

Abraham in Egypt

Text: Gen. 12:9-13:4

Introduction:

1. Egypt is a picture of the world in the Bible and God's people were warned against leaning upon it. Take the following two verses from Isaiah as an example:
 - Isaiah 30:1-2 "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: **That walk to go down into Egypt**, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!"
 - Isaiah 31:1 "**Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help**; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because *they are* many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; **but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel**, neither seek the LORD!"
2. Abraham's sojourn in Egypt was not blessed of God and represents a lapse in his walk of faith. It serves as a very powerful and relevant warning to believers of the danger of neglecting the walk of faith for a life of accommodation with the world.
3. We will consider this period of Abraham's backsliding in Egypt in three segments.

I. THE RESORT TO AN EGYPT SOJOURN (VS. 10)

A. The Motivation towards an Egypt Sojourn (Vs. 10a & c)

1. The Adversity of Canaan – "a famine"
 - a. The Moment of the Trial.
 - i. It came in the context of God's leading. God had clearly led Abraham to this place. He was in the will of God and now facing a significant trial! Our natural reaction in such circumstances is to doubt and even feel God has somehow failed us. Stay where God led you unless God clearly directs you otherwise.
 - ii. It came in the context of God's promises. God had promised to bless Abraham in multiple ways, including by giving the land of Canaan to his descendants. A famine in the land of promise represented a big test for Abraham. Trials can test our faith in God's promises! The Christian life is not a life exempt from trials but a life sustained through trials.
 - iii. Far too often we assume that the walk of faith, backed by all the glorious promises of God, will be a life of ease. In reality, the life of faith is often confronted with trials and tests. These tests, if responded to correctly, can become great victories of faith where we prove the faithfulness of God.

Begin with God - Genesis Series

- iv. Tests often follow triumphs. John Butler writes, “One of the times or seasons in which trial often comes to us is right after we have had some great spiritual victory or mountain peak experience. So it was here with the timing of this trial in Abraham’s life. The trial came right after Abraham had reached a new high spiritually in his life. He had obeyed the Lord and come to the land of Canaan. Beware of the peril of post-victory and post-blessing problems.”
- b. The Magnitude of the Trial – “the famine was grievous”. Before we quickly dismiss Abraham’s dilemma, try and appreciate what this trial represented for him.
 - i. Abraham was from the well-watered pastureland of Mesopotamia. Canaan was more subject to famine due to its greater reliance upon seasonal rainfall.
 - ii. Abraham had livestock, servants and a wife to care for. We get the sense from verse 5 that Abraham was a man of reasonable means.
 - iii. We need to remember that big trials can be a blessing in that they develop our faith and also become occasions for the display of God’s power on our behalf. But to stay and trust is a real discipline and requires much grace from God!
- 2. The Attractiveness of Egypt
 - a. Egypt appeared to offer what Canaan lacked at this time – sustenance and relief from the famine. Egypt looked like the easier way! The world often appears to offer an easier way to the Bible way. But it’s all smoke and mirrors, a mirage that soon gives way to sand and nothingness. We find out that the world’s way is not the easy way after all.
 - b. Egypt appealed to natural wisdom. Like Ur of the Chaldees, it was a fertile area with a better food supply. It made good sense to go to Egypt from a logical point of view! One thing we learn from Abraham’s life is this; taking matters into your own hands never ends well!
 - c. Abraham allowed himself to be led by circumstances. The circumstances favored a move to Egypt but making a decision based on circumstances alone is a very dangerous game!
 - d. Abraham was also led by the drive for self-preservation. This is also a danger as God’s way is self-denial rather than self-preservation.
 - e. “Abraham was called to go to Canaan, not Egypt. He was, therefore, safer in Canaan in the midst of the worst of famines than in Egypt in the midst of plenty.” (Butler)

B. The Direction of an Egypt Sojourn (Vs. 10b)

- 1. Egypt was “down” in a topographical sense. Canaan was literally “higher ground” to Egypt. It was always “up” to Jerusalem.
- 2. Egypt was “down” in a spiritual sense. A move towards the world is always a downward move spiritually no matter how well it is rationalized and appears on the surface. A move in the direction of

Begin with God - Genesis Series

the world is always a move away from the higher ground of the separated, consecrated life of faith.

3. Is it any wonder God's Word warns us, "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17)

II. THE RESULTS OF THE EGYPT SOJOURN (VS. 11-20)

There are at least 8 consequences of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt.

Running from problems doesn't solve them; you just trade one set of problems for another! The same consequences can be expected for the believer who neglects the walk of faith and relies on the world. The Egypt sojourn is marked by:

A. Faithlessness – Abraham is now being guided by the wisdom of the natural man rather than by the wisdom of God's Word. A shift to Egypt (the world) represents an abandonment of the walk of faith.

