

Abraham Goes Down to Egypt

Genesis 12:10-20

Genesis 12:10-20 - *“Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, ‘Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. ¹² Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that may live because of you.”*

¹⁴ So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. ¹⁵ The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. ¹⁸ And 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’? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way.” ²⁰ So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.”

Background Notes

The second half of Genesis 12 is not a pleasant chapter in Abram’s life. In a time of severe famine in Canaan, Abram went down to Egypt where there was food. Egypt has the Nile River for irrigation, so it isn’t as dependent on rain as much as the rest of the area. Verse 10 indicates that Abram did not intend to live there permanently; he just planned to live there until the famine was over. Some commentaries say that Abram was just using his common sense – if there’s no food in the land, go where there is food. However, the Lord had promised to take care of Abram in the Land, famine or no famine, so it probably was a lapse of faith that took Abram down to Egypt. The Scripture doesn’t reveal that Abraham consulted the Lord about the move, and Hebrews 11 (the great faith chapter) does **not** say that “by faith Abraham went down to Egypt in a time of famine”!

In any case, Abram was certainly wrong to lie about Sarai, his wife, in Egypt. According to Genesis 20:12, Sarai actually was Abram’s half-sister - but it was still a lie. Even the pagan Pharaoh saw it as a lie.

Abram’s motive for telling the lie was self-preservation, and he told it at his wife’s expense! *“Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his*

wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you" (v11-13).

Abram probably reasoned that if any man in Egypt desired Sarai, they would try to negotiate a deal with her supposed brother, and Abraham would be able to stall for time and escape. Little did Abraham expect that the Pharaoh himself would desire Sarah, and take her right into his harem - without any negotiations!

By the way, at this point Sarai was at least 65! Genesis 17 says that she was 10 years younger than Abraham, and Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran (v4). In case you're wondering why Pharaoh would want a 65-year-old woman in his harem – well, for one thing, we don't know how old Pharaoh was at the time. Maybe Pharaoh was 80 - who knows? Another reason is that people in that day lived longer and didn't age as quickly as we do today.

This event has some parallels with the Israel's sojourn in Egypt during the time of their bondage and Exodus. During a time of famine, Jacob's family went down to Egypt for food. Years later Jacob's descendants came under the control of a Pharaoh and needed divine protection. There were plagues against Pharaoh, even in his household, and then Pharaoh asked the Jews to leave and return to their Land. Do you see the parallels? Perhaps, many years later, this story from Abram's life was an encouragement to the Jews when they were in bondage in Egypt.

Doctrinal Points

1. God never approves of lying as a means of protection for the believer.

In these verses we see the snowballing negative effects of Abram's lie. It was a bad testimony before Pharaoh. Sarai was put in danger. Pharaoh's household suffered from a severe plague. Abram was rebuked by an unbeliever. These negative effects didn't have to happen, because **God did not need Abram's lie to protect him and his family!** God never approves of lying as protection for the believer.

But, you may say - What about Rahab in Joshua 2? She lied about the two spies, and God spared her life and blessed her household. Yes, but the Bible never says that God condoned Rahab's **lie!** Notice that Rahab was commended for her **faith**, but never for her lie (Hebrews 11:31). **God did not need Rahab's lie to protect the spies.** God never approves of lying as a means of protection for the believer.

Now you may be thinking, "What if we were hiding Jews in Nazi Germany, and the police came to our door and asked, 'Are you hiding Jews?' Should we tell the truth and let the Jews be captured and sent to the death camps, or should we lie to protect them?" I would say that we should **follow the biblical model of our Lord Jesus** here, and look for a "third alternative" answer. The Lord Jesus never chose "the lesser of two evils." **The Lord Jesus never lied to protect Himself - or anyone else.**

The Lord Jesus lived in a real world, with all the same dilemmas that we may be face, and yet He **always** did the right thing. We are to follow the model He set for us. The Lord was constantly questioned by people who opposed Him, and many times He didn't answer with a Yes or No. He often chose to answer with a "third alternative" such as, "By whose authority do you ask me that question?" or "Let me ask **you** a question." Remember those cases? Sometimes He chose not to answer at all!

So if we were hiding Jews in Nazi Germany we could choose to say to the police, "By whose authority do you ask me that question?" or even, "I refuse to answer that question." These answers might mean that we would be killed (as our Lord was), and the Jews might be killed as well. But God expects us to do the right thing - and then leave the results in the His hands. **God does not need our lies to protect us (and others)!**

Christians do not all agree on this point, and there's certainly more to discuss on this subject, but I believe the Bible teaches this doctrinal point: **God never approves of lying as a means of protection for the believer.**

2. God **sometimes** rescues the believer from the consequences of foolish mistakes.

"But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife" (v17). Most likely these plagues upon Pharaoh were a means by which God preserved Sarai's purity, because she had actually been taken into Pharaoh's harem. Notice that Pharaoh said, *"I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way" (v19).* This verse indicates that God stepped in and saved the day before Sarai was defiled. As Abraham was rescued from the consequences of his foolish mistake, so God can rescue us from the consequences of our foolish mistakes.

Notice, however, that the doctrinal point says that God **sometimes** rescues believers from the consequences of foolish mistakes. There are plenty of biblical events in which God did **not** rescue believers from their foolish mistakes. Sometimes we (and those we love) must live with the sad consequences of our foolish mistakes.

So think and pray through the major decisions of life that you're facing right now. God is a gracious God, and many times He steps in and gets us "off the hook," but you **may** have to live with sad consequences of a foolish decisions. God **sometimes** rescues the believer from the consequences of foolish mistakes.

Practical Applications

1. Let's not forget the "Hagar factor."

In chapter 16, Abram made a terrible mistake when he took Hagar as a concubine. Hagar was Sarai's Egyptian maid. Where did she come from? *"He [Pharaoh] treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male*

and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.” There’s a good chance that Abram and Sarai acquired Hagar from Pharaoh while they were in Egypt. So while God rescued Abraham and Sarah from the consequences of their foolish mistake in going to Egypt, the “Hagar factor” should not be forgotten. Even when God graciously rescues us from our foolish decisions, there may be lingering problems – “Hagar factors” - that are the results of our mistakes. Sometimes the results of Hagar factors are life-long.

Have we picked up any “Hagars” along the way, as a result of our foolish decisions? Hagar was from Egypt, and in the Bible Egypt is always a picture of the world. What worldly habits we have picked up along the way as a result of foolish decisions or mistakes? What about the easy-to-acquire worldly habits of materialism or a desire for success? Be very careful. These “Hagars” could become the means of disrupting and even destroying our homes and families. Let’s not forget the “Hagar factor.”

2. Let’s not have to be rebuked by an unbeliever!

Pharaoh, an unbeliever, had to rebuke Abraham for his deception. What a sad testimony! This can be true in the lives of Christians as well. What a bad testimony it is when an unbelieving boss has to rebuke a Christian employee for being late to work too often or taking long coffee breaks.

What a negative witness for the Lord when unbelieving neighbors have to rebuke a Christian for not cutting his lawn, or letting his property become a mess. What a sad testimony it is when an unbeliever has to rebuke a Christian because the Christian is cheating in some way. Let’s not get ourselves into a situation where we will be rebuked by an unbeliever!