

THE FAILURE OF ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:10-20

INTRODUCTION

Lammily – A doll launched by Crowdfunder, comes complete with cellulite, acne, stretch marks and the proportions of the average teenage girl.

There are optional extra ‘physical flaws’ – freckles, glasses, blushing, bruises, dirt and grass stains.

In the same way, the Bible portrays the picture of the heroes of the faith with warts and all. This is not glossed over in Scripture. David is a classic example.

At this point in the text, nothing is revealed about pagan opposition to Abraham in the Promised Land. He built altars. He publicly called on the name of the LORD in worship. We know he is going into a land of hostility but the text is silent on any overt oppression or persecution.

The line of promise is threatened here. The threat is not from the outside. The line of promise is threatened from the inside.

Saving faith engenders obedience.

Saving faith does not guarantee obedience.

READ Gen 12:10-20

Proposition: We encounter:

I. Providence of God

II. Pragmatism of Man

III. Problem of Man

IV. Protection of God

So That: God **protects** us from **Satan**, the **world**, **circumstance** at times, and sometimes most importantly, from **ourselves**.

I. Providence of God Gen 12: 10

Point –Providential testing ground

Proof – Gen 12:10 – “**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.**”

Famines were (are) common in the Promised Land.

3 major ones in Genesis:

- **12:10** (Abram and Pharaoh)
- **26:1** (Isaac and Abimelech)
- **41:56** (Jacob/Joseph/Egypt)]

Also Ruth 1:1; 1 Kgs 17:1; Hab 1:10,11

Unlike Egypt (Nile), the agriculture of the Promised Land was **dependent upon rain**. Perfect land for the development of God’s chosen nation. It is dependent on the mercy of God.

Providence - The Shaper and Ruler of the destinies of history.

Being in the ideal place to serve God ... Being all there wherever God has you ... is not a guarantee against suffering.

Sin #1: Pragmatism

“**went down**” – in elevation, not heading South as we might think
“**sojourn**” – temporary

Abram was to go to the land that God showed them and remain there. He was to be steadfast and immovable on the promises of God and believe against all appearances that God will provide everything necessary for their fulfillment.

The problem is not the lack of bread. The problem is the lack of trust in God. This was not the first famine in the land flowing with milk and honey, and it would not be the last.

Abram learned to trust God in less demanding times, on the long journey to Canaan and during the months he wandered all over the land. But now, he must trust him now in tougher times.

Application – Sometimes it takes more faith to stay in Canaan than to get there.

Illustration - Recently, I was talking about the tremendous sanctifying influence in my life of my wife, Margie. I was immensely blessed and refined by Margie's reaction when she first learned that she had cancer. And I am ever more greatly blessed and refined by her steadfast and immovable spirit and trust through the trial.

Abram does not cast himself on God's provision. He chooses the easy way out; he goes for the provision of Egypt, and there he almost destroys his marriage and loses his life. The emigration was a confession of his failure to trust in the Lord.

Someone might protest, "But what do you do when there is a famine in that place?" You do what the thousands of people in Canaan did who didn't desert the land – many Canaanites didn't have the resources to travel far away to Egypt. They had to tough it out.

You barter for food and you search the valleys for springs of water and you cry mightily to your heavenly Father that he would provide your needs as he promises. You pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." You grow in strength when the heavens finally open and the drought ends and you survive. Christians live through barren times as well as revival times.

Illustration - It's like the Christian brother who said to another, "How are you doing?" The response, "I'm doing okay under the circumstances." The first is tempted to respond back, "Well what are you doing under the circumstances?"

Christians are supposed to be above the circumstances!

Illustration – David Brainerd, an American missionary to the Indians, was caught in a mighty storm which poured down rain and

soaked him. He found shelter in a hollow tree and lay there as the storm continued. He grew hungry but could not leave that shelter, and so he prayed that God would provide for him. After some time, a squirrel entered the space and left a pile of nuts in a corner. David was delighted to eat them. The storm was unabated for a few days, but on three different occasions the squirrel returned and left a heap of nuts for which Brainerd was delighted. When he got to his destination and described the provision he added the text, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.”

God knew that Abraham, his family, his servants and beasts all needed water and food.

We are often in the same predicament. God preached the gospel to us; “Get up! Leave this world and take up your citizenship in heaven. Come and suffer with Christ and you will be glorified with him.” God promised He will bring us to heaven in the end, and that the sufferings we meet on the way are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us. He has sworn that neither life nor death, neither angels nor principalities nor power, things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth nor any other creature shall separate us from his love in Jesus Christ.

The problem is, in weak moments, our lack of faith, our deficiency in trusting God will blind us to the love in Jesus Christ. We go in faith, but then trials come and we begin to doubt.

Application – Then we have to focus our faith in the work Christ has done for us. God’s providence will never guide us to where his grace cannot keep us. The ends never justify the means.

II. Pragmatism of Man Gen 12:11-13

Sin #2: Deception, Cowardice, Betrayal

Proof – **Gen 12:11-13** – “**And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, ‘See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; ¹²and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and**

they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.”

If you start to not trust God in one thing, you will soon start to not trust God in another thing ... and then another ... and then another. It is a very slippery slope.

Illustration – Sin is like snowball rolling down a hill - it gets bigger and bigger. One sin leads to another.

Abram’s pragmatic plan to survive back-fires. His life is in greater danger in Egypt than it was back in the famine of Canaan.

Sarai was 65. The life span in Patriarchal times was roughly twice ours today. **Sarah** died at 127. **Abraham** died at 175. **Jacob** thought 130 years were “few and unpleasant” (47:9). **Sarai** at 65 was probably 30-something by today’s standards.

v. 13 – “**so that it may go well with me because of you**”
Abram completely surrenders his honor and risks his wife’s body to save himself.