B. Prayerlessness (Vs. 8) – there is no mention of the altar of prayer or of Abraham seeking God in earnest for direction and guidance. The Egypt life is marked by an absence of a real prayer life.

C. Fearfulness (Vs. 11)

1. Fear quickly replaces faith in Abraham's walk. He lost the peace that comes with the walk of faith in the center of God's will. His whole sojourn in Egypt is full of fear from start to end. Wiersbe writes, "Once in Egypt, Abraham faced a new set of problems; for if you run away from one test, you will soon face another...Abraham soon discovered that he had been better off dealing with the circumstances in Canaan than with the people in Egypt."
2. The closer Abraham got to Egypt the more he felt uneasy – "it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt". It began to dawn on Abraham that Egypt wasn't such a safe place for his family after all! From a distance it looked so good but as he got closer, he couldn't help but feel the change in atmosphere. The environment was different to Canaan!
3. Things can appear to be going very well initially when a believer moves towards the world. When you ask them how they are doing in their new "Egypt Evangelical Church", they are quick to tell you how WONDERFUL everything is going in their lives since they left Canaan Baptist Church! But the passing of time has a way of revealing the hidden dangers of the world and sad reaping in the life eventually comes.

D. Self-centeredness (Vs. 11b-13)

1. The Egypt sojourn represents the self-life in place of the Christ-centered, crucified life.
2. Notice the emphasis on self – "they will kill me" (Vs. 12), "well with me" (Vs. 13), "my soul shall live" (Vs. 13). Abraham's primary focus is on preserving Himself rather than on rescuing his wife. He should have put his wife first instead of himself. A spouse out of God's will

Begin with God - Genesis Series

can bring untold trouble into a marriage. This is specially true of the husband as head of the home.

3. One author (L.E. Maxwell – Born Crucified) wisely observed that the flesh is the “I” specialist. We discover:
 - a. In our service for Christ, self-confidence and self-esteem.
 - b. In the slightest suffering, self-saving and self-pity.
 - c. In the least misunderstanding, self-defense and self-vindication.
 - d. In our station in life, self-seeking and self-centeredness.
 - e. In the daily routine, self-pleasing and self-choosing.
 - f. In our relationships, self-assertiveness and self-respect.
 - g. In our education, self-boasting and self-expression.
 - h. In our desires, self-indulgence and self-satisfaction.
 - i. In our successes, self-admiration and self-congratulation.
 - j. In our failures, self-excusing and self-justification.
 - k. In our spiritual attainments, self-righteousness and self-complacency.
 - l. In our public ministry, self-reflection and self-glory.

E. Deceitfulness (Vs. 11-13)

1. Abraham again leans to his own understanding to try and deal with the threat that now loomed over his marriage. He concocts a half-truth which was calculated to deceive. A half truth is calculated to lead the other person to a wrong conclusion; in short, to believe a lie. If what you are doing requires the use of deceit, mark it down; you are out of the will of God!
2. Sarah simply claiming to be Abraham’s sister would give the impression she was unmarried. Abraham’s selfishness again highlighted as giving the impression he was not married to Sarah would lead the Egyptians to conclude she was available to be someone else’s wife! This is exactly what happened.
3. We also note that Abraham is not exercising proper headship in his home. He led his wife into Egypt but now he wants to hide behind her and make her responsible to spread the untruth to cover for him.
4. Worldly men tend to be selfish and also poor leaders (passive).

F. Vulnerableness (Vs. 14-15)

In Egypt, there was a very real danger to:

1. Abraham’s life. For Abraham, this was in the physical realm but it also included his spiritual life. The world has a way of strangling our spiritual life down to a bare glimmer of its former self. A true believer cannot be lost but he can get into a pretty bad state if he stays in a backslidden state.
2. Abraham’s wife. Abraham almost lost his wife and marriage in Egypt. They might have got close initially over their mutual compromise and their deceitful plan but it was short lived! If it hadn’t been for the direct intervention of God, Abraham would have lost Sarah to another man and probably have disappeared from the pages of history.
3. How many Christian marriages have been destroyed during an Egypt sojourn? Sadly, more than many realize. Canaan

Begin with God - Genesis Series

(representing the victorious life of faith) is a much safer place for marriage and the home than Egypt.

