

MOVIN' ON DOWN

GENESIS 12:10-20 NOVEMBER 17, 2021

In the classic *Simpsons* episode *You Only Move Twice*, Homer gets a taste of wealth and success. He's hired to be an executive at a power plant in a new city and, at first, everything seems to be going great. The family gets a big, new house. Homer's salary and social status increase. But all is not well. Marge and the kids suffer in the new location and Homer's boss turns out to be a Bond-style super villain, bent on world domination. As the episode closes, the Simpsons return back home and their lives are able to pick back up from where they left off, a little the worse for wear.

Last week we saw Abraham begin his walk of faith. He traveled through Canaan - the land God promised to Abraham's descendants. Abraham's story is full of moments where his faith was tested. Ours will be, too, as we walk with the Lord, not because God is cruel or insecure, but because He continually refines and toughens and trues our faith, bringing us forth as gold - pure and enduring, malleable and beautifully reflective¹ of God's glory.

Abraham wasn't perfect. That's good news because we aren't either. As we dedicate ourselves to trust God and follow Him we're able to learn from the examples of those who came before us and learned important lessons. One of those is set before us tonight.

Genesis 12:10 - ¹⁰There was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to stay there for a while because the famine in the land was severe.

Famines were a common feature of these lands. They are particularly problematic when you live in a time with no reliable food storage solutions and lots of flocks and herds that need to graze.

Abraham will make some significant mistakes in this text, but that isn't to say this wasn't a serious problem. It was. The sheep needed food *today*. The pressure was real. Given the circumstances, Abraham made the decision to leave the land of promise and, instead, go to Egypt. You see, Canaan was dependent on rainfall to feed the land while Egypt had the stability of the Nile river.²

We can see Abraham *trying* to remain faithful yet falling victim to a *huge* mistake in his decision-making process. He only intended to stay in Egypt "for a while." He knew that, in the long run he should not settle in Egypt but be in the land God had shown him.

His mistake was that he was only figuring in physical circumstances in his calculations. We don't see him go to his altar and petition the Lord. We don't see him travel north, through Canaan to try to find relief within the boundaries that God had given. Instead, he uses human reasoning to try to escape his problems. It is always a mistake to be driven by your earthly circumstances. God has called us into a dynamic, love-relationship with Him and He has gone on record to say that *nothing* can separate us from that love. Not affliction or distress or persecution or nakedness or danger or

¹ <https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/gold/incomparable-gold/gold-properties>

² Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

sword or famine.³ But to love God means to obey what He has said and to seek *Him* instead of using our own schemes to live our lives. He knows the way forward, we (so often) do not.

Genesis 12:11 - ¹¹When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, “Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are.

Abram has got it all figured out, hasn't he? First, “we'll only go down ‘for a while.’” Now, before they cross the border, he pulls his wife aside and explains the *rest* of his plan. He starts by telling her how beautiful she is. While this is an attempt to sell her on his strategy, it wasn't untrue. Sarah was, apparently, fantastically beautiful, even in her sixties. But beware when you're being buttered up!

Genesis 12:12 - ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ They will kill me but let you live.

Human reasoning can be so silly. “We *have* to go to Egypt so we don't die...of course when we get to Egypt I'll probably die!” Then why go? Abraham seems to be focused most of all on his flocks. His wealth is his top priority. We'll see him *trade* his marriage for the security of his possessions. He's willing to leave the place God had led him and go to a place *full* of idolatry - a place *he himself* considers to be incredibly dangerous. “But, there will be water and water means grass and grass means the sheep will be ok.” But what about the *spiritual* ramifications? What about the *relational* impact of this decision? What about the distance it creates between him and God's will?

We can easily bring this up to date for modern application. We live in the land of opportunity. You have lots of things you *could* do. But learn this lesson from the Bible: Your career, your wealth, your social status or achievement or power, those things are not worth losing your family or drifting out of the will of God. You may get an opportunity to do something that promises a big payoff, but if it means you have to sacrifice your family's spiritual health to do it, then *don't* do it.

Genesis 12:13 - ¹³Please say you're my sister so it will go well for me because of you, and my life will be spared on your account.”

