

Covenantal Sabotage?

Abram and Sarai in Egypt

- ¹⁰ 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.
- 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."
- ¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.
- ¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.
- ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.
- ¹⁷ But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.
- 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.

Genesis 12:10-20

The Ninth Commandment

Some Christians seem to be of the opinion that God magically came down on Mt. Sinai and created **ten brand new commandments** out of thin air—commandments that had never been heard of in the entire history of the world before that. I don't really think anyone really believes that, but this sure seems to be the implication when they talk about how if a command isn't repeated in the NT, then it no longer applies to Christians today, saying Jesus came to do away with the law, for we are "**no longer under law, but grace.**"

I've never understood this thinking. On the most basic level, this would mean that God somehow didn't care about morality prior to the Ten Commandments, and even worse, since the coming of Christ, he no longer cares about it today either. Can anyone really read the Sermon on the Mount or the book of Genesis and come to such a conclusion? Of course not, but this is the inconsistency in some Christian views of law, dispensations, and the newness of covenants.

In Genesis 1-11 we have seen a good many of the Ten Commandments come up explicitly: coveting and serving other gods (Eden), worshiping God improperly (Cain), taking God's name in vain (Babel), lust/adultery (the sons of God), and murder (Cain, Lamech). Today we will look at another one. This is the **ninth commandment** which is usually summarized as, "You shall not lie."

Abram the Good or Abram the Bad?

Before us is a **strange story**. It is the first story of Abram after he obeys God's call and goes to the land of Canaan. Yet, curiously, it does not take place in Canaan, but **Egypt**. Almost as soon as we find Abram in this Promised Land, we find him leaving it again. It is also strange because the way it is written makes it very **difficult to interpret**. Basically, Abram goes down to Egypt to escape a famine (**Gen 12:10**). But he is worried that the Egyptians will kill him because Sarai his wife is beautiful (**11-12**). So he convinces her to tell the Pharaoh that she is actually his sister (**13**). After doing this, the Pharaoh takes her into his harem and rewards Abram with much wealth (**14-16**). But then the LORD afflicts Pharaoh and his house with plagues (**17**). When Pharaoh discovers why, he becomes angry with Abram for lying to him (**18-19**). Then he sends them away, banishing them from Egypt (**20**).

What are we to make of this story and Abram's actions in it? In some ways, I almost feel like preaching **two completely different, even opposite sermons**. The reason is that there are two very opposite ways of interpreting this text. Both seem to have legitimacy. One is to basically make Abram out to be a hero, a great and mighty man of faith who did everything in this story from that motive.¹ The other sees Abram as doing some very bad things in this story, acting not from faith, but his own autonomous desires apart from the revealed will of God, much like Adam did to Eve in the Garden.² This is, of course, completely besides the fact that he really is a true believer and a man of faith. He just didn't act like it here. You can see how these two different takes would lead to some very different applications.

The interpretation really hinges on Abram's actions in relation to the ninth commandment. As I said, most people summarize this commandment by saying, "You shall not lie." Now, lying is a very broad concept. It can include a great many things from **perjury** in a law court, to **forgery**, to **flattery** for selfish ends, to **slandering** someone. It could even include pretending to be someone else or intentionally deceiving people. Are all of these always wrong? Ask yourself, is it a sin for a quarterback to look one way and pass another, intentionally deceiving and

¹ See Augustine (*Reply to Faustus* XXII.33ff.), Calvin and Luther's commentaries on this story. Neither tries to justify Abram entirely, but they do come to the basic conclusion that it should be read through the lenses of Abram's faith.

² See Robert R. Gonzales Jr., *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 111-18.

lying to the cornerback? Is it wrong to be an actor by playing some person in a movie that is not you? Would God be angry with you if you hid Jews in your basement and lied to the Gestapo when they came to your door? The answer to all of these is “no.”

That is why I don't particularly like this summary of the ninth commandment. Technically speaking, the commandment is that **you shall not answer against your neighbor a false testimony**. The **principle** behind the command is the important thing. Why is a person lying? What is the motive and result?

