time, Terah and his sons were followers of strange gods ie the family were idolaters.

Genesis 11 and 12 would also tell us that Abram was not the eldest son of Terah. Gen 11: 26 might well suggest that Abram was the eldest as he is the first mentioned of Terah's three sons. "Now Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran". However there are two other significant verses regarding Terah and Abram. Gen 11 :31 says "The days of Terah were 205 years and Terah died in Haran". Also, Gen 12 : 4 adds "And Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran". Assuming that Abram left Haran soon after the death of his father, we can estimate that Terah was 130 years old when he begat Abram – 205 years less 75 is 130 yrs. So the Bible was simply telling us that at the age of 70, Terah began to have children – Abram, Nahor, and Haran, but not necessarily in that order. Either Nahor or Haran came first followed 60 years later by Abram. Abram would be mentioned first because of the prominence he had later. Incidentally, if Abram was born when his father was 130, it should have been no great thing for Abraham to have a son when he was 99. The difference of course was that Sarah was barren as well.

So, the choice of Abram from amongst this family was a sovereign decision made by God and it illustrates perfectly the sovereignty of God.

Matthew Ch 1 is the illustration of the sovereign will of God. At first glance, the chapter appears to be nothing more than yet another boring list of names in the Bible. It is of course the genealogy of the Lord Jesus from Abraham through the line of David and Solomon. It begins in verse 1 with the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. It begins with Abraham who of course is the father of the nation of Israel, yet as we seen, Abram was not the eldest son.

But in this genealogy, God makes choices, and sometimes rather surprising choices as far as we can see. It even contains the names of four women of doubtful character or ancestry. There is Tamar who played the harlot, Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess and she who had been the wife of Uriah. So, in verse 2, God made the choice of Abram, but he was but one of the three sons of Terah ie Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Of these three, God chose Abram. Abram in turn had two sons – Ishmael and Isaac. Abram even pleaded the cause of Ishmael before the birth of Isaac – "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee". But God said later "In Isaac shall thy seed be called". Isaac also had two sons – Esau and Jacob. Esau was the elder of the twins and the rightful heir, but he sold his birthright and lost the blessing through the deception of Jacob. But Jacob did not have to scheme, for God had already said "The elder shall serve the younger". Then Jacob had no less than twelve sons, the eldest of whom was Reuben. But Jacob said of him – "Unstable as water,

he shall not prevail". So who would be chosen ? Not Joseph the favourite, or Benjamin the youngest, "the son of his right hand". No, the honour went to Judah who broke a promise, and lay with one he supposed to be a harlot. Jacob said of Judah – "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet". And so it goes on through the generations till the days of Jesse. Here was a man with eight sons. Even Samuel was impressed with Eliab the eldest – "surely the Lord's anointed is before Him". But the Lord had not chosen him. Seven sons pass by and not one is chosen of the Lord. At last the youngest of all is sent for – David, out tending the sheep. And he is anointed to be king. David had eleven sons with various wives, any one of whom had a claim to the throne. But it is a son of Bathsheba, with whom David had an adulterous relationship which led to murder. Solomon comes to the throne. So, the whole genealogy is an illustration of the sovereign will of God, and it all began with His choice of Abram in Ur of the Chaldees.

3. The particular choice of Abram

So what was it that moved Abram out of Ur. Three things are mentioned in the scriptures – the glory, the call, and faith. In his address in Acts 7, Stephen tells us something that is not revealed in the historical account in Genesis. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia." One day, this heathen idolater met the God of glory. Here was an idolater, a worshipper of graven images of wood and stone. Yet one day, he met the living God, the God of Glory, who not only appeared to him, but spoke to him. The idols could neither hear nor speak, but the living God, the God of Glory could and did. What an event this must have been. What a transformation in his life. Yet, though we have had no such appearing in our experience, we have been equally transformed. We have seen the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shining into our hearts and we have heard the call of God in the gospel.

