

Onwards and Downwards to Egypt

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Great to be here with you again. If you have a Bible with you, while I'm getting this set up, we're looking at Genesis chapter 12 and starting at verse 10 this morning.

If you're using the church Bibles, I think it's page 13 in the church Bible. So Genesis chapter 12 and starting in verse 10 down to verse 20 to the end of the chapter.

Now there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife.

Then they will kill me, but will let you live. Say that you are my sister so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.

[1 : 06] When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh and she was taken into his palace.

He treated Abram well for her sake and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants and camels.

But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife, Sarai. So Pharaoh summoned Abram.

What have you done to me? He said. Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister so that I took her to be my wife?

Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go. Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men and they sent him on his way with his wife and everything that he had.

[2 : 08] So we started last week back in to the book of Genesis and we took up looking through the life of Abraham. Rob started us off last week with God calling Abraham out of his hometown of Ur and to go to a land that God was going to show him.

And remember back to that, that this was a man who likely didn't know a whole lot, if anything, about God, about Yahweh. He was most, you know, he most likely worshipped the God that was in that city at the time, the moon God called Nana.

And what you see or what we did see last week was this really amazing scene of where, in a sense, you know, this foreign God, Yahweh, comes to Abram and tells him to come follow him to a land that he's going to show him.

And what's really amazing is this man, Abram, believes God. He believes Yahweh and he goes against the tide and he follows the Lord. And, you know, I imagine it wasn't an easy decision, as Rob talked about last week and, you know, thinking about all that he was going to have to give up and all that he was going to have to leave behind.

You know, especially imagining people asking him, you know, where are you off to? And, you know, he would have to say to them, well, I don't actually know yet. You know, God's going to show me.

[3 : 37] I have no idea where I'm going, but I trust that he's going to show me and he's going to lead me and guide me. And so we saw Abram, a man who was full of faith and a man who went, even though he had no idea where he was heading off to or the journey that he was going to take.

Yet he was still willing to step out and trust God. He was willing to take God at his word and to trust in God's promises.

And so we see that, you know, this journey, it sets off in great fashion. Abram's spirits are high and he gathers everything that he has and he strikes off a road at 75 years old.

And he makes his way across the land until he arrives at a place called Shechem. And the Lord appears to Abram. And again, Abram sets off and he arrives into this place called Bethel and he pitches his tent down in verse 8.

And we finished off last week in verse 9, seeing that he builds an altar to the Lord and he calls on the name of the Lord. And so we finished last week on a high where Abram is trusting God and he's leaning on him and he's calling on his name.

[4 : 53] And everything seems to be going well until we come to these verses here this week. And we see immediately down here the first verse we read down in verse 10.

And we see disaster. A famine strikes. And, you know, it must have been going on for quite a while because he says that the famine was severe.

And so, you know, a famine wasn't something that just happened overnight. It wasn't something that, you know, Abram went to bed one night and the grass is all green and everything was growing away grand. And then the next morning, everything was gone.

No, generally, there would have been two times in the year where there would have been rain. And so during this rainy season is when you would plant your crops for the next year.

But if one of those rains didn't come, you were goosed. There was, in a sense, no point in planting because there was no moisture to be able to germinate the seeds.

[5 : 57] And even things that grew perennially, like grass for the cattle, this was going to start to wither. And there was going to be nothing for all Abram's livestock to eat.

And so Abram, he's probably in this sort of situation where, you know, the wheat, the flour, whatever he had, was starting to get a bit low. And he looks out at all his livestock and he sees the grass is starting to turn a bit yellow and there's not a whole lot for them to eat.

And, you know, they're starting to moo louder and louder wondering, where is my green grass all gone? And he has nothing for them. He's nothing to feed them with. And Abram was a wealthy guy. He had, it seemed, a lot of possessions and money and everything. But gold and silver, it's no good to you if you've no food, if you can't get any food or flour or grass or anything like that.

And so the question is for Abram, you know, what is he going to do at this point? And he hears about down in Egypt, there's plenty of food, there's plenty of water, there's plenty of grass and all the rest of it.

[7 : 11] And his head is turned by it all. And the question is, what is he going to do about it? You know, what is the decision he's going to take? You know, is he going to turn to the Lord and ask him for guidance?