G. Prosperousness (Vs. 16)

1. Egypt was not without its positives from a worldly perspective. Abraham did very well materially all the while he was declining spiritually. The rewards of disobedience may look nice on the surface but in reality, they bring heartache.
2. Henry Morris wisely points out, "It often seems at first that a compromise between the methods of the world and God's will and promises works out very well. Following the criteria of the practical world system will often prove profitable because of the pragmatic nature of that system. Christians who follow this path may easily misinterpret the prosperity that follows such a compromise as a confirmation that this was, after all, God's leading; and they may become quite satisfied with the situation. Until, that is, God finally has to deal with them in chastisement, forcing them out of the compromising position back into the walk of true faith."
3. Warning: Do not mistaken material prosperity to automatically mean spiritual prosperity! Remember that "all that glitters is not gold". The Egypt sojourn is marked by materialism. Abraham came out of Egypt with his wealth significantly increased (See Gen. 13:2) but that wealth caused him way more problems that it was worth. It led to the division between him and Lot (Gen. 13:5-6). The time in Egypt also left its mark on Lot who chose the Sodom in part because of its likeness to Egypt (Gen. 13:10). And sadly one day during another lapse of faith, Abraham would marry Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant, brining division and sorry into the home (Gen. 16).
4. If it comes down to a choice, much better to be rich spiritually and poor materially (compare Smyrna Vs. Laodicea in Revelation 2-3). Griffith Thomas notes, "A crust with God is better than a feast without Him." C.H. Mackintosh adds, "It is better to starve in Canaan, if it should be so, than live in luxury in Egypt. It is better far to suffer in God's path, than be at ease in Satan's. It is better to be poor with Christ, than rich without Him."

H. Shamefulness (Vs. 17-20)

1. Abraham's testimony was compromised in Egypt. Instead of bringing blessing to Egypt, he brought God's judgment on Pharaoh and his household.
2. Abraham drew a well-deserved rebuke from a heathen king. It is a shameful and sad thing when a man who has been given a high calling from God requires a rebuke from an unbeliever. It should have been the other way around! Sometimes the unsaved behave better in some instances than the backslider.
3. While Pharaoh evidently came to fear Abraham's God, Abraham's poor testimony meant that Pharaoh would not turn to his God.
4. The Egypt sojourn is marked by powerlessness in the area of personal testimony and witness. Worldly Christians lose their zeal to reach the lost.

III. THE RECOVERY FROM THE EGYPT SOJOURN (VS. 1-4)

Praise God the story ended well for Abraham and should encourage every backslidden Christian that recovery from spiritual decline is possible if you truly desire it. Failure does not have to be permanent! Let's trace Abraham's spiritual recovery and how it applies to us:

A. The Path of Spiritual Recovery (Vs. 1)

1. Abraham "went **up out** of Egypt". Compare this with Genesis 12:10 – "and Abram went **down into** Egypt".
2. This was the first, critical step to spiritual recovery. You've got to get OUT of Egypt. You take the step back in the direction of higher ground and expect the power of God to come to your aid to speed you on your way.
3. If you are honest, you will likely recognize the fact that God's chastening hand has been upon you while you were compromising with the world. We see clear evidence of God's chastening hand on Abraham.

B. The Place of Spiritual Recovery (Vs. 3)

1. The Fellowship Place – 'Bethel' (Vs. 3a).
 - a. The word 'Bethel' means "house of God". Bethel was a special place in Scripture. God met Jacob at Bethel twice and even called Himself "the God of Bethel" (See Gen. 31:13; 35:1, 15).
 - b. The word 'Hai' means ruin, heap of ruins. Hai (same as Ai) would become a place of defeat later in the life of Israel under Joshua's leadership. Ai also represents the danger of leaning on human wisdom rather than seeking God in faith. Without reading too much into the meaning of these two words, we can at least make an application that a believer is always faced with two choices – the house of God and spiritual blessing or the world and spiritual ruin.
 - c. The New Testament "house of God" is the New Testament church. 1 Timothy 3:15 "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in **the house of God**, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." The Christian who wilfully neglects the New Testament house of God (local church) is a worldly Christian. They reveal by their actions that their heart is really in Egypt.
 - d. Beware of forsaking the house of God during a time of crisis! Times of trial are times to stay close to God's house. Attend church regularly and faithfully unless you are **Providentially** hindered from doing so. There is spiritual safety in the House of God!
2. The Former Place
You have to think about where you left your first love and return back to that place.
 - a. The Former place of Separation – "unto the **place** where his **tent** had been **at the beginning**" (Vs. 3b). The tent represents the life of separation as a stranger and pilgrim. The solution for compromise with the world is renewed separation from the world.

Begin with God - Genesis Series

- b. The Former place of Supplication – “unto the **place** of the **altar**, which he had made there **at the first**” (Vs. 3b). The return to the altar represents a return to an effectual prayer life – “and there Abram called on the name of the LORD”. It’s time for a return to personal prayer, family prayer and corporate prayer (church prayer meetings).
- c. Christ’s rebuke to the Ephesian church highlights the same pattern we see in Abraham’s recovery. Revelation 2:4-5 “Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left **thy first love**. Remember therefore **from whence thou art fallen**, and **repent**, and **do the first works**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Christ’s instruction for spiritual recover is to Remember, Repent and Renew (do the first works).

Conclusion: Have you drifted from the walk of faith into compromise with the world? Will you, like Abraham, make a decision today to return from wandering in Egypt to walking with God?