He dumps all of this onto his wife. He says, “They're going to kill me *because of you* so, *you* need to join me in this lie and it's the *only way* my life can be saved.” While it was technically true that Sarai was Abram's half-sister, his plan is *clearly* to deceive. If you're married, don't tempt your spouse. Help your spouse to *not* sin. Help them to walk by faith. Be partners in avoiding temptation and growing strong together.

Abraham says, “so it will go well *for me*.” But what about Sarah? What's going to happen to her? Because Abraham's focus is on earthly things - he's forgotten his spiritual life for the moment - he's willing to do things he knows he shouldn't do. This is what having our minds on the things of earth

³ Romans 8:35

will do. It leads us to compromise. As Bruce Waltke puts it, Abraham's mentality became "Better defiled than dead."⁴ But that's never the right mindset for a believer.

Genesis 12:14-15 - ¹⁴**When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.** ¹⁵**Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, so the woman was taken to Pharaoh's household.**

It's immediate disaster! Obviously this isn't what Abraham wanted, but *what did he think was going to happen?* Some think that Abraham was hoping to ride out the famine and when suitors would come to court Sarah he'd be able to put them off - like Laban will later with Jacob.⁵ But people like Pharaoh don't need to negotiate.⁶ They take what they want. Still, we can't say that Abram should've been *surprised* by this turn of events. One source explains:

"Since Abram's group had many people and animals, they had to be given special permission to live and trade in Egypt. Important economic and political contracts in the ancient world were sometimes finalized by the weaker party giving a woman to the leader of the stronger party."⁷

This is the first use of the word "praise" in the Bible.⁸ It's the word from which we get "hallelujah." This first usage is the Egyptians praising Sarah. The Bible reveals that human beings are made to worship. "Praise" means to exalt, to be deeply thankful for, and to find satisfaction in lauding the greatness of something or someone.⁹ You and I are made to praise but the *object* of our praise is up to us. When we turn our worship from God, we invariably try to find our satisfaction in things that cannot last: Things like beauty or pleasure or status or temporal achievement. Apart from God, man also tends to worship whatever belongs to someone else. That leads us to do things we ought not do. Look at Pharaoh. Did he *really* need one more woman in his harem? No, but when we worship things that are *not* God, our hearts are *drained* of satisfaction and thankfulness. When we worship the Lord, the opposite happens - we're *filled*.

Genesis 12:16 - ¹⁶**He treated Abram well because of her, and Abram acquired flocks and herds, male and female donkeys, male and female slaves, and camels.**

On paper, Abraham's doing great. He avoided financial disaster in Canaan, his family gets to see an exotic locale, he's added a bunch of capital to his portfolio, his wife won a beauty contest, and he's even on friendly terms with the king! Of course, that's all a matter of perspective. *We* know what's *actually* important, and so we read this and we wince and say, "No, Abraham! Don't do this!" Why? Because we know that Abraham has made a serious mistake. God had made it clear that *He* wanted to be the Sovereign Provider for Abraham and his family. But Abraham must've feared God wouldn't come through. So, like the Israelites in First Samuel, he decided to get himself a human

⁴ Waltke

⁵ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

⁶ *NET Study Bible Notes*

⁷ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

⁸ Henry Morris *The Genesis Record*

⁹ *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

king to provide for him. But, the cost was steep. He forfeited his wife. He made plenty of money, but all these gains are polluted. Warren Wiersbe points out that everything he gets from Egypt ends up causing trouble for him.¹⁰ He has *too many* possessions, which leads to strife with Lot. He picks up Hagar the slave, who will end up figuring into another sorry misadventure. And we can speculate that the largess of Egypt awakened in Lot a carnality that eventually led him to Sodom.

Our choices impact others and they impact our future, sometimes in profound and unforeseeable ways. This is why we need an eternal Navigator. We need the light of the Word to direct us.

Genesis 12:17 - ¹⁷ But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Abram's wife, Sarai.

If Abraham wasn't going to protect his wife, God most certainly would. It was through Sarah that the Deliverer would come, so God made sure she was safe. There's a contrast between Abraham's selfish focus on the here and now, material state and God's great vision. God is concerned for Abraham *and* Sarah *and* their future beyond this famine *and* the future of their kids *and* the future of the nation of Israel *and* the future Hope for all humanity. He has quite a big picture in mind.

