

# **BFFs FOREVER**

## Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 12:10-13:4

Topic

Fearing for his life in Egypt, Abraham asks his beautiful wife Sarah to lie and tell everyone she is only his sister

Title

*"Sister Act"*

### Introduction

One of my favorite lines from *The Little Mermaid* is when Sebastian says to Ariel, "You're under a lot of pressure down here."

We say it in our family whenever we want to communicate that we're feeling a little stressed from the pressure of certain circumstances.

We all feel pressure from life's circumstances. The question is, What do we do to relieve the pressure?

Abraham was feeling pressure. Finally in the Promised Land, he faced a severe famine. He had a lot of mouths to feed. He decided to relieve the pressure by altering his circumstances. He left the Promised Land for Egypt.

*Big mistake!* He should have stayed in the land realizing that the famine was a pressure-test of his faith.

When you and I are in difficult circumstances the first thing that comes to mind is to get out of them - to alter our circumstances. It can be a big mistake. Instead we might want to consider that it is a pressure-test of our faith.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Pressure-Relief Should Not Be Sought By Altering Your Circumstances, and #2 Pressure-Relief Should Be Sought By Sacrificing At Your Altar.

#1 Pressure-Relief Should Not Be Sought  
By Altering Your Circumstances  
(12:10-20)

Abraham was definitely under a great deal of pressure from his circumstances:

- His wife, Sarah, was barren and they were without any children
- His father, Terah, had recently died
- He was the head of a rather large household and was responsible for their survival
- He was living in the midst of godless, immoral Canaanites who looked upon him with suspicion at best and malice at worst

I wish I could say things were about to improve for him. *They were not!*

It's not a good idea to try to encourage people who are in difficulties by telling them that things are going to get better. Sometimes things get better, **but often they take a turn for the worse.**

It's not about circumstances getting better but about our focusing on the Lord in them. Romans 8:28 assumes that we will be in dire circumstances but that all things will, indeed, work together for the good as we look to the Lord.

Genesis 12:10 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.

“Abram” is Abraham. God will change his name in a little while.

After five years of delaying, Abraham had finally obeyed God and moved into the Promised Land. You'd think God would greet his obedience with milk and honey. Instead Abraham faced a “severe famine.”

God **does** want to prosper you for your obedience - but not necessarily in a material way. Real prosperity, real wealth, is spiritual in nature. It is knowing God in a deeper, more intimate way. We can be rich in faith, but it will require that our faith be tested in order to come forth as gold.

A barren wife... A death in the family... Surrounded by godless idolators. Abraham was holding up pretty well in all these troubles. "**Now** there was a famine in the land..."

"Now" - while Abraham was already being tried, there came another trial. It is a word of precise timing - of God's precise timing. In God's dealings with Abraham, "now" was the ideal time to test him with the famine.

It could be that he was holding up in his own strength and that God added weight until Abraham was in a place where his own resources were insufficient.

One author noted, "Given our talent set, experience, and education, many of us are fairly capable of living rather successfully (according to the world's standards) without any strength..." from God.

That being true, God must keep adding weight until we are at the point our own resources fail. It's a place of decision. Will we walk by faith?

Abraham would stumble in this trial; his faith would fail. There is no mention of his seeking the Lord on the decision to go to Egypt. There is no mention of a tent or of an altar the whole time he is in Egypt - the two objects that are symbols of Abraham's walk of faith. Abraham was acting on his own - choosing to change his circumstances without God's clear leading to do so.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that you can never, ever change your circumstances. That is both untrue and a tremendous burden to bear. What I am talking about are those circumstances in your life that you know to be God's sovereign circumstances for you but that you would rather see changed on account of the difficulty of remaining under them.

How do you know when your circumstances are a trial to remain faithful in? **Go back to God's last instructions to you.** If Abraham had done that, here's what he would have discovered:

Genesis 12:1 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you."

Genesis 12:7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

God's last instructions to him were to go to the land that He had promised him. The difficult circumstances he faced in the land were by themselves not a sufficient reason for Abraham to move. Going down into Egypt to avoid the famine was not a part of God's leading. It was a natural choice on Abraham's part in order to get out from under the difficult circumstances he found himself in.

By the way, it made sense, did it not, for him to go to Egypt? Would we not have given him that counsel? This stuff isn't just about us. It's about how we encourage others.

What were God's last instructions to you? It's important that you remember them! You may soon find that the land that seemed so promising has a famine in it. Difficult circumstances are not a sufficient reason in themselves for you to move in a new direction. Whether you remain faithful in difficult circumstances or take a disastrous excursion into Egypt can depend upon your confidence in God's last instructions to you.

"Egypt" is, of course, a real place, but it also has a symbolic meaning to believers. In Isaiah 31:1 we read,

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, And rely on horses, Who trust in chariots because they are many, And in horsemen because they are very strong, But who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, Nor seek the Lord!

Egypt symbolizes a dependance upon the world or upon ourselves rather than looking to the Lord for help and leading. It symbolizes the natural, logical way to relieve pressure. But it is *not* the spiritual way and any excursion back to Egypt will take its toll.

Genesis 12:11 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.

Genesis 12:12 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.

Genesis 12:13 Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."