Augustine, noticing this, gave three classes of lying. One he called **playful lying**, such as the lies of an actor in a play. There is nothing wrong with this. A second he called an **obliging lie**, obliging because it serves the advantage of someone who would otherwise suffer harm or violence and therefore helps prevent even more sin. There appears to be little wrong with this. The third is simply what we normally think of as a lie. Luther defines it as **deceiving our neighbor to his ruin and our own advantage**.³ Of course, as Jesus teaches us, everyone is our neighbor. I think this basic definition is correct, so let's look at the story and see what we discover.

First, there are really only **three actors** in our drama (though, based on what I just said, they are not playing the role of someone else). There is **Abram, Sarai, and Pharaoh**. There are also the princes of Pharaoh and Pharaoh's household, but these do not really do anything significant to merit further attention. We'll look at all three, but I'm going to take them in the reverse order of what you might think. It should become apparently why a little later. I'll start with Pharaoh.

Pharaoh

If Abram is violating the ninth commandment, what harm does it do to Pharaoh? First, it says that **the princes of Egypt saw Sarai and praised her to Pharaoh. So they took her to Pharaoh's house (Gen 12:15)**. So far, nothing bad has come to Pharaoh. In fact, he seems to have gained a new addition to his harem. He's loving it.

Next, it says that **he dealt well with Abram (16)**. The ESV reads a bit confusing here, “... and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.” Does this mean Abram already had these, and so, because he was rich, Pharaoh dealt well with him? Or, does it mean, as the NAS says, that Pharaoh **gave these things** to Abram because he was treating him

³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 2 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 292. It is also in this section that I found these distinctions in Augustine.

well by giving him a dowry for his sister? It literally says, “and he had to him,” meaning that the NAS is correct. Pharaoh is treating Abram kindly because he “gave” Pharaoh his own sister. Of course, previous verse says that “The woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house.” This verb (*laqach*) can mean forcefully taken (Gen 6:2? 34:2) or taken with permission lawfully (11:29). Clearly, Abram did not want this to happen, so it definitely has a negative connotation here, even though it may have been lawful in Egypt. The point is, nothing bad is happening to Pharaoh because of Abram’s plot. Therefore, we might conclude that he was not actually breaking the ninth commandment at all, for he meant no harm to his neighbor.

I’ve seen no commentators that will actually go this far in the details, though it sure does feel like this is what they really think when they finally conclude that this man was acting in pure faith throughout this episode. But let’s continue looking at the Pharaoh, then we will move on to the other two. Immediately after telling us that Pharaoh acted well towards Abram, we find that the LORD does just the opposite to Pharaoh. “But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife” (Gen 12:17).

Does this sound similar to anything else we read in the Bible, perhaps in the book of Exodus? The word “plagues” here is rightly translated this way by the ESV (as opposed to the NET’s “severe afflictions” or the NIV’s “serious diseases”), because this is the same word used for what the LORD inflicts upon a later Pharaoh in Moses’ day in the Ten Plagues of Egypt.

I notice two things about this. First, God is showing himself to be sovereign over the Pharaoh even at this early a period. God does this to foreshadow what he will do 400 years from now in the same land. I will return to more of the theology of God acting this way when we come to the other wife deception stories in this book, for there are two more that are almost identical that shed more light on God’s sovereign actions here (Gen 20:1-18; 26:1-11). If I went down this road here, I probably wouldn’t stop, so in order to keep me on track, I want to make the other observation. Second, something bad is now happening to Pharaoh because of what Abram did. It may have been an unintended consequence, but it was nevertheless a consequence, and a very bad one at that.

Next, notice Pharaoh’s reaction. “What is this you have done to me [Abram]? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife?” (Gen 12:18-19). Pharaoh obviously does not view Abram’s behavior as neutral, much less good! In fact, he summons Abram to his court by “calling” him in much the same way that God calls Adam and Eve to

account (3:13) and Cain to account (4:10).⁴ It is also similar to how another Pharaoh will “call” Moses in Exodus. Even more, Abram does not try to defend himself. He simply says nothing. When we look at the consequences and outcome from Pharaoh’s perspective, while it might **begin good**, it **does not end that way**.