So, when God comes to us and gives us clear directions, they are for very good reasons. When God says, "I want you to married people to stay married and I want you to connect with a local church Body and I want you to honor authority and I want you to control your thought life," it's not because we have to do those things to *earn* salvation. That price has already been paid. God gives us commands and confines because He is able to see all of the ramifications of our choices and He says, "I want to fulfill certain *good* purposes in your life and *this* is the way it must be done."

God is so serious about His will for His people that He will, when necessary, fight against the earthly obstacles Himself. He sent fierce plagues on Pharaoh and his house. Now, on one hand, it's nice that the Lord picked up the slack left by Abraham. But, on the other hand, there's a sad aspect to how this all shakes out. God's plan was for Abraham to be a *blessing* to the people of the world. Here, because he's out of the will of God, he's become a curse to them.

When Christians stop living a Spirit-filled life, when we stop walking by faith according to the truth of God, we become a detriment to unbelievers around us. Think of the church at Corinth. Paul points out in his first letter to them that, because of their unbiblical behavior, they were full of scandal. The unbelievers around them thought they were crazy. They were seen as cheats, bringing disgrace on the name of Jesus.¹¹ When Christians act in unchristian ways it drives people away from the Lord, it doesn't entice them to believe. This is exactly what happens with Pharaoh.

Genesis 12:18-19 - ¹⁸ So Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She's my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and go!"

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe *Be Obedient*

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5:1, 6:8, 14:23

When Pharaoh learned the truth *he* has to send for Abraham! Meaning, Abraham wasn't planning a jail break. He wasn't trying to figure out how to fix his mistake. He traded one famine for another. Sure he had grass now, but he's in a *spiritual* famine, a relational famine, an evangelistic famine.

Pharaoh speaks sharply to Abraham. In the text Abraham remains silent - he has no excuse or defense when Pharaoh asks 'Why?' When we make life decisions, we need to be able to answer *why*. Why are we choosing what we're choosing? Why are we doing what we're doing? If the answer is like Abraham's - I'm doing this purely out of fear or for material gain - then we need to turn back to God and see what *His* choice for us is. Chances are, He's already revealed it to us.

Genesis 12:20 - ²⁰Then Pharaoh gave his men orders about him, and they sent him away with his wife and all he had.

We're glad they're getting out of Egypt, but this was an embarrassing day. They're being *deported* - perhaps at the edge of a spear.

So, what *should* Abraham have done? It's easy to criticize the mistake, but we should consider what the *correct* choice would've been at the start of chapter 12. Because that's where we live, right? As I said at the beginning - the famine was real. The trouble was serious. And, as Bible students we know that later on God will purposefully *send* His people to Egypt to escape a famine. So how can this help us learn how to navigate our own circumstances when we face tough choices?

When making decisions, particularly the big life decisions like we see in this text, we can ask ourselves two questions to help us discern the will of God: What has God *said* and how has God *led*? In Abraham's case, God had specifically asked him to *leave* a certain land and *go to* a certain land. If you're going to make a significant decision concerning your home life, your community, the trajectory of your career, first ask what God has said. Has He given guidelines for your situation? In many cases He has. And then ask, "How has God *led*." There are a lot of things you *could* do, but *could* is not the same as *should*. In Genesis 12, Abraham *could* go to Egypt, but shouldn't have. In Genesis 46, Jacob *could* go to Egypt and he *should*. Why? Because God told him, "Don't be afraid to go down, because I'm going to go *with* you." God was leading.

Instead of going to Egypt, what should Abraham have done? We don't know. Maybe the Lord would have miraculously provided for him. Maybe God would've "opened his eyes" to see an oasis of provision, like the Lord will do for Hagar in chapter 21. Whatever the right thing to do was, it would not have led to strife with his wife, strife with his nephew, strife with his neighbors, and strife with himself. The choice to run to Egypt did all those things. The next time we see Abraham and Lot, their houses are quarreling. The next time we see Sarah, she's angry at God and gets in a fight with her husband. It's all thanks to this Egypt business.

God's way is the way to provision, and to peace, and satisfaction, and to a thriving life, spiritually and relationally and evangelically. Let's head that way, pursuing that upward call in Christ Jesus.