

Introduction

Conversation with a friend years ago who thought the best approach to dealing with his soon to be ex-wife was to sin, manipulate, and make her life miserable so that God could get ahold of her heart and cause her to repent and return to him

A. Abram devised a deceptive scheme to ensure God's promises (12:10-13)

1. There are two potential perceived threats to the promises God made to Abram revealed in this passage and both provided a bit of a challenge to Abram's faith:
 - a. I refer to them as "perceived" threats because they really aren't threats from God's perspective, but they could be from a human perspective
 - b. The first threat was related to God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants (READ 12:10):
 - 1) If you remember, after Abram and Sarai arrived in the land of Canaan, God appeared to Abram at Shechem and promised him that He would give all the land to his descendants (READ 12:6-7)
 - a) This was a significant event because Shechem was geographically smack dab in the middle of Canaan, there was a prominent religious shrine there, and it was currently filled with Canaanites
 - b) Yet, in spite of this, God promised to give it all to Abram's descendants
 - 2) However, after settling in the southern part of Canaan known as the Negev, a severe famine developed throughout the land:
 - a) It was so severe that Abram and Sarai were forced to leave the land and head to Egypt
 - b) We might wonder what Abram was thinking at this point:
 - Did he wonder why God called him to leave Ur, travel 500 to 1500 miles to Canaan, promise to give the land to his descendants, only to be forced out of the land by a famine?
 - Did he wonder if the famine would screw up God's plans?
 - Did he wonder if God had forgotten about his promise or abandoned him?
 - Did it cause Abram to waver in his faith?
 - c) The Bible doesn't tell us specifically what Abram was thinking, but we might have a clue in the fact that v. 10 tells us that "**Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there**":
 - The word sojourn generally means to stay for a while, and the noun form, sojourner, refers to a foreigner or temporary resident who is passing through a region
 - This suggests that Abram had no intent on staying in Egypt but was only planning on staying there through the famine and then returning to Canaan
 - Many in this situation might have been tempted to think God's promise regarding the land was in jeopardy, but it appears Abram still believed God would fulfill His promise

- So far, so good
- c. The second threat was related to God's promise to bless Abram with descendants and make him into a great nation (READ 12:11-13):
- 1) There are two other passages that are remarkably similar to this one; there's one more with Abram when he deceives king Abimelech about Sarai being his sister and not his wife (Genesis 20) and another when Isaac does the same thing (Genesis 26)
 - 2) To be honest, I really wanted to sanitize these verses and try to see Abram in the best light:
 - a) When you read what many have written on this passage you hear things like "Abram was only concerned about his own life and not Sarai's life" or "Abram threw Sarai under the bus":
 - b) I believe statements like this are a bit harsh and don't necessarily represent what took place, but we have to be honest and admit that these verses don't present Abram in a very positive light
 - 3) As he and Sarai approach Egypt, Abram is concerned the Egyptians will be drawn in by Sarai's beauty, know that she is his wife, and therefore kill him, presumably so that one of them can take her as his own wife:
 - a) So, he tells Sarai to say that she is his sister so that it will go well with him and they won't kill him:
 - We know from Genesis 20 that Sarai was Abram's half-sister, so he wasn't really asking her to lie; however, he wasn't being completely honest
 - We also learn from Genesis 20 that this scheme to deceive others wasn't something Abram came up with on the spot; it was something he cooked up before he ever left Ur
 - It really shouldn't come as a surprise, however, because the Canaanites weren't exactly a moral people
 - So, Abram may very well have had a reason to fear for his own life
 - b) Some accuse Abram of worrying only about his own life here and showing a total lack of concern over Sarai, and technically that's one way we could interpret Abram's actions
 - c) However, it's possible that Abram's actions here were an attempt to help ensure that God's promises would come true:
 - After all, if he were dead, how could God's promise to give him descendants come true?
 - Likewise, if he were dead, how could God make him into a great nation?
 - One of the things we need to remember is that Abram was raised in a polytheistic culture where the gods were somewhat weak and often needed man's help; the Canaanite religion was very much a religion of cooperation between the gods and man
 - Based on everything else we learn about Abram in the OT and NT, I am more prone to think his deceptive scheme was at least as much about trying to help God keep His promises as it was his own skin (but I admit this is speculative)

2. Regardless of what motivated Abram to come up with his scheme, it ultimately revealed a lack of faith to some degree:
 - a. I don't want to be too hard on Abram here because the Bible clearly portrays him as a man of faith, one who believed God and was credited with righteousness as a result
 - b. However, Abram wasn't perfect and had times in his life when he didn't demonstrate the faith and trust we might expect of one of the Bible's heroes of the faith:
 - 1) Here, instead of simply trusting the Lord to protect him as he traveled down to Egypt, he came up with a deceptive scheme to save his life, but also put his wife in danger and one that could lead others into sin (as we'll see in a moment)
 - 2) He did the same thing later with his encounter with Abimelech
 - 3) Then, there was the time he thought he could help God fulfill his promise regarding a son by taking Sarai's advice and having a child with her maidservant, Hagar
 - 4) In each of these instances, Abram had a moment where his faith seemed to falter, and he instead relied upon his own schemes and abilities
3. Takeaway: when we devise our own deceptive schemes to bring about some result, or to help facilitate what we believe God wants, it ultimately reveals a lack of faith on our part:
 - a. When we lie, deceive, manipulate, or engage in other sinful behavior to accomplish something or bring about some result, it's not just sin we're engaged in
 - b. It demonstrates a lack of faith and trust in the Lord
 - c. We either don't believe He can do what He can do, or we aren't willing to accept His will for our lives so we take matters into our own hands
 - d. Either way, it demonstrates a lack of faith