Though I will now tip my hat to how I end up interpreting this passage, let me say this. Isn’t that how many of our own lies end up? We intend a thing to be well, to protect someone, but in the end people end up getting hurt. Lying has tremendous implications. They almost always end up doing more harm than good. I think we all know this, if we really stop and think about the lies that we have been caught in, and yet each of us continues to have our lies. And make no mistake, **each of us is a liar**. As the Apostle says, “**Let God be true and every man a liar**” (Rom 3:4). We all lie in the multitude of ways, perhaps the most basic is when we say that we are not liars, for this is a great lie.

The **Larger Catechism** does a great job of exposing us by listing such things as: prejudicing truth, giving false evidence, willingly pleading for an evil cause, passing unjust sentences, calling evil good and good evil, rewarding the wicked, forgery, silence in a just cause, speaking the truth unseasonably or maliciously, perverting it to a wrong meaning, doubtful and equivocal expressions, misconstruing intentions, words, and actions, flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking too highly of yourself or others, hypochondria, raising false rumors, slandering, backbiting, detracting, tale bearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, receiving evil reports, and the list goes on. Not only this, but we hide, conceal, fail not only in what we have done, but in what we have left undone. Every sin is at its heart, a lie. For it is making a liar of God. In doing what he forbids we tell him, “**You don’t know what you are talking about. You are a liar. This is not wrong. This will not hurt me.**”

If Abram is breaking the ninth commandment here, the good news is that he **still has faith** in Yahweh, and we will see how this faith plays itself out at the beginning of the next story. For us, we need to remember even here that God still forgives liars in Christ. In fact, that is why he died, so that liars could be reconciled to him. So if you know yourself to be a liar, flee to him and find forgiveness, and never stop fleeing, for as we are seeing right now, Abram is already a man of faith, yet perhaps he finds himself thick in the midst of breaking the ninth commandment. His only hope is to continue to repent and turn to Christ. Same as us.

⁴ See Gonzales, 116.

Sarai

With that, let me turn to **Sarai**. How does the plot of Abram effect her in this story? It is really important to stick close to the text here, and to put yourself in her position. First, Abram comes to her and tells her how beautiful she is (**Gen 12:11**). I do not think this is flattery for the sake of flattery. Rather, it has something else in mind, “**When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live**” (**Gen 12:12**).

Sarai’s beauty raises an interesting, but speculative question. This woman is at least 65 years of age here.⁵ Yet, Abram and the Egyptians seem to treat her like some kind of a 20 year old supermodel. Is this really plausible? Well, all sorts of things have been said about this. Some suggest that **women back then did not age as rapidly**. They base this on the long lengths of ages that people were living back then, for even Abram still lives to be 175 (**Gen 25:7**). I suppose this is possible, though it should be pointed out that by the time she reaches 90 years of age she is well past the age of childbearing, so some things haven’t changed very much. Would looks? I don’t know.

Others suggest that **physical beauty was not nearly as important** in that culture as it is in ours. What they deemed as beautiful was a mature woman, a woman of dignity and self-confidence.⁶ Again, maybe, though I tend to doubt that men back then were any less prone to being captured by the physical beauty of a woman than they are today. My thought is, I simply have no idea, and neither does anyone else. But, the entire story says that she was beautiful, so whatever that means, it certainly lead the very thing Abram feared, and that’s what matters.

What is more important is that Abram says that if she follows his plan, his hope is that she will live, that they will not kill her (**Gen 12:12-13**). So he asks her to, “**Say you are my sister**” (**13**). We are not privy to the following information yet, and that is probably deliberate, because it keeps us in more suspense as to Abram’s motives here. But we do learn a few chapters from now that this was actually a half-truth. Abram says, “**She is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife**” (**Gen 20:12**).⁷ Nevertheless, Abram is still withholding the vital information—Sarai is his wife. We’ve seen how Pharaoh takes this as a deliberate deception.

⁵ Based on the numbers from **Gen 17:1** and **17** where Abram is 99 and Sarah is 90. In our story, Abram is probably around 75 (**Gen 12:4**).

