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Now There Was a Famine in the Land, and Abram Went Down to Egypt to Live 12: 10-20

Now there was a famine in the Land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live **DIG**: When Abram comes to the Promised Land, only to find no food there, how might he feel about God's promise? Why? Sarai was Abram's *half-sister*; does that justify Abram's *half-truth*? Or does the end (Abram's safety) justify the means (a lie)? What if the end he had in mind was fulfilling ADONAI's promise? Or is such lying *never* justified? Why? Either way, could Abram's sin thwart God's plan? How does the LORD remove Abram from the mess he created?

REFLECT: What sure promise of ADONAI are you questioning? Where is it tough to be totally truthful with Him? Where might you be tempted to assist the LORD to fulfill His plan? What is your testimony to the world?

At this time, a particularly severe trial took place in **Abram's** life.



Now there was famine in the land of Canaan, and Abram, without calling on the LORD for guidance, went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was **severe (12:10)**. This is the first mention of **Egypt** in the Scriptures and it symbolizes alliance with the world and reliance upon the flesh. **Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and their**

great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Isra'el, or seek help from ADONAI (Isaiah 31:1). After wasting time and being stuck in Haran (**11:31b**), **Abram** experienced the second failure in **his** life. Here was a **man** who traveled from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan on the bare word of **God**, but now was afraid to trust **Him** in the time of **famine**. **He** was operating in the flesh (**Romans 8:8; Galatians 5:17**).

He left the Promised **Land** because it seemed that **the Land** could no longer sustain **him**, **his** family and **his** herds. At this point **Abram's** faith had not matured to the point where **he** knew **he** could trust **the LORD** under any circumstances, and hearing that **the famine** did not affect **Egypt**, **he** chose to go there until the **famine** in Canaan had passed. So **he** temporarily took things into **his** own hands and left **the Promised Land** to which **God** had led **him**. This lack of faith led **Abram** to lie, and this lie would lead to tragic consequences in **his** life.

This is the second of four tests where Abram fell flat on his face. First, **he** stayed in **Haran** when **he** should have gone to **the Promised Land (11:31b)**. Secondly, here, **he** left **the land** of Canaan and went to **Egypt**. Thirdly, **he** listened to **his** wife instead of waiting on **the LORD**, which resulted in the birth of **Ishm'ael** and untold problems (**16:1-16**). And fourthly, **his** lapse of faith continued as **he** refused to trust **ADONAI** for **his** and **his wife's** safekeeping when **he** lied *again* to **Abimelech (20:1-18)**.

Compromise with the world often seems harmless, but in the end it is very damaging. And one of the most damaging results, at least to those who truly love **God** and desire to witness effectively for **Him**, is to discover that their compromise has destroyed their testimony. Worldly people, rather than being drawn to **God** through **His holy ones (Psalms 16:3 and 34:9)**, are used by **God** to rebuke them. This is what happened to **Abram**.²³⁶

The Egyptians, like the Canaanites, were descendants of Ham. **They** were cruel, immoral, and **they were notorious for their low standard of morality**. **He** knew **they** wouldn't hesitate to kill **him** and **his** servants in order to get **Sarai** for themselves. Therefore, **as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are" (12:11)**. This is amazing to us today, because **she** was 65 years old at that time!

"When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live" (12:12). **Egyptians** during this period were famous for wife abduction. **His** reasoning was that if **Sarai** were recognized as **his sister**, **they** both would be treated with some respect and **he** would not be **killed**. While it was true that **the Egyptians** might approach **her** for sex, **Abram** reasoned that it would certainly be true if **he** were **killed**. Consequently, **his** idea seemed the best solution in a bad situation.

Abraham had some shining moments, but this wasn't one of them.

“Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you” (12:13). The fact was that **Sarai** was **his** half-sister (20:12). This was still in the early centuries after the Flood, and close marriages were still common and often necessary.²³⁷ But it was still a lie because the intent was to hide the fact that they were married. However, if **he** were perceived as **her** brother, **he** would be the one to negotiate for **her** in any marriage proposal. Like **Abram**, our fear can lead us to start living a lie and one sin leads to another. We've all been there.

Indeed **Abram's** fears were eventually realized. **When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman (12:14). The rabbis teach that Abram hid Sarai in a chest, but she was discovered at the border.** But **God** was behind the scenes protecting the line of blessing (**to see link click [Bl](#) - The Line of Seth**).

Instead of dealing with regular **Egyptians**, **Sarai** came to the attention of **Pharaoh** himself. **And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised** (*hallal* which means *praise*) **her to Pharaoh, and she was taken to his palace** and ended up in **Pharaoh's** harem (12:15). Rather than taking **her** for themselves, **they** merely **praised her to Pharaoh**. This shows that **Abram's** fear was reasonable. But by going to **Egypt** and having **his wife** end up in **Pharaoh's** harem, **Abram** put the promise of **the Seed of the Woman (3:15)** in danger because that **Seed** would come through **her** and no other.

Pharaoh followed the custom of the day and paid the bride price. The ancient laws said that if the father had died, the brother became the legal guardian of an unmarried **sister**. Because **Abram** was the supposed brother, **he** was paid the bride price. **He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels (12:16).** These new acquisitions would lead to the conflict with **Abram's** nephew Lot in the next chapter. In addition, **he acquired maidservants** and one of them was **an Egyptian woman named Hagar(16:1)**. This in turn would set the stage for the conflict between **Sarai and Hagar (16:1-15)**, between **Isaac and Ishmael (21:8-21)**, and between the Jews and Arabs to this very day.

Abram's plan seemed to be working out quite well. **Sarai** was safe and was not only alive but being lavished with gifts. But what would happen if **Pharaoh** actually had sex with **Sarai**? Their own best thinking had put them in a predicament. They were helpless - but **God** was not. By taking **Sarai** away, **Pharaoh** had cursed **Abram**. **The LORD** had said *the one who treats you lightly I must curse (12:3)*. So here **ADONAI** inflicted serious diseases on **Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai (12:17)**. **The**

rabbis teach that it was leprosy. But whatever it was, **Sarai** remained untouched by it.

On the one hand, what was **Sari** to think of all this? What