Abram might have schemed that he had time. Perhaps he thought prospective suitors would negotiate for the hand of his sister. Perhaps **Abram** thought he could buy time in negotiation for the hand of his “**sister**”.

But, his well thought out, pragmatic plans are laid waste.

III. Problem of Man Gen 12:14-16

Proof – **Gen 12:14-16** – “**And it came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵And Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.**

¹⁶**Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him**

sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.”

If David himself took a man's wife because she was beautiful it is not unexpected that the king of Egypt would take any woman he desires. This is how the lawless world operates.

Abram had been relying on himself to be strong enough to stall the suitors, and smart enough to outwit them, but in a moment it all came to nothing.

It is a great reminder for all of us, that if we play games with the world according to the rules of the world we will always lose. The weapons of our warfare are not of the world. We have other weapons which are mighty through God and the strongholds of Egypt will collapse before them.

Application - Never surrender principle for pragmatism.

Irony - Abram received his cowardly selfish desire

v. 13 – **“so that it may go well with me because of you”**

v. 16 – **“he treated Abram well for her sake”**

Abram loses Sarai and gains animals and servants - v. 16

“the woman” – vv. 14-15 - Sarai is not a person. She is an object.

The text implies **Sarai** is a willing participant (see also 20:5 – “And she herself said, “He is my brother.””). But the sin, the responsibility is with the man **Abram**. The buck stops there.

Half-truth – **Sarai** was **Abram's** half-sister. But the point here is **Abram's** cowardice. The reader of Genesis doesn't even find out **Sarai** is **Abram's** half-sister until Gen 20.

- 20:1-18 (Abraham)
- 26:1-11 (Isaac)

Application – The hero inside yourself will always let you down. You have to lift your eyes outside yourself and this world and put your hope in the living God.

Application – A half-truth is a full lie.

IV. Protection of God Gen 12: 17-20

Point – God’s unmerited favor. God’s mercy outruns man’s merit.

- Divine intervention
- Divine protection
- Divine rescue

God **protects** us from **Satan**, while we are in the **world**, through **circumstance** at times, and sometimes most importantly, from **ourselves**. And that is what God does here for Abram and Sarai.

Proof – **Gen 12:17-20** – “**But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.**

¹⁸**Then 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 commanded *his* men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.”**

God **protecting His chosen line** despite their **sins** and the **deception** - this is a recurring theme in Genesis. God acting in a manner to carry out His will.

Ezek 36:22 – New Covenant language - “Thus says the Lord God, ‘It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.’”

- Ezekiel rebuking the nation of Israel because of the spiritual harlotry
- Abram was profaning the name of the Lord by his cowardice.

Man’s failure will not stand in the way of God’s promise.

This sets the stage for the unilateral nature of the Abrahamic Covenant which is coming in chapter 15. The promises have already been laid out.

God says “I will,” period (four times in **12:2-3**). And God will do what He pleases to do to effect His will.

- 5 unilateral (or unconditional) covenants : Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly (Numbers 25), Davidic, New
- 1 bilateral (or conditional) covenant: Mosaic (Exodus 19, 20)

Pharaoh had seen what God does to those who curse Abram. Pharaoh has a fear of the Lord.

God can harden a pharaoh’s heart - in the case of Moses. And God can soften a pharaoh’s heart - in the case of Abram. All of this is part of His unfolding plan of redemption. The king’s heart is in God’s hand and he turns it wherever he wishes.

- Prov 12:1 “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord;”

The “father of the faithful” is rightfully **rebuked by a pagan**.

Sarai is referred to as:

11 – “**his wife**”

12 – “**his wife**”

14 – “**the woman**”

15 – “**the woman**”

17 – “**Abram’s wife**”

18 – “**your wife**”

19 – “**your wife**”

20 – “**his wife**” →this is communicating something - shame!

Whoa to us if we are rebuked by a child of Satan.

Notice Abram is silent here. No response to Pharaoh’s rebuke is recorded. The silence is poignant. It emphasizes Abram’s failures. Remember, Noah didn’t speak in Genesis until the end of chapter 9. In that case, his actions were good. They demonstrated his

righteousness. In this case, the actions are bad. And his actions speak louder than words.

Application – What does this do to your witness? Are there people in your life that you would not evangelize because of your lost witness?

CONCLUSION

So how does our story end? Abram leaves Egypt richer. Sarai's purity was preserved. This is great. All's well that ends well, right?? That is what the world might say.

Illustration – Remember the story I told back when we were studying Genesis 3? It was the story of the construction company that invited various contractors to submit bids for a major building complex. The contractor who submitted the lowest bid would get the job. The bids were submitted in secret.

One man came to submit his bid. He saw the bid of his major competitor lying open on the desk. The only problem was that there was a can of soda sitting directly over the most important figure in the document. Confident that no one was looking, he lifted the can quickly, intending to glance at the number and then put the can back instantly. So, he lifted the can from the desk hundreds of bb's spilled onto the desk and rolled onto the floor.

Unforeseen events had been built into the temptation. One single act had repercussions he could not have anticipated. The can of soda was not what it appeared to be.

Abram's ill-gotten gain plagued him with problems for years including his strife with Lot and his interaction with Hagar, who was very likely part of the "female servants" he received from Pharaoh. In fact, we probably see worldwide conflict today as a result of these undeserved riches. Turn on your TV and you will see in the news consequences of this sin.

Ezekial 36:22-27

11/23/14