⁶ Walton says, “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.” John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 397.

⁷ We’ll look at why God might permit such a marriage when we come to that passage.

What happens to Sarai because of this? First, [she apparently goes along with her husband](#), for this is the reason Pharaoh takes her to be his wife. She lies for him. Have you ever asked someone else to do your lying for you? Not good. Second, [Sarai does live](#). Perhaps Calvin and Luther are right that Abram has the promise in mind, and so he is acting in faith of the coming seed in protecting his wife from death? But if that is true, are we to suppose that he had a plan to somehow storm Pharaoh's palace, recapture his wife, kill the whole Egyptian army, and run away with his wife to have a child? That seems pretty implausible to me, especially given how apprehensive he appears to be in this story.

Furthermore, what are we to make of [the way Sarai is actually treated](#) by her husband here? Bob Gonzales compares his actions in some ways to Adam leaving Eve to fend for herself against the serpent, or to Lot's "[unhesitating willingness to hand over his daughters to the men of Sodom for sexual abuse](#)."⁸ He adds how this betrays disregard, "[For the weaker sex and a lack of familial loyalty and affection. Worse ... \[it evidences influence\] by the pagan culture around \[him\] that tended to accord women a lower social status and in some cases treated them merely as objects of sexual gratification](#)."⁹ Don't sugar coat the story. Sarai is not faring well because of what her husband has had her do. At the very least, this is akin to the second half of the Pharaoh storyline. At worst, it is simply blatant disregard for the welfare of his wife. How is this a good thing?

Abram

I want to now move to Abram by looking at [the specific things that are said about him](#) in this story. Before doing that, let me point out again that this man has spent the first 75 years of his life worshiping and serving other gods. He lived in Babylon, and was steeped in pagan worship. While I have no doubt that he is now a converted man, it seems to me that Paul's talk in Romans 7 and Galatians 5 about doing what we do not want to do may very well apply to our hero. And in some ways, this is actually good news to you and I, for biblical heroes are not untouchable perfect saints, but are men and women just like you and I—saved by the grace of God apart from ourselves. If only we would learn to see them as they are.

Let's look at what the text says is [Abram's motives](#) in asking his wife to tell this half-truth. It is actually very interesting and quite explicit about it. First, [vs. 12](#). "[... when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live](#)." We have seen how he may be considering Sarai's well being in saying that they will let you live. But I am only now bringing up the

⁸ Gonzales, 116.

⁹ Ibid.

other part of this. “Then they will kill me.” Abram is deeply concerned about ... himself. That isn’t necessarily wrong, I guess. But it is curious.

Vs. 13 follows suit. “Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me.” Who is Abram concerned about? Himself. And again, “... that my life may be spared” in the same verse. Yes, he says that it is for her benefit (“because of you” and “for your sake”), but in two verses, the first person pronoun has come up three times. Abram is worried about himself. So, Abram will certainly be benefiting from this little charade.

The benefits become extravagant when Pharaoh gives Abram the dowry. Sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. Seven things. The perfect number. Make no mistake, Abram becomes rich because of what he has done. It is also an interesting coincidence that this list (when we include Sarai and Pharaoh’s household which are both in the story) reads like the tenth commandment: do not covet your neighbor’s house, your neighbor’s wife, or his servants, or his donkey. Did he have this in the back of his mind the whole time? We don’t know.

Again, some commentaries try to get Abram off the hook by saying that he really just wants to be near Sarai so that he can protect her. What an altruistic lie this is, purely for Sarai’s sake. But the text doesn’t say anything about Abram wanting to protect her, and I’ve already brought up how difficult that would have been to even try. Or again, some want to make Pharaoh out to be a villain here, saying that he took Sarai without permission. He kidnapped her. But Abram willing accepts Pharaoh’s gift. Compare his actions here with what he does a couple of chapters when Lot is “taken.” He takes his whole army to find the evil perpetrators and kill them all. He wants revenge.

Let me add one more fact to this increasingly dark view of Abram that I think the text paints. The story begins with a famine in the land of Canaan. So, Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there (Gen 12:10). No big deal, right? Famines happen all the time in Israel. Not everywhere in Israel. Notice where Abram was just prior to this. It says that Abram’s last journey was to go to the Negeb (Gen 12:9).¹⁰ Where is this, what is this, and why might it matter?