B. Abram's scheme had unintended consequences (READ 12:14-16)

1. When Abram first came up with his scheme back in Ur, he probably didn't intend for it to work out quite the way it did; there were unintended consequences:
2. One unintended consequence was that Sarai ended up in Pharaoh's harem:
 - a. Abram was right about one thing: when the Egyptians saw Sarai, they indeed thought she was beautiful
 - b. It was customary even among the Canaanites and Egyptians that marriages were negotiated, generally between fathers, or brothers when the father was no longer alive
 - c. Abram probably expected that as Sarai's "brother" (in quotes), he would simply be able to ward off any offers or requests from eager Egyptians that wanted to marry her long enough to survive the famine and return to Egypt
 - d. The last thing he probably imagined was that the Pharaoh's officials would take her to become part of the Pharaoh's harem, but his plan backfired
 - e. We see in v. 16 that Abram was rewarded rather handsomely by the Pharaoh (12:16):
 - 1) He was treated well by the Pharaoh
 - 2) He was also given a significant amount of livestock and human servants
 - 3) This poses a challenge for us in that it appears God blessed Abram for his deceitful scheme, though I believe that would be a wrong assumption; it seems He blessed Abram in spite of what he did (in fact, this increase in wealth actually caused some of the conflict that arose later between Abram's servants and Lot's when they went back to the land)

3. The second unintended consequences is that Abram's actions seemingly put God's promises in jeopardy, the direct opposite of what he might have been trying to do:
 - a. God promised Abram descendants, but how would that happen without his wife?
 - b. God promised to make him a great nation, but how would that happen without children?
 - c. Seemingly, at least from a human perspective, Abram put God's promises in jeopardy
4. Takeaway: When we take matters into our own hands instead of relying on faith and trust in the Lord, there can be unintended consequences:

Kimberly deliberately knocking over the lamps so Katie would be disciplined—unintended consequences were that Katie got disciplined for something she didn't do, we were heartbroken, and Kimberly ultimately got disciplined

- a. We are not sovereign which means when we take things into our own hands we can't be assured they will work out the way we want or expect
- b. However, God is sovereign which means when we trust Him, things will turn out exactly as He intends and will ultimately be in our best interests

C. God intervened to ensure His promises (READ 12:17-20)

1. God intervened here to fix the mess Abram created by striking the pharaoh and his household with "**great plagues**":
 - a. The pharaoh never mentioned the Lord by name but the context suggests he realized he was facing some form of divine judgment for taking Sarai to be his wife
 - b. The text also doesn't tell us how the Pharaoh discovered the truth about Sarai (Did God speak to him as He did Abimelech in Genesis 20??)
 - c. As a result, the Pharaoh returns Sarai to Abram and has him escorted out of the country
2. We always have to be careful when dealing with subtleties in a Biblical text, and knowing what to make of them, but one of the things that stands out to me here is the contrast we see between Abram and the Pharaoh:
 - a. Abram is shown to be a bit of a schemer, who ultimately puts Sarai in danger and possibly derails God's plans and promises to him
 - b. In contrast, the Pharaoh is portrayed in a very different light:
 - 1) He unknowingly is led into sin because of Abram's deceit
 - 2) He didn't just take Sarai which was generally the king's prerogative, but compensated Abram significantly for her
 - 3) He was kind and generous to Abram
 - 4) He responded quickly and correctly to God's judgment
 - 5) And, he was even gracious in the way that he sent Abram away by not taking back all the wealth he had given him
 - c. Again, we have to be careful with subtle details like this, but it makes you wonder if Moses provided these details in this way as sort of a subtle rebuke of Abram's actions:
 - 1) There are other places in the Bible where the actions of the unrighteous or unsaved are used to offer a rebuke of believers

- 2) Jesus did this in Matthew 5:47: **“And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles, do they not do the same?”**
 - 3) Paul did as well in 1 Corinthians 5:1: **“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among the pagans...”**
3. Takeaway: throughout history God has continued to intervene in the affairs of men to accomplish and secure His promises, even when we seemingly screw things up!
- a. He did this in the Garden with Adam and Eve, and later with Cain and Abel
 - b. He did this routinely with the patriarch’s Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and throughout Israel’s history when they kept seemingly putting God’s promises in jeopardy
 - c. We see this even in the Church where so many times over the past 2000 years, instead of walking in obedience to what the Lord has commanded, the Church has taken things into its own hands, relying on worldly wisdom and practices and compromising God’s standards to make the Gospel and Christianity more attractive
 - d. However, we see this most profoundly when it comes to our own sin—think about this with your own life; how many times has God had to intervene when we’ve screwed things up either by sinning directly or simply not trusting Him?