

Genesis 12C (2011)

- Abram is a man of complexity
 - The Father of faith, Paul says in Rom 4:16
 - A man called a friend of God, according to James 2:23
 - The patriarch of the patriarchs
 - But he is also a man who, as Scripture records, makes serious errors and shows weaknesses in faith at times
 - As I mentioned before, this man came to be called Abraham, a friend of God
 - But he began his walk with God as Abram...a man new to faith and unfamiliar to depending upon God
 - And like anyone new to faith, Abram must progress through trials and challenges if he is to grow spiritually
 - So he can learn how to depend on God rather than upon his own fleshly nature
 - Last week Moses taught us how this new man of faith heard God's call, responded and received God's promises of blessing
 - Abram's receiving of God's promises began the fourth period of God's rule over His creation
 - We refer to this period as the dispensation of promise or patriarchs, which is distinguished from the dispensation of government by God's selection of one family
 - While government still operates, God's purposes will be uniquely fulfilled through the line of one family – Abram's family
 - And in the second half of Chapter 12, Moses relates one of Abram's early missteps after arriving in the land
 - Beginning today in v.10

Gen. 12:10 Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

- Abram has been wandering through the land to take in all that God had given him and his descendants
 - His wanderings brought him into the southern most part of Canaan, into the Negev desert
 - The Negev is the final wilderness before you reach the border of Egypt
 - So as we enter v.10, Abram is living near Egypt's border making his new life in Canaan
 - Now Moses says there was a famine in the land
 - This statement holds great intrigue for us because we know that famines are not events of chance or luck
 - We know God has brought this famine about
 - Therefore we must conclude it is a test, not only on Canaan as a whole but upon Abram in particular
 - So this begs a big question: why would God bring such a test upon Abram so soon after leading him into the promised land?
 - History tells us that the city of Ur was a very prosperous city
 - Ur was located in fertile Mesopotamia where crops and herds were plentiful
 - And archeologists have found evidence that the city traded for exotic goods from around Asia and Africa
 - So Abram's family was probably accustomed to having plenty
 - So then the living God revealed Himself to Abram and called him to a better place, a place God had prepared for Abram's inheritance
 - What do you suppose Abram expected to find in Canaan?
 - If pagan Ur was a prosperous place to live, surely God's promised land would be far better, offering a far easier life
- With the onset of this famine, Abram must have been scratching his head and wondering about what went wrong?
 - Did he do something wrong? Did God forget His promises?

- Whatever the cause, Abram knew he needed to take matters into his own hands
- If following God and depending on God for his needs and his inheritance was Plan A, then perhaps it was time for Plan B
 - Because Plan A didn't seem to provide for Abram in the manner to which he was accustomed
- And as we heard, Abram's Plan B was to follow the world's lead and head to Egypt
 - Ancient historical records confirm what we see Abram doing here
 - When famine would hit Palestine hard, many would migrate into Egypt seeking greener pastures
 - Even when Egypt experienced drought, the Nile river would bring enough flood waters to ensure a good grain harvest
 - So while the rest of the known world was suffering, Egypt would often become the world's destination for survival
 - Egypt plays a prominent role in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New
 - At times it becomes a place of protection for Israel
 - And at other times it serves as Israel's oppressor
 - After Jesus was born, Egypt becomes a place for the Messiah to hide as a child
 - And in the coming Kingdom, Isaiah tells us that Egypt will remain an empty wasteland as a testimony against Israel's enemies
 - By all these examples, Egypt becomes a picture in Scripture of the Gentile unbelieving world
 - Egypt pictures the unbelieving Gentile world both giving Israel sanctuary at times while persecuting them at other times

- Egypt pictures the way the world becomes a place for the Messiah to dwell before he comes into His Kingdom in the form of His Church
- And Egypt will one day picture the judgment that comes upon the world that rejects the Messiah
 - So Egypt pictures the sinful, unbelieving world
- Abram responds to his time of trial by retreating to the world
 - He goes to Egypt looking for the provision he expected to find in God's land
- Personally, I take a small measure of encouragement in watching Abram making this mistake
 - And yes, this was a mistake
 - Abram receives no instruction to leave the land of Canaan
 - And his time in Egypt just leads to more stumbles and compromises
 - Abram may be a man of faith, but at this early point, he's a man unaccustomed to living by that faith
 - Here he faces his first test as a man following God, and he concludes that reliance on God isn't sufficient under the circumstances
 - When we're new in our walk of faith – or when we are untested – we have little personal experience in depending upon the Lord
 - On the other hand, we do have experience in depending upon ourselves
 - Trials are a God-provided opportunity for us to learn what depending on God looks like
 - Early in our walk, we're likely to revert under pressure to what we know best – depending upon ourselves
 - Which is actually a lie anyway
 - Even when we were living apart from the promises of God, dead in our sins, we were still dependent upon God for every breath