One dictionary describes it as, “A triangular desert area southwest of the Dead Sea. Framed by the Judean hill country to the north, the Arabah to the east, and the Mediterranean coastal strip to the west, it is the southernmost district of Judah.”¹¹ Another says that it is a, “Tract of land in southern Judah, which, though

¹⁰ Luther counts this as his sixth of seven journeys (Apparently: 1. Ur to Haran, 2. Haran to Canaan, 3. Canaan to Shechem, 4. Shechem to Bethel, 5. Bethel to Ai, 6. Ai to the Negeb, 7. The Negeb to Egypt).

¹¹ Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 754.

fertile in comparison with the rest of Palestine, is nevertheless regarded as an arid country. The term "Negeb" refers very often to "the south" in general."¹² Of all the people in the Bible, pretty much only Abram actually chooses to live here.

Notice the word “desert.” Abram went into a desert. Of all the places in all of Canaan that he could have lived, he chose the desert. Just how much rain falls in this desert? I’ve found numbers from 3 – 5 inches per year average today.¹³ The 5 inches is in Beersheba, the main oasis and capital of the region for millennia. To put that into perspective, just a few miles north in Jerusalem, they get 22 in. Denver gets 16 in. Phoenix gets 8 in.



Avg. Rainfall Modern Israel



Beersheba



Mitzpe Ramon (the Jewel of the Negev)

Why would I bring this up? It is for this reason. Whatever reasons Abram had for going to the desert, the text certainly makes it read like he stayed there a while in his tent. However, to move into a desert when there is plenty of water elsewhere in the country is a bit strange. Add that famines came regularly to an already very dry place, and it almost appears like this man was playing Russian Roulette. Is he deliberately trying to [sabotage the covenant](#)? Is there something about the people living here that he doesn't want to have anything to do with, something that makes him afraid, so he goes and lives far away from civilization like one of the desert father's on a pole for 50 years?

¹² Jewish Encyclopedia, “Negeb.”

¹³ One commentary says, “In the Negev, rainfall is minimal (averaging between four and twelve inches per year.” John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 73.

Now let me add one last point to this. **Nowhere do we read the LORD telling Abram to go down into Egypt.** This is sort of like his staying in Haran earlier. God didn't tell him to stay in Haran. That isn't necessarily a blemish in Abram, but when we read this in light of the later story where God specifically tells Isaac not to go down into Egypt when a similar famine hits in his day (**Gen 26:1-2**), it raises more eyebrows. Thus, Dr. Gonzales concludes, even from the beginning of this story it appears that Abram was moving out of God's revealed will. Notice that it is the "revealed" will, not the secret will of God (no one can be outside of that).

He seems to almost be tempting fate, or rather tempting God, though I realize it doesn't say that. But there can be no doubt that for what he does in where he moves that he ends up getting himself into trouble. I highly doubt that if he were living up in the foothills of Mt. Bashan, in what would later become the territory of Dan, that he would be in this predicament at all.

God in the Midst of Sin

Viewed in this light, one could almost conclude that the LORD was tempting him back, or rather **testing him**. In fact, many have said this. "**When I send a famine, what will you do then, Abram? When you go down into Egypt, what will you do then, Abram? Who will you trust? To whom will you turn?**" I believe there is fairly conclusive evidence from this story that **Abram trusted in himself**, he turned to his own autonomous imagination to get him out of a jam of his own making. It is Adam and Eve once more. This very quickly led him into sin.

If you still think I'm wrong about this, I want you to **notice one more person in this story**. Notice that He is someone who is never spoken to or turned to in the text. This is the LORD. **Is Abram asking God what he should do?** Is he staying in Canaan like he was told? No. Is he even offering up a prayer for help? I mean, if God would come to anyone and talk directly to him, it seems that this would be the guy, especially after he has just promised him his blessing—I will be with you, I will be your God. The silence is deafening.