“Sarai” is Sarah - also shortly to receive her new name. She would have gotten the senior citizen’s discount at *Denney’s* but she was blessed with unusual beauty. *Or cursed with it!* Her beauty made her attractive in the wrong way.

We try to encourage girls by telling them that it’s their inner beauty that matters. It comes across as a concession to girls that aren’t very attractive! Truth is, attractive girls maybe need to hear this even more. Sarah was beautiful but in the New Testament she is praised for her inner beauty.

The commentators seem to be in agreement that Abraham’s life was, in fact, in jeopardy. Abraham went to Egypt to save his life all the while knowing that he would be in grave danger.

When we try, on our own, to relieve the pressure of our circumstances, often we merely exchange one set of pressures for another. Our own plans are filled with fatal flaws.

The custom in those times was to negotiate a dowry with the father or brother of the woman you wished to take as a wife. If the Egyptians saw that Abraham was Sarah's husband, he reasoned they might murder him. As her brother they would perhaps approach him with hospitality rather than homicide! He may have supposed that he could drag out the dowry negotiations until the famine in Canaan was ended.

Sarah was indeed a half-sister to Abraham. In Genesis 20:13 Abraham goes on record saying that he asked Sarah to participate in this half-truth everywhere they went. It was their cover-story while wandering through the land.

Do we sometimes come up with a cover-story? I think we are tempted to whenever we don't want to appear as though our lives are somewhat foolish because we are walking with the Lord. We can do this among nonbelievers but also in conversations with believers.

Bill O'Reilly calls it 'spin.' We put a spin on our lives to make them seem either more normal to nonbelievers or more spiritual to believers.

*Abraham was right about the Egyptians wanting Sarah!*

Genesis 12:14 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful.

Genesis 12:15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house.

Abraham didn't take into account that Sarah might catch the eye of the Pharaoh himself. There would be no lengthy negotiations prior to Pharaoh's taking her. He had the power to take her and the wealth to compensate her brother afterwards.

Genesis 12:17 But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Genesis 12:18 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?"

Genesis 12:19 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."

Genesis 12:20 So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

The nonbelieving Pharaoh acted better than the believing pilgrim!

People often compare their works of righteousness with those of Christians and come out looking better. Regardless of their respective works, Abraham was saved by grace through faith and Pharaoh was not. Salvation is not a matter of comparison; it is a matter of conversion. Your salvation is not a matter of works of righteousness; it is a matter of grace.

The challenge of his circumstances seemed too great for Abraham's faith and, so, he chose to **alter** his circumstances rather than remain at the

**altar.** The result was a disastrous excursion into Egypt during which he compromised his testimony, his marriage, and his integrity.

The challenge of your circumstances is often great. It is all too possible for you to choose to alter your circumstances. There is always an Egypt to which you can flee.

When you do find yourself in Egypt, take heart: When you are faithless, God remains faithful!

#2 Pressure-Relief Should Be Sought  
By Sacrificing At Your Altar  
(13:1-4)

The Beatles gave good advice when they sang, "Get back to where you once belonged."

Abraham returned to the Promised Land, to Bethel (v3), and, significantly, to the place of his altar.

Genesis 13:1 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South.

One commentator wrote, "*Back to Bethel* is the rallying cry for all who have wandered from the Lord."

Genesis 13:2 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Wait just a minute. **You mean that Abraham avoided the famine and came out of Egypt far wealthier than before?** Yep.

When we are in Egypt we can seem to be prospering and we can even think that it is God prospering us because we are so resourceful.

But at what cost are we prospering? Abraham lost his testimony, he lost his integrity, and he almost lost his wife. "Livestock, silver, and gold" are no substitute for the testimony of a godly man who leads his family in the ways of the Lord.

When we sin, God's grace abounds, but we should never conclude that we ought to sin so that it will. I'm certain that when we talk to Abraham in Heaven he will tell us he regrets his time spent in Egypt. It was a spiritual setback.

Genesis 13:3 And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,  
Genesis 13:4 to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

It is not said he came to the altar but "to the place" where it had stood. It's possible it was no longer standing.

- Maybe it fell by itself from disrepair
- Maybe it had been destroyed by the Canaanites
- Maybe it was demolished by Abraham himself before he left for Egypt

We don't build altars anymore. Instead we are described as living sacrifices to the Lord. Our lives - every aspect of them - are to be dedicated to worshipping and serving Him.

We can still suffer from disrepair, destruction, and demolition.

- Living sacrifices fall into disrepair when we withhold those things God is asking from us
- Living sacrifices can be destroyed, in a sense, by too much compromise with the world
- Living sacrifices can be demolished by our own decisions, discouragements, and depressions

I see Abraham standing where his altar had once stood reflecting upon his excursion into Egypt. He realized he ought to have remained in the land - realized that the famine was a test of faith.

There in the rubble he had made of his altar God met him as Abraham sought after Him.



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God had not changed. His Word had not changed. His promises were sure and certain. Abraham could build another altar and continue on his pilgrim journey.

I don't want to be Abraham in Egypt. Do you?

*Of course not!* Therefore, unless you have a compelling spiritual leading to alter your circumstances, don't. Embrace them; endure them.

Be the living sacrifice.