Or will he just do whatever he thinks is best in his own mind? You know, was he going to build an altar like he had done before? And was he going to call on the name of the Lord like previously? Or was he going to do whatever was right in his own eyes? And it's a similar question, I think, that each one of us must face in our own lives too. Because when a similar situation like Abram's comes to our lives, what are we going to do?

And, you know, it could be literally a famine where we're struggling, where you're struggling to put food on the table or to pay the bills or the mortgage and everything else that comes along with it. You know, it could be a famine in your heart where, you know, maybe when you first became a Christian, you were on fire for God, for the Lord. And you loved him and you were doing everything for him.

[8 : 16] And then suddenly now it all feels a bit, it's all right, kind of everything is going away. Okay, kind of. But you feel kind of just that famine in your heart towards God.

And I'm sure we can, you know, all think of different situations that you have gone through or are going through. And you're struggling to see a way ahead. And like Abram, you know, you maybe hear of a solution coming from an Egypt.

You know, you could see a TV ad. You could see something on social media, on TikTok or Facebook, or you hear something from a friend or a family member. But the question is really, where do your priorities lie or where are you going to turn to first?

You know, will you listen to your own heart or to what others say? Or will it be to what God has to say to you? And that's not to say that we shouldn't listen to what others say.

You know, we should. We should listen to other people's advice. And we read books, we read articles, we read different things to give us advice.

[9 : 29] But when it all comes down to it, our most trusted advice must come from what God says. And good advice will always back up what God says.

And if it doesn't, then it's bad advice. And so in those times of making decisions in our lives, often difficult ones, like Abram had to hear, our priority must be to turn to God first.

What does God have to say about it all first? But as you read through this, you get the sense here that Abraham, he skips that step.

And instead, he looks to his own advice and he does what he thinks is right in his own eyes. You know, there's no mention of calling on the name of the Lord or looking to God for guidance.

You know, God has brought him into the land of Canaan that he's shown him. And when trouble hits, Abraham decides to get out of there and head to the land of plenty, to Egypt.

[10 : 30] And when you go against God's word, or, you know, at the very least, if you don't ask him for help or advice, you know, it's a very slippery slope from there down.

And this is what we see here with Abram. Because as soon as he gets to the outskirts of Egypt, he hits a problem and he starts to worry. Because he knows that his wife, Sarai, is a very beautiful woman.

And he knows that Pharaoh can take her into his court and into his harem if he wished to. But he also knew, during that time, Pharaoh could take any woman he wanted into his court, into his harem.

But the thing was, if she was a married woman, he had to kill the husband first before he could get her in. And so this is what Abram's worried about. He's worried, well, if he, you know, if Sarai's noticed, she's a very beautiful woman.

If she's noticed, Pharaoh's going to take another look at her and probably take her away. And I'm going to be gone. I'm going to be killed off. And so you see Abram's dilemma here.

[11 : 36] He's afraid for his life and rightly so because he knows what could and what very possibly will happen to him once his wife, Sarai, is spotted.

And again here, you see from Abram a lack of consultation with God and a lack of looking for guidance and help. And instead, you see again, his instinct is to do what he thinks is best in his own eyes.

And in his own eyes, he decides to lie about it. Or at the very least, he decides to be deceptive. And so he tells everyone as he enters Egypt that Sarai is his sister rather than his wife.

You know, which is, it's a half-truth because she was a half-sister to Abram. So it really was a half-truth, I suppose. But in reality, it was a lie.

And Abraham knew it. And it seems like he panicked and he would do anything he could at all to save himself. And I think it reminds us that as soon as we leave God out of the picture, it's a very, very slippery slope.

[12 : 46] And we all know this because, you know, as soon as you start to make an exception to tell one half-truth, a lie is likely not very far behind.

You know, or if you start to let a couple hundred euros off your taxes this year, it's very easy to let a couple of thousand next year off your taxes. Or if you get annoyed at someone or bitter with someone in your heart about something, you know, it's a very slippery slope to seeking revenge on that person and to getting really angry with that person.

And so every sin in our lives must be dealt with at the very beginning. Or else it'll start to take root and grow and grow.

And, you know, the easiest time to pull a weed in a garden is when it's small and its roots are shallow. And like that, the easiest and the best time to fight sin in our lives is before it starts to take a hold.

Before it starts to put down deep roots into our hearts. And this is what you see here with Abraham. This lie didn't come out of nowhere. You know, this lie all stemmed from the fact that he failed to trust God.

[14 : 02] And he failed to take God at his word. And he failed to believe in God's promises for his life. You know, back at the start of chapter 12, God had given him all these promises and what was going to happen to him.

And he failed to take control of those promises that God had given him. And similarly, for us, if you're a Christian, if you see that your own heart is full of anger towards someone, or full of lust, or greed, or bitterness, or pride, or whatever it is, it's not something that's appeared out of nowhere.

It all stems from somewhere. And it stems from the exact same place that it stemmed with, with Abraham. You know, Abraham didn't trust in God's promises and didn't take God at his word. And it's the exact same for us. The fact that you're angry or bitter or greedy or proud or whatever it is, is because you haven't trusted in the promises of God.

You've not taken him at his word. You know, like, for example, if, you know, you're feeling angry towards someone because they've hurt you in some way, they've said something to you, or they've done something to you.

[15:16] You know, one of the promises that God gives us is, he says, Don't take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

And so when we feel anger and we want revenge on someone because of something they've done to us, that's not taking God's promise. God says, leave it to me, I will deal with it.

Don't worry about it. And if we don't take hold of that promise, then we are not trusting in God's word. And it's a slippery slope from there. Or, you know, it could be you're worrying about how you're going to pay all your bills.

And you're just worried about this and that. And God tells us, Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your father's care.

And even the very hairs in your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. Or Philippians 4.19, My God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

[16:23] And if we take hold of those promises that God has given us, that helps us to break free from worrying about things or how we're going to get through this and that.

And I'm sure in some of our lives, we do have those, I would say in all of our lives, we have something or another where we're worried about or there's something going on in our hearts. And it's about, are we trusting and taking God at his word and the promises that he's given us?

And, you know, this whole book is so full of promises and we forget so easily all these promises that he's given us. But let's go back to Abram.

And if you look at the face of it from Abram's point of view, you know, he seems to be getting away with it, doesn't he? I mean, he hasn't asked God for directions or guidance.

You know, he's told a lie and we see what happens. Look, you know, verse 16, the result of it is, Pharaoh treated Abram well for her sake and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants and camels.

[17:30] I mean, put yourself in Abram's shoes. This couldn't have gone any better, could it? You know, things, you know, they're not going well in Canaan.

There's famine. And so he comes down here. He lies about his wife and everything he does prospers. You know, I'd say he was happy out with himself, really, if we're being honest.

And yet, when you dig deep down into it, we see the result of Abram's lie on other people. In the next verse, in verse 17, it says, But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife, Sarai.

And here you see Abram was happy out on one side of it all, and he was prospering away. But on the other side of it, because of Abram's sin, Pharaoh and his household are being inflicted with diseases.

And it's a lesson to us too, isn't it? Because very often, when we sin, when we tell that lie, when we look at another person with lust or anger or bitterness towards someone, you know, we can often think, look, sir, it's not really affecting anyone else.

[18:45] They're not being affected by it. You know, I'm not doing anything to actually hurt them or take revenge on them. I just have these feelings in my own heart.

But the reality is, Abram might have thought that here, and yet his sin was having consequences for other people. And so we need to be careful.

And these verses, they're a very strong warning to us, I think, that our sin can and will impact those around us, either directly or indirectly.

And so it must be a constant battle to keep on picking out those weeds of sin before they start to take hold in our hearts.

But somehow, you know, in the story, we see finally Pharaoh, he suspects something is up and he finds out. And we don't know, you know, how he finds out, but somehow he does.

[19 : 41] And he summons Abram into his court and he tells, why have you done this to me? And Abram is caught out. He's caught absolutely rotten. And Pharaoh finds out and he exposes Abram's lie.

And in the end, he orders his men and he throws Abram and Sarah and everything that he has out of Egypt. Now, you know, Pharaoh could easily have had Abram killed for all that he'd done to him, for all the trouble that Abram had caused him and brought in Pharaoh.

But yet, what do we see here from this story? And we don't, I don't think you see it directly, but if you stand back and look at it from afar, you see how God is watching over Abram through it all. You see how despite Abram's ignoring God and lying in everything that has gone on, God has still been with Abram through it all. And what's interesting to me is God called Abram to the land of Canaan where he knew there was going to be famine.

He brought him to a land where he knew it was going to test and stretch Abram's fate. You know, he could have brought him to the land of Egypt and made that the land that he was going to give him.

[20 : 54] And God could have done that and could have given him the land of Egypt and the River Nile and, you know, this very fertile land, which would always have had plenty of water to irrigate crops.

But he didn't. He brought Abram to the land of Canaan where he was going to have to rely on God to provide those rains to fall. He was going to have to rely on God to provide for all his needs.

And when that famine came, you know, when that time, you know, which I'm sure was a very hard and stressful time, when it came, Abraham or Abram relied on himself and on his own judgment and on what he saw fit to do rather than looking to God and to his instructions.

And I think, through it all, we see God still watching over Abram and bringing him through it despite his mistakes, his missteps, his sinfulness.

And, you know, it reminds me of kind of like, you know, a parent is looking at a child to make a mistake and you see them doing the wrong thing.

[22 : 04] And there's two types, two different things that a parent can do and sometimes they will intervene and sometimes they won't. You know, if a child, you're in a swimming pool or something and the child, you know, goes off and they're getting out of their depth, you know, generally, you will, as the parent, see that they're struggling, you will dive in and bring them back to safety.

But then there's other times where you won't intervene and you will, you know, it could be maybe with their homework or something, you're doing their, you're helping with their maths or something. I remember going through a long division with our daughter and trying to get her, help her to be able to learn how to do it.

And there was a certain way of how we showed her how to do it. And she'd get so fed up doing it our way, she couldn't work it out. She'd end up kind of trying to do it her own way and she'd end up with the wrong answer and she'd go around and try another way and it'd be wrong.

And eventually she'd learn that she couldn't do it by herself. She had to come back to us and ask us for help again. And so by us letting her make that mistake, she learned to trust us and to trust our words and that, you know, when we showed her how to do it, that following our instructions was probably the best way of doing it.

And similarly, I think God, sometimes he intervenes in our lives and sometimes he intervenes very, very directly. And if you read through the Bible, you know, you'll see many, many examples of God directly intervening in people's lives.

[23 : 39] But here you see in this, in these verses, God doesn't intervene. And you see him letting Abraham learn on his own that maybe, you know, maybe trusting God's idea and God's plan is a better way to go than trying to do it on my own way.

And I think you see that lesson being learned and taken on board and you see growth in Abraham's life as he gets older. And I think as, you know, as we go through the next, however many, nine or 10 chapters of Abraham's life, you see him starting to trust God more and grow in that faith and learning from the mistakes he's made.

You know, even in the very next chapter that we're looking at next week, you'll see how much he grows in faith and in trusting God. And so I think the main lesson for us here today is that if you are a child of God, if you are someone who has put your hope and faith and trust in Jesus and in God's words and promises, then yes, you may and, you know, you will go astray.

And there will be times where you do go down some very wrong roads. And there are very strong warnings for us throughout the Bible of the consequences of not trusting God and not taking him at his word.

But at the same time, we see that God will watch over his children and that he will use those experiences in our lives, good and bad, to teach us as his children to trust him and to take him at his word and to take hold of those promises that he's given us in his word in the Bible.

[25 : 18] And, you know, Philippians 1 talks about, it says that, he who started a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

And so if you are God's child, then he will use every single event in your life to work it out for your good and for his glory.

And so there's a warning there to take heed and to be warned of not trusting God and his promises and doing what is right only in your own eyes and of the consequences of that.

But also there's that encouragement for us as well by the fact that if God watches over every single sparrow in the world and we are worth much, much more than many sparrows, then how much more is he going to watch over us, his children, whom he has adopted into his family and brought into his heavenly kingdom.

So let's just pray. Father, as we have seen...