Nevertheless, God does show up. Even when we aren't seeking him, he is seeking us. He knows exactly what is going on. He is not off somewhere else, too busy to take notice. He shows up in the story. He punishes Pharaoh and his household for Abram's actions. This doesn't quite seem fair, and yet we do not know enough to say that what Pharaoh did was itself acceptable. It may or may not have been.

But in this case, I don't believe the fairness or non-fairness is really the question. Rather, the question is, why is God doing this? Let me offer three suggestions. **First**, God must gain a name for himself. This has been the point of the

text since Shem came off the Ark. How does God do this here? He shows up as the **All Sovereign God**. What is Yahweh doing down in Egypt? You may not ask that question, but I guarantee people in that day would have. That territory belonged to Ra and the gods of Egypt. Yet, Yahweh is here in their land, and there is no mention of them here. They don't stop Yahweh. Neither can Pharaoh. Pharaoh is no match for him. God does exactly what he wants, even over one of the most powerful rulers in the world. You would do well to think on God's power here. Know that he is able to do anything he wants, wherever he wants, with any of the kings of the earth. How much more you and I?

Yet, do not divorce the naked power of the omnipotent God from his other attributes, especially his **faithfulness**. And so second, God has just promised Abram a great promise. He gave him a **covenant grant**. Abram hasn't explicitly done anything against Yahweh, which is why some can still interpret this in a positive light. I just think it makes more sense of the passage to read God rescuing the sinful Abram here than it does to turn Abram into some kind of hero. Besides, it is also more of a comfort to the faith of weak, sinful liars like us to realize that Abram isn't all that much different than we are. At least, that gives me comfort. As does God showing up. God's presence here is good news to Abram.

Because God has made a promise—a covenant grant, that promise must come true. But Abram has put that promise into serious doubt, for though he may have saved her life, there is no way as of this moment that he will have a child with her. Thus, it seems to me that **the LORD's intervention here is more about rescuing Abram and Sarai from their own stupidity** than it is punishing Pharaoh. The line will continue; the line must continue. God has sworn it. If God would wipe out the entire world in a Flood in order to preserve this promise, what's one little Pharaoh going to do to stand in God's way?

Of course, **God has preserved the line**. Isaac was born and his son was Jesus Christ. Thus, the faithfulness of God has brought salvation to the world. So the grace of God is actually hidden here in this punishment. In fact, this one tiny act of God makes all the difference between your damnation and your salvation, for without it, Isaac is not born, Jesus does not come, and you and I go to hell for our lies. Thus, the sovereignty of God is not first and foremost about asking sometimes unanswerable questions about God's fairness to an individual. It is about rejoicing in his covenantal faithfulness and abounding loving-kindness to his people. That is why we have gathered today, to worship our God for just these things.

Finally, these actions **foreshadow the troubles** that will later come to Israel. Abram does get "off the hook" so to speak, but look at the language of **vs. 19** again.

“Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.” Does that sound like another Pharaoh? It should. For this is what finally happens in the days of Moses after God plagues Egypt with ten great plagues, including Pharaoh’s own house, until finally he let the people go (“let them go” is the same word in both: *shalach*).

The point here is that sin still has repercussions, even if God is gracious. The the Exodus is coupled with the foreshadowing of Abram’s own actions and those of Joseph’s brothers later in the book, when they sell their brother and he ends up in Egypt. So never use God’s grace as an excuse to sin against one another, much less to sin against God, be it in a lie or any of the other commandments. Do not use the grace of God to tempt his kindness.

The story concludes with Pharaoh giving men orders concerning Abram. “And they sent him away with his wife and all that he had” (Gen 12:20). And thus, God has delivered Abram out of Egypt. The very first exodus! In response, as we come to the next story, Abram returns to Canaan where he begins to worship his new God anew. This must be your response every time you sin against him. Do not harden your heart in your sin, refusing to repent. Do not be afraid of God’s anger, thus also refusing to repent. But turn to him in the day of his mercy in Christ. For this is repentance. And God will continually wash you with his word, sanctifying you one step at a time, even in the midst of your sin, so that his glory might be revealed to all. And through this process, he will cause you to want to obey him all the more.