So, with Abram, the glory came first followed by the call. This is found in Gen 12 : 1. "The Lord had said to Abram, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee". Abram was to leave 3 things behind him – his country, his kindred, and his father's house. He certainly left his country behind, and in so doing he left his kindred – the citizens of Ur and of Mesopotamia. But he did not leave his father's house for chapter 11 tells us that Abram was accompanied, not just by Sarai his wife, but by Terah his father and by Lot his nephew. It is perhaps more true to say of Abram at this point that his father's house did not leave him. The God of glory had not appeared to Terah, or to Lot. They moved out on the strength of Abram's call. Abram obviously told them of his experience and they said "we will come along with you". But they proved to be no help to Abram – indeed his father impeded his progress. Abram was called to go into a land that God would show him, but he abode at Haran until the death of his father. And Lot was to be an even bigger problem to Abram as he had to fight to release him from the bonds of Chederlaomer in Gen 14. Perhaps Lot got the sympathy vote, for Gen 11:28 tells us that Haran, Lot's father, died before his father Terah. Lot's father died young and perhaps it was Terah who insisted that his bereaved grandson should accompany them on the journey. But Lot also became a burden to Abram. In Gen 13, the servants of Lot strove with those of Abram regarding pasture for the herds. Abram is generous in giving Lot first choice. He says more or less – "you choose and I will go the opposite way". And so Lot moved toward Sodom and by chapter 14, he has given up his pilgrim character to settle in the wicked city of Sodom. The Lord however immediately appears again to Abram and re-states the promise. Look north, south, east, and west – everything you see is yours.

But does not scripture record the fact that friends and family can often be a hindrance rather than a help in divine things. The Lord even taught that except a man hate his father and mother and follow Him, he cannot be His disciple. Critics have argued long and weary as to the meaning of the word "hate" in this verse but it remains true that the Lord's things must ever take precedence over even the closest of family ties. In Luke 14, the Lord Jesus tells the parable of the Great Supper. The invitation goes out to all, but they all with one consent began to make excuse. One excuse was "I have married a wife

and I cannot come". But even the closest tie of all should not act as a hindrance to us in divine things. In Acts 15, we see how a dispute between Barnabus and Paul over the nephew of Barnabus led to a parting of the ways between the two men. The language used in Acts 15 is most interesting. The question was whether or not to take with them John Mark on their next journey. Barnabus determined – but Paul thought it not good, for Mark had let them down before. Who was right? Well I trust the judgment of the brethren at Antioch, for it was to Paul and his new companion that they gave the right hand of fellowship. I wonder how much Barnabus lost out in spiritual terms by allowing family ties to cloud his judgment.

There is an interesting fact we can highlight about verse 31 of Ch 11. "Terah took Abram and Lot...etc". Even though Terah is in the wrong here, God still acknowledges him as the head of the family, and Terah is responsible for his actions. Still it is a great sin to be responsible for the stumbling of a child of God. In the New Testament, the Lord warns – "Take heed that ye offend not one of those little ones who believe in me. It were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and he were cast into the sea". I am sure many Christians have found that they received plenty of encouragement as they stepped out on the Christian pathway – but as soon as they began to make real progress, many of those friends tailed off and may even begin to show hostility.

We can say more about the call when we come to chapter 12 proper, but we cannot ignore what the Bible has to say about Abram's faith. Abraham is one of the great examples of faith in Hebrews 11. "By faith he went out ". "By faith he sojourned ". "By faith, he offered up Isaac". These show 3 great aspects of faith. There was that initial faith – this caused him to get up and leave the city of Ur. While the call of Abram may illustrate the truth of election, it also shows that election is always accompanied by faith and the grace of God. In Gal Ch 1, Paul says of God – (He) separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace". When speaking of Israel, Paul also says "Even now there is an election according to grace". It is true that none of us would be saved apart from the sovereign choice of God, but equally as not one of us is worthy of this choice, it could only be through grace. Election is the divine side – our side is through faith.

Abram began with that initial faith, which caused him to take the first step. "By faith he went out". But he needed faith to keep going. "By faith he sojourned". And he needed faith when he offered up Isaac, believing that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead. No wonder that Abraham is often called "the father of the faithful".

