

ABRAHAM GOES DOWN TO EGYPT

TEXT: GENESIS 12:4-20

INTRODUCTION:

1. Last week we saw how the LORD called Abraham out of his home in Ur of the Chaldees (12:1).
2. Abraham was told to leave his home, his family, and his country and to embark on a life of pilgrimage to the promised land.
3. Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."
4. On his journey to the promised land, Abraham stopped off at Haran, and he stayed there until the death of his father Terah (11:31, 32; 12:4, 5).
5. Genesis 12:6 says, "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem (later called Shechem), unto the plain of Moreh..."
6. In Genesis 12:7 we find the first visible appearance of God. This is called a "theophany." Before God's voice was heard. Genesis 3:8 says Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."
7. But in Genesis 12:7, the LORD appeared to Abraham.
8. And here Abraham built an altar, the first of many (12:7; cf. vs. 8).
9. This tells us what kind of man Abraham was, what his priorities were, etc. All of the altars in the Old Testament pointed toward the cross of Christ, and there are no altars after Calvary.
10. Abraham's altar of prayer and supplication represents his dependency upon God. Genesis 12:8 says, "And there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD."
11. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."
12. After building his second altar, Abraham packed up his tent and continued on his journey (12:9).
13. Abraham's tent (12:8) and Abraham's altar symbolize our walk in separation with God.
14. By the altars of Abraham we learn that Abraham was a worshipper, and by Abraham's tent we learn that he was a pilgrim.
15. This brings us to Genesis 12:10, where we read, "And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there..."

I. ABRAHAM WAS TESTED

II. ABRAHAM WAS BACKSLIDDEN

III. ABRAHAM WAS REBUKED

I. ABRAHAM WAS TESTED

1. As we walk by faith, we need to keep our eyes on the Lord because there will be unexpected problems, trials and troubles. There were two things in the promised land Abraham did not expect to find there --- the Canaanite and famine (12:6b; 10).
2. God allowed these things in order to test Abraham. Abraham was tested several times in his long life (as we all are tested from time to time). Abraham's most difficult test came later, in Genesis 22.
3. Abraham passed that test in Genesis 22 because he had advanced in his walk with God. But it's obvious that here in Genesis 12 that Abraham's faith had not yet reached maturity.
4. James 1:3 says, "Knowing this, that the trying (testing) of your faith worketh patience."
5. "And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt..." (12:10). This is the first mention of famine in the Bible. God often sends famine in order to test people. Psalm 105:16 says, "Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread."
6. Jeremiah 29:17 says, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence..."
7. During the coming tribulation period, God will first send seven seal judgments, followed by seven trumpet judgments, and then seven vial judgments.
8. When the third sealed is opened, Revelation 6:5 says John saw a black horse representing famine, followed by the fourth seal and a pale horse, "and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him" (Rev. 6:8).
9. In addition to the first reference to famine, Genesis 12:10 has the first mention of Egypt in the Bible. In the Bible, Egypt is a picture of the world.
10. Revelation 11:8 says the dead bodies of the two witnesses "shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified."
11. John Phillips said, "What *Egypt* was to Abram, the *world* is to us...(its) wealth, its wisdom, its wickedness, its worship, are all alluring. Egypt looked very attractive to Abram as a place where his need could be supplied. He had forgotten God" (*Exploring Genesis*).
12. W.G. Heslop said, "Pharaoh did his best to keep God's people in Egypt, and Satan will do his best to keep us in the world."

13. The *Scofield Study Bible* says, "The resort to Egypt (the world) is typical of the tendency to substitute for lost spiritual power the fleshly resources of the world, instead of seeking, through confession and amendment, the restoration of God's presence and favour."
14. We see warnings in the book of Isaiah about going to Egypt for help: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help...Woe to the rebellious children...that walk to go down into Egypt...and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion" (Isaiah 30, 31).

