

TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Talk Genesis 12:10-20: Abraham's Goes Down to Egypt

Lesson 27

"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 I 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 had the Nile River for irrigation, and didn't need to depend on rain as much as the rest of the area. Verse 10 indicates that Abram did not intend to live there permanently, but just to sojourn there temporarily until the famine was over. Some commentaries say that Abram was just using his common sense and doing the right thing -- 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. We don't read of Abraham consulting the Lord about the move, and we don't read in Hebrews 11 (the great faith chapter) 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, when they went down to Egypt. According to Genesis 20:12, Sarai actually was Abram's half sister -- but it was still a lie. Even Pharaoh saw it as a lie.

Abram's motive for telling the lie was self-preservation, at the expense of his wife. Look at verses 11-13: *"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 I may live because of you."*

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 realize or expect that Pharaoh himself would desire Sarah, and take her without any negotiations, take her right into his harem! By the way, do you know how old Sarah was at this point? At least 65! We learn from chapter 17 that she was 10 years younger than Abraham, and verse 4 of our chapter says that Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. You might be wondering why Pharaoh would want a 65-year-old woman in his harem. Well, one possible reason is that we don't know how old Pharaoh was at the time. Maybe Pharaoh was 80 -- who knows? However, all jesting aside, another reason is that people in that day lived longer and didn't age as quickly as we do today.

One more background note. This event has some parallels with the later sojourn of Israel in Egypt during the time of bondage and the Exodus. There was a time of famine, and the family of Jacob went down to Egypt for food. Then came the control by Pharaoh, and need for divine protection. Then there were plagues against Pharaoh, even in his household, and then Pharaoh asked the Jews to leave and return to the Land. Do you see the parallels? Perhaps this story from Abram's life was an encouragement to the Jews many years later, during their time of 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 Abraham's lie. It was a bad testimony before Pharaoh. Sarah was put in danger. The household of Pharaoh suffered from a severe plague. Abraham had to be rebuked by an unbeliever. God never approves of lying as a means of 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**, not 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.

But 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 the Jews? 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." He never lied to protect Himself -- or anyone else.

The Lord Jesus lived in a real world with all the dilemmas that we can be involved in, and yet He always did the right thing. We are to follow the model of our Lord Jesus. Many times when the Lord Jesus was questioned He didn't answer with a Yes or No. He 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 maybe if we were hiding Jews in Nazi Germany we should choose to say to the police, "By whose authority do you ask me that question?" or even, "I refuse to answer that question." This might mean that we would be killed (as our Lord was), and the Jews may 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)! All Christians do not agree on this point, and there is certainly a lot 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 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 is an indication 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.

Have any of you been rescued from the consequences of your foolish mistakes? I remember we were rescued from the consequences of a foolish decision concerning a house that we had bought. We never prayed enough about that decision. Looking back on it now, we believe we made a mistake -- but God bailed us out!

Notice, however, that the doctrinal point says that God **sometimes** rescues believers from the consequences of foolish mistakes. There are plenty of biblical examples, where God didn't rescue believer from their foolish mistakes. Sometimes we must live with the consequences of our foolish mistakes. So think through your decisions; think 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 the consequences of a foolish decision! God **sometimes** rescues the believer from the consequences of foolish mistakes.

Practical Applications

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

When we get to chapter 16, we'll see that Abram made a terrible mistake. He took Hagar as a concubine. Who was Hagar? Hagar was Sarai's Egyptian maid. Where did she come from? Look at verse 16 of our chapter: *"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 result of our mistakes.

Are there any "Hagars" that we have picked up 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 about worldly habits that we have picked up along the way as a result of foolish decisions or mistakes? What about the easy-to-acquire worldly habit of materialism? We need to be very careful. These "Hagars" could become the means of disrupting and even destroying our homes and families if we are not careful. Let's not forget the "Hagar factor."

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

Abram had to be rebuked by Pharaoh, an unbeliever, for his deception. What a sad testimony! The same is true in our lives. What a sad testimony it is when a Christian employee has to be rebuked by an unbelieving boss for being late to work too often, or taking too long on coffee break. What a sad testimony it is when Christians are rebuked by unbelieving neighbors because they never cut their lawn, or let their 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 have to be rebuked by an unbeliever!