4. Israel – a blessing and a curse to others

So, returning to Gen 12, what else did God say about the call. Verse 2 – "I will make of thee a great nation". This is a remarkable statement, for in Gen 11:30 we read that "Sarai was barren, she had no child". Verse 2 continues, " and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing". There is a blessing for all those who bless Israel. It is hard to think of examples from the past of those who blessed Israel and received a blessing. Certainly we can see it in the experience of certain men of Israel. Look at the life of Joseph. God blessed the household of Potiphar while Joseph was the steward and even blessed the house of the jailor while Joseph was in the prison. But it will certainly be true of Israel in a day yet future. In Matthew 25, there is a blessing and a curse. "My people" we believe will be mainly Jews who will preach the gospel of the kingdom during the Tribulation. The Lord says to the sheep on His right hand, come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". They were blessed for a cup of water given to His people or a visit in prison to His people. And when Israel will come into blessing as a nation in the Millenium, they will be much sought after by men "Ten men will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew and say "We will come with thee, for the Lord is with thee"

On the other hand, Israel has often had a stormy history as the people of God. What began in Egypt with the extended family of Jacob soon became a nation – but more importantly a nation of slaves. For 400 years they were in bondage. Israel became more

miserable while Egypt increased in might. But when God brought Israel out, He also brought judgment upon the land of Egypt. The plagues in Egypt brought on by God through Moses ended on that Passover night when all the firstborn of Egypt were slain. But for Pharaoh, worse was to come. He and his army perished in the Red Sea. For the Lord had said "I will curse him that curseth thee".

At the time of the exile, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon was given power to lead Judah into captivity. Daniel Ch 1 says of Nebuchadnezzar that the Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand. In Chapter 2, the king is told regarding the great image "Thou art this head of gold". Babylon was used of God to punish His people Israel for their departure from Himself. But before two generations had passed, Babylon itself was overthrown. Belshazzar was weighed in the balances and found wanting, and the power passed to the Medes and the Persians.

The cynic might say - "But why is it that the people of God were so often downtrodden ?". The answer is, because of their own failure and their departure from God. Had they remained faithful, they truly would have been head of the nations and not the tail.

That is why Israel today, though back in the land, enjoy an uneasy peace with their neighbours. It is the ambition of every muslim nation to see the Jews being driven out of Palestine. In a day to come, that ambition will seem to be nearing completion. Jerusalem will be surrounded by the armies of its enemies - seemingly on the brink of certain defeat, and then the Lord will come. Perhaps only then will the last part of verse 3 be fulfilled - "And in that day shall all families of the earth be blessed". God will bless the Jew for a thousand years of the Lord's reign. And not the Jew only, but every family on earth shall be blessed and come into the good of Israel's blessing. Then there will be perfect peace. The nations shall not study war any more. The realm of nature will be transformed. The wolf and the lamb shall sit down together. The lion will eat straw like the bullock. The horticultural world will be transformed - the desert shall blossom like a rose. Even the mountain tops shall yield handfuls of corn. The Dead Sea, so long dead and lifeless, will be joined to the Mediterranean, and fishermen shall find their catch at Engedi. Truly, all families of the earth shall be blessed.

5. The completion of the journey and the experiences of Abram

Verses 4 and 5 describe the completion of the second stage of Abram's journey from Haran to Canaan. Haran is generally reckoned to be in the northern part of what is now Syria and much time was lost due to Terah coming with Abram when Abram should have been in the land. But Lot was still with Abram and he too would prove to be a burden to Abram as described in Gen 14. Despite the two stage journey to Canaan, God kept his promise to Abram and the patriarch was able to gather up his substance and the souls that he had gathered at Haran and move on.