- We just didn't recognize and acknowledge His role
- So I'm encouraged when I read that Abram, the Father of Faith, had days when his faith didn't drive his decision-making
 - Instead, his doubts and fears and sinful nature drove his decision-making
 - And his mistakes certainly don't justify our mistakes
 - But they remind us that walking in faith is a progression in maturity, not an instantaneous achievement
 - And the engine driving our maturity is the Spirit of God bringing the truth of God's word to our hearts
 - And the fuel for that engine of maturity are trials and tests brought by the Lord
- James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote this to the church:

[James 1:2](#) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

[James 1:3](#) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

[James 1:4](#) And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- We are to face our trials joyfully, in the sense that we recognize their potential to achieve a good purpose
 - Because by these trials we learn to endure in our faith, to rely on the Lord
 - So that we might attain to the perfect or complete work in Christ
- Isn't this Abram's shortcoming here?
 - He didn't understand that he could be complete in the Lord
 - He has found the Lord's provision lacking
 - It wasn't as satisfying as what Egypt held for him
- This is the early experience I believe the Lord gives every new believer, to understand that walking in faith isn't a recipe for more of what the world offers
 - Sadly, many believers were taught that their entrance into the faith meant they had arrived on Easy Street

- They will be rich, popular and thin
 - They will find life's problems disappearing and all their dreams coming true
- None of this is true, none of it
 - God's word teaches that just as the prophets were persecuted and as our Lord was crucified, so will God's children be mistreated
 - The Lord said that we should expect to be hated by the world for Christ's name's sake
 - The reality is that the world appeals to our flesh, but a walk of faith appeals to our spirit
 - And as Paul taught in Galatians 5, we are either led by our flesh or we are being led by God's Spirit – but we cannot follow both
- I don't think it's any coincidence that Abram had ventured close to the Egyptian border by the time of the famine
 - Knowing that Egypt is a picture of worldliness, then we might see Abram's choice to live in the Negev as a picture of trying to hold onto the world while walking with God
 - And then when the trial came, it was that much easier for Abram to step across the border and enter Egypt
 - Christians repeat this error when we entertain thoughts of remaining married to the world
 - We're talking about the Christian who lives with one foot still in the world, still clinging to the life the Lord calls them to leave behind
 - When Jesus prayed to the Father before His death on the cross, listen to what He says concerning God's children – those who have faith

[John 17:14](#) "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

[John 17:15](#) "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

[John 17:16](#) "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

[John 17:17](#) "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

[John 17:18](#) "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

[John 17:19](#) "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

[John 17:20](#) "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

[John 17:21](#) that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

- Jesus says that God's children are like Christ in that we are spiritually different than the world
 - And that difference will cause the world to disapprove and distance themselves from us in various ways
 - And yet Jesus says He would not ask the Father to remove us from the world, not until the time God has appointed
 - Instead, Jesus asked the Father to keep us from the enemy and sanctify us in the truth of God's word
 - Just as the Father sent the Son into the world, we are sent in Christ's place until His return to rule
 - And that we might act and think as one with God, living a sanctified, godly life
 - But if we live with one foot in the world, longing for what the world offers us, we retreat from sanctification and holiness
 - We cross the border into Egypt, seeking association with the world again, seeking the world's approval
 - Instead of relying on the blessings that come exclusively by faith
- Our faith does bring great blessings, but like Abram's inheritance, those blessings await the appearance of the kingdom upon the return of the Messiah
 - So in the meantime, we live in the enemy's world, but we are told by our Lord that we are no longer to live as if we are still part of it
 - We aren't to think like the world, seek for what the world seeks, love like the world loves, live like the world lives

- Abram failed this second test of his faith, and he stumbled because he was still clinging to the false security of the world
 - Rather than remaining where God had delivered him, trusting in God to provide despite the famine
 - Abraham walked according to his own counsel
- In v.10 Moses says Abram sojourned in Egypt
 - The Hebrew word for sojourned (*gur*) means a temporary dwelling
 - Abram knew the trip was temporary
 - He would venture into Canaan for a little while, just long enough to get past the rough patch
 - Like we might say to ourselves during a trial
 - We might know the Lord is asking us to wait on Him, to rely on Him, but we tell ourselves we know how to solve the problem
 - We'll just step outside the Lord's will for a short time, seek the worldly options for a little while
 - But when we begin to play by the world's rules it's hard to know where to draw the line
 - And Abram experiences this slippery slope firsthand while in Egypt

[Gen. 12:11](#) It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman;

[Gen. 12:12](#) and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

[Gen. 12:13](#) "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."