II. ABRAHAM WAS BACKSLIDDEN

1. Sadly, there is no mention of Abraham praying and asking the LORD about moving to Egypt (12:10).
2. When I preached about Noah's sin, I mentioned that this was evidence that the Bible was the inerrant Word of God, because a book written by men would leave out embarrassing details about great men and women. Here we see Abraham backslide by going down into Egypt, and then lie in order to save his life.
3. The Bible tells the truth about the men and women. In modern vernacular we would say, "It tells it like it is," the unvarnished truth.
4. The Bible says Sarah was very beautiful and Abraham was worried that the Egyptians would kill him and steal Sarah, a common practice in that day (12:11, 12).
5. This has puzzled students of the Bible because Sarah was 65 years old at the time. However, it should be noted that Sarah was an 127 years old when she died. And since the length of span of Sarah's life was considerably longer than our span of life, it may have been that though she was 65 years of age, she may have looked as if she were only about 35.
6. In any event, the Bible says she was "fair" (12:11) and "very fair" (12:14). The Hebrew word translated "fair" means "beautiful."
7. For example, the same word is used to describe Rachel. Genesis 29:17 says, "Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured."
8. Furthermore, the Egyptian princes thought she was beautiful (12:15).
9. In a moment of weakness, Abraham suggested that Sarah should say that she was his sister instead of his wife (12:11-13).
10. This was a half-truth, because Sarah was his half-sister. They had the same father, but they had different mothers. (cf. 20:12).
11. But a half-truth is still a lie.
12. "The ends justify the means" is the philosophy of the Jesuits, and it is contrary to Scripture. Our ends and our means both must be right.

13. Abraham was selfishly thinking only of himself, and not considering Sarah's chastity. She could have been seduced by Pharaoh or other Egyptians, and Abraham would have been powerless to stop them.
14. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, Abraham "had journeyed all the way from Ur of the Chaldees, and yet could not trust God with his wife or with his own life. How small great people can be! How weak strong men can be! How bad good people can be!" (*Genesis*).
15. What Abraham feared had come to pass (12:14-16). Sarah was taken into Pharaoh's house, presumably into his harem.
16. Abraham's life was spared, but Sarah's honor was endangered.
17. Abraham's life was spared, and Pharaoh treated him well for Sarah's sake, giving him gifts of sheep, and oxen, etc. (12:16), but Abraham could not enjoy these gifts, knowing his wife was now part of Pharaoh's harem.
18. Abraham received sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels -- but he lost his wife.
19. In Genesis chapter 11, and in the beginning of Genesis 12, we see that Abraham was a separated man. He separated himself from the idolatry of Ur of the Chaldees, and walked the pilgrim pathway to the promised land.
20. But now we see Abraham is no longer a separated man, but a compromiser. Sadly I know many Christians (even Baptist pastors) who used to be separated, but are now compromisers.
21. Despite Abraham's compromise; despite Abraham's sin; despite Abraham's failure, the LORD graciously intervened before it was too late (12:17-20).
22. The LORD would not allow His promises to Abraham to be frustrated or His will unfulfilled. God had already promised Abraham -- "And I will make of thee a great nation" (12:2).
23. Regarding Sarah, God said to Abraham, "And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her" (17:16).
24. Therefore, it was therefore necessary for the LORD to rescue Sarah.
25. Back in verse 2, the LORD told Abraham, "Thou shalt be a blessing." But because of his cowardice and dishonesty, Abraham wasn't a blessing to Pharaoh and his house (12:17)!
26. Many people suffer on account of one man's sin. First of all, it must have been a frightening experience for Sarah to be dragged off into Pharaoh's house, not knowing what could happen to her.
27. Furthermore, "the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife" (12:17).

III. ABRAHAM WAS REBUKED(12:18-20)

1. Finally Pharaoh found out why he was being afflicted with plagues. How he found out the Bible does not say. Perhaps Sarah told him.
2. And so Pharaoh called for Abraham and he rebuked him (12:18-20).
3. As Pharaoh rebuked Abraham for his deceitfulness, Abraham stood speechless (12:18-20).
4. It is ironic. Here in this sad story the heathen king seems more honorable than the famous man of God!
5. It is tragic when a believer is rebuked by an unbeliever. We must be very careful to guard our testimony.
6. John Phillips said, "One can almost hear Pharaoh turn to his courtiers as Abram and Sarai slunk away..., 'Well! If that's an example of a believer, may I never meet another!'" (*Exploring Genesis*).
7. We see a similar situation in the book of Jonah, when the heathen shipmaster rebuked the backslidden prophet, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God" (Jonah 1:6).
8. Ephesians 5:15 says, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." Abraham was not walking circumspectly. He acted foolishly.
9. Pharaoh scornfully dismissed Abraham, "Now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way" (Genesis 12:19b).
10. Merrill Unger said, "A wayward child of God is a liability to sinners; they are glad to be rid of him."

CONCLUSION:

1. I mentioned earlier that the famine recorded in Genesis 12 was Abraham's first test, but a greater test came later (Genesis 22).
2. It's been said that Psalm 22 shows us what Calvary meant to God the Son, but Genesis 22 shows us what Calvary meant to God the Father.
3. What does Calvary mean to you?