Verses 6 to 9 describe the passage that Abram made through the land, going from north to south. His first stopping point mentioned is Sichem or Shechem, in the plain of Moreh. At the end of verse 6, there is what appears to be a little footnote added - "And the Canaanite was then in the land". The Canaanite was the occupier of the land and might have assumed himself to be the possessor of the land, but in the very next verse, God promises it to Abram's seed. "Unto thy seed will I give this land". This is an advance on the beginning of Gen 12. When God called Abram out of Ur, He simply said "Get thee out..... to a land that I will show thee". But now after leaving Haran, God speaks for the first time of "the land that I will give thee". Abram himself, of course, never possessed the land, but the promise was to his seed. The only part of the land ever owned by Abraham was the field of Machpelah, near Hebron, and there in a cave he buried Sarah. Abraham was one of those mentioned in Heb 11:13 - "these all died in faith, not having received the promise". Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker was God.

Verse 7 says "And the Lord appeared unto Abram....". Was this perhaps only the second

time that the Lord appeared unto Abram ? Had he travelled all this way during all this time, on the strength of that first appearance in Ur of the Chaldees? Certainly the Bible tells us nothing more. But note that this new appearing of the Lord only happened after Abram had moved on in the second stage of his journey. It was only after the death of his father that Abram fully obeyed.

In Daniel Ch 1, Daniel and his friends refused to eat the meat and drink the wine from the king's table. There might have been things on that table that were an offence to the Jew. This was to prove a test for these young men, Much had happened to them that was beyond their control. They had been forcibly removed from Jerusalem to Babylon. Their names had been changed. Their names no longer linked them with Jehovah but with the pagan gods of Babylon. They had been obliged to learn the language and the learning of the Chaldees. But when it came to meat, they decided to take a stand. For them, it was a test of obedience – to honour God or obey the king. But God honoured them and they became fairer and fatter in flesh than their fellow eunuchs. More importantly, in verse 17 of Daniel 1 we read, "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom". Thus Daniel was able to interpret the king's dreams in chapters 2 and 4, and the writing on the wall in chapter 5. And in chapter 6, Daniels's obedience is again put to the test when he ignores the decree of Darius the king and prays three times a day towards Jerusalem, to the God of Israel. That act of faith and obedience caused Daniel to be put to a great trial – the den of lions, but God honours the obedience of His servant and Daniel comes out unscathed. Not only so but the man who has proved himself obedient is the recipient of many more revelations from chapter 7 through to chapter 12, regarding the future of the nations and of Israel.

There are further examples of the link between obedience and revelation in the New Testament. In John 14:21, the Lord says " He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me : and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him".

The New Testament also gives us examples of what happens when we are disobedient to the Lord – he withholds revelation from us. In I Cor 3, Paul says from verse 1 on – "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat : for hitherto, ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." As long they had these divisions amongst them as shown by their party spirit, they were carnal and unable to make progress. The Hebrews were babes also, but for a different reason – they wanted to return to the law with its temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. There were many things that the writer would have liked to teach them but he has to say to them – "Ye are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." Strong meat belongs to them who are of full age, and hence not to these Hebrews.

So, returning to Gen 12, how does Abram respond to this revelation from the Lord . "There builded he an altar unto the Lord". ie Abram worshipped God. In other words, obedience led to communion and communion led to worship. This was true in the experience of Mary of Bethany. In Luke Ch 10, she is seen sitting at the Lord's feet listening to His words. These words led to worship in John 12. She is again at His feet, but this time as a worshipper with her box of ointment.

This is the first of the altars to be built by Abram to the Lord. Another is to follow in verse 8. Abram moves on to the east of Bethel and builds another altar. Worship is now becoming part of his life. Not only so, but when he built the altar, he called upon the name of the Lord. Worship then leads to prayer and communion with God.

But does indeed worship come before prayer. Is it not the other way round. Prayer before worship. What does the New Testament have to say on this subject ?. Let us look at three incidents in the Gospel of Matthew in order to form an opinion.

Matthew 8:2

"And behold there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou

canst make me clean".

The leper comes, first to worship, then to ask. He addresses Jesus as "Lord". He recognises that here is One who has the power to heal him. This was no small matter. The king of Israel in the days of Elisha rent his clothes when he received the letter from the king of Syria regarding Naaman the leper. His lament was "Am I God to kill and make alive that I should heal this man of his leprosy". The king knew that only God could do such a thing. Naaman was healed but not by the prophet doing some great thing as Naaman had hoped, but by dipping himself 7 times in Jordan. So the leper in Matthew Ch 8 was perhaps acknowledging the very deity of the Lord Jesus as he came to worship and then to make his request.

We too ought to worship before we pray. In Acts Ch 4, the first recorded prayer meeting of the church, the saints had a problem. Their lives were being threatened. Yet they begin their prayer, not with the problem to hand, but a recognition of the omnipotence and the omniscience of God. "Thou art God which made heaven and earth etc". They also quote Psalm 2 – "Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine a great thing. " They go on to apply the Psalm to recent events – "against thy holy child Jesus both Pilate, and Herod, and the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatsoever thy mind and thy counsel determined before to be done". Then, having acknowledged the greatness of their God, they add "And now Lord behold their threatenings". And the Lord immediately answered their prayer. If we cannot acknowledge the greatness of the Person, then we cannot truly be expecting Him to answer. James says in his epistle – "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."

Matthew 9:18

"And behold there came a certain ruler and worshipped him, saying, "My daughter is even now dead : but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live".

The "certain ruler" of this verse is undoubtedly the man named as Jairus in Mark 5:22. Matthew presents a darker picture than either Mark or Luke of the child's condition. In Mark, she is "at the point of death", while in Luke she lay "a dying". Again, Jairus comes, first to worship, then to ask. This also is a recognition of the greatness of the Lord Jesus. Paul says in Romans Ch 1 that He was "declared Son of God with power, by the resurrection of the dead". This was not His own resurrection, I believe, but rather the resurrection of others including the widow of Nain's son and Lazarus. Here, Jairus had the faith to believe that Jesus could raise his daughter from death if need be.

Matthew 15:25

"Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me".

This the woman of Canaan who came pleading for her daughter. She made her request first of all to the "Son of David", but the Lord turns away from her. He had come first for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But the Saviour could not refuse her when she came with the simple plea "Lord, help me"

In Gen 13:18, Abram came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron. Hebron means "joining" or "fellowship" so Abram is once again in fellowship with God. He returns again to the altar and calls upon the Lord, but much time has been lost in the journey down into Egypt.

6. The dangers of compromise

From verse 10 to the end of the chapter, there follows an episode which Abram would rather forget. Because of famine in the land, Abram goes down to the land of Egypt. There is no direction from the Lord in this. "Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there". But worse was to come. Abram tells Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister and not his wife.

In Gen 20 :12, Abram says to Abimelech under similar circumstances "And yet indeed she is my sister : she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife".

Gen 20 :13 tells us that this story that Abram and Sarai told about being brother and sister was not an impromptu decision brought about by circumstances. Abram had asked Sarai to say "at every place" that she was his sister. This decision was taken in Ur of the Chaldees, as he was about to set out on his momentous journey. It almost seems a denial of the marriage bond for the two to deny each other as circumstances changed. The New Testament has much to say about Abraham's faith, but the Bible also does not attempt to conceal his failings also.

Abram therefore told the truth in one sense, for Sarai was his half-sister. But he withheld the fact that she was his wife. It is not enough for a believer to tell only half the truth though. Our lives should be transparent before others and before God. In I John 1, John defines the basis of all our fellowship – "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin. Our fellowship with one another is in the light, the same light as God, and light of course makes everything manifest. There is nothing hidden in the light. That is how our relationship with one another should be. There is always an uneasy feeling if we have believers near us who give us the impression of only telling us half the truth. Is there something hidden there that we should know about? At any rate, the more we know about each other, the more we can intelligently pray about one another. This is our fellowship with one another. But what about our fellowship with God ?. Who could stand in the glare of His light ? Fortunately, God has provided the answer – "The blood of Jesus Christ... cleanseth us from all sin" God sees our failings but He also sees the blood, and it is the blood that keeps us in fellowship with a holy God.

Abram's deception also displayed a lack of faith. Had not God said in Gen 12:2 - "I will make of thee a great nation". If Abram were living in the good of that promise, he would not have been saying to Sarai "they will kill me". Abram's life was secure because God still had to fulfil His promise in him.

So, in Egypt, Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's household and Pharaoh showers great riches upon Abram for Sarai's sake. I wonder if he blushed as he received the goods. It goes to show that once a compromise is made, we go on to dig ourselves even deeper into the hole that we have made for ourselves.

When Peter denied for the first time that he knew the Lord, he is standing before the servant maid. No real threat one might think from a servant maid. But he is in the wrong company already. Twice over in John Ch 18, we read that Peter stood and warmed himself. It is the seemingly warm glow of compromise. Fairly soon, when asked again the second time, he has little option but to deny again, and so on to a third time. Wore still, his language becomes like that of the soldiers beside him. Matthew records the fact that Peter began to curse and to swear. In John's account, in John 18, he tells a bare faced lie. John alone of the four gospel writers identifies Peter as the wielder of the sword in Gethsemane, and also names the high priest's servant as Malchus. Why such detail ?. Because in John, it is a kinsman of Malchus, and an eye-witness of Gethsemane, who says to Peter "Did not I see thee in the garden with Him?." But Peter denied again. It was not a lack of physical courage that let Peter down. Given more encouragement from the Lord, he would have fought with all the soldiers in the garden, but the Lord tells him to put away his sword. No, Peter's life was not in danger when in the palace of Caiphas , but there he denied his lord.

And was it not the same weakness that let Peter down in the incident at Antioch when Paul has to say of Peter "I withstood him to the face, for he was to be blamed." After all, it was just an ordinary meal and Peter was sitting happily at a table eating with the Gentiles, when the door opens and in came certain brethren from Jerusalem, from James. Peter, afraid of what men might think, gets up from one table and goes over to another where the Jews in the assembly are sitting.

Nothing much in that, you might think, but Barnabus follows the example of Peter. Soon, the room may have become divided. Jews on one side, and Gentiles on the other, and a possible division at Antioch could have led to division elsewhere. Antioch was already beginning to replace Jerusalem as the centre of assembly activity, and anything that took place at Antioch would be replicated elsewhere.

So, in Genesis 12, we can see the weakness of Abram here. The irony is, he was blessed with goods, but Pharaoh's household was cursed with a plague. At last, the truth is revealed to Pharaoh and he rebukes Abram for his deceit. How sad that the father of the faithful, the heir of the land, the friend of God, lets himself down so badly. Abram and Sarai are dismissed by Pharaoh and they are in effect escorted out of Egypt by Pharaoh's men. Pharaoh, in this episode, comes out of it with his honour more intact than Abram, the heir of all the promises of God.

We see another example of this in the attempt by Jonah to escape the will of God for him to go and preach in Nineveh. The sailors who so reluctantly threw Jonah overboard had more honour than the reluctant prophet.

We have seen how that Abram returns again to the altar and calls upon the name of the Lord. He left the place of the altar to go down into Egypt – now God brings him back. In John 18, Peter stood by the fire of coals and warmed himself. The scriptures even repeat it a second time - "Peter stood and warmed himself". He went astray from this point onwards. But in John 21, The Lord meets Peter again by the fire of coals – the same fire as in the palace of Caiphas. Instead of three denials, we have three questions. "Lovest thou Me more than these?" The point of failure is also the point of recovery.

Returning to Abram, we see, worse still, that he repeats the same error with Abimelech in Gen 20, and again Abram tells men that Sarai is his sister. Again, the king rebukes him, but it is all to Abram's shame.

And in Genesis, the matter is not ended. Isaac his son does the very same thing with Rebekah, and in the same place, with Abimelech in the land of Gerar. To err ourselves is one thing – to be a stumbling block to others is even worse. The Lord says in the gospels – "Take heed that ye offend not one of these little ones which believe in Me"

Abram's visit into Egypt also had repercussions for Lot. Given his choice of land, Lot moves towards Sodom because it was surrounded by the well watered plains reminiscent of Egypt.