- Abram makes this bold request of Sarai
 - Abram begins the way every smart husband begins when he wants something
 - He says, "Have I told you recently how nice you're looking these days?"

- Or as the King James version says, “I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon”
- In truth Abram’s concern wasn’t driven by Sarai’s beauty, though I’m sure she was a beautiful woman
 - Abram’s fear was driven by a well known cultural practice common among the Egyptian noblemen
 - Egyptians during this period of history were famous for wife abduction
 - Ancient records discovered written in the Nuzi tablets record this practice
 - When Egyptians came upon a husband with a desirable wife, the husband might be killed and the woman stolen and sold as a wife to someone else
 - And the prettier the woman, the more likely the theft became
 - On the other hand, if the woman was unmarried, it was more likely that those wishing to take her would barter for her instead of stealing
 - So Abram asks that Sarai lie and say he was her brother rather than husband
 - Even though Sarai was Abram’s half sister, this was only a half truth
 - And half a truth is a whole lie
 - Abram was likely thinking that he might survive long enough to escape during negotiations and avoid death
- Where was Sarai in all this?
 - Why did she agree to play this game?
 - The only answer is that she trusted God more than she trusted Abram
 - While Abram might – and does – fail her
 - God won’t fail her, so Sarai remains true to her role to respect and obey her husband

- And in this case, she acts according to his direction even though he is sinning
- Will God come to her rescue when Abram lets her down?
- Abram's fear of death and dependency on the world caused him to live a lie
 - And to bring his wife down with him
 - This is the inevitable course when we try to live with one foot in the world
 - First living near Egypt, then crossing into Egypt, and now living a lie to save himself
 - Paul tells us that when we seek unity with the world, we won't find common ground nor should we expect to

[Gen. 12:14](#) It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

[Gen. 12:15](#) Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

[Gen. 12:16](#) Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

- In short, Abram's plan didn't work exactly as he intended
 - Though his lie did save his life, it produced a new outcome Abram didn't anticipate
 - The Egyptians had taken notice of Sarai and her beauty was such that it made its way to Pharaoh
 - And before Abram knew it, Sarai was sitting in Pharaoh's house
 - And because they thought Abram was just Sarai's brother, they ensured he was treated well because of her
 - Did you notice the irony?
 - Abram tells Sarai to lie so that he would be treated well because of her
 - He meant that he would be able to live and escape with her

- Yet in the end, Scripture records the same phrase in describing how Abram collects this wealth from the sale of his sister
- There are seven categories of material that Abram receives, suggesting that the Lord was at work in blessing Abram despite his sin
 - And yet we'll learn later that one of the female servants Abram receives from Pharaoh was a woman called Hagar
 - Abram's sin in Egypt sows the seed of his own future turmoil

[Gen. 12:17](#) But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

[Gen. 12:18](#) Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"

[Gen. 12:19](#) "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go."

[Gen. 12:20](#) Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

- Pharaoh's struck in defense of Sarai
 - The Pharaoh seems to be a victim here in light of the fact that he knew nothing of the deception
 - He paid for his bride
 - But God has made promises to Abram that depend on Sarai remaining Abram's wife
 - And as Paul says, the gifts and call of God are irrevocable
 - And so God acts to preserve His promise
 - Since God has said that those who are against Abram would be cursed, here we see that statement proving true
 - God working to defend Abram from his enemies
 - And we also notice God acts to protect Sarai as she obediently obeys and respects her husband even as he makes serious mistakes

- The Jewish Rabbi Rashi declared that the plague was a skin disease that made sexual contact impossible, thus protecting Sarai
- And yet the disease didn't affect Sarai, thus leading Pharaoh to discern that Sarai was the key
- This led to the conversation with Abram
 - The Pharaoh chastises Abram for lying and causing this trouble
 - Of course the Pharaoh doesn't say that had Abram told the truth, they would have abducted his wife and killed him
 - Still, that doesn't justify Abram's lie
 - He stepped into the ungodly world and had to play by their rules
 - Bringing one compromise after another
 - And yet even though Abram was unfaithful, God remains faithful to His promises
 - Clearly the covenant is working and is in force
 - Clearly the covenant is unconditional, without dependence on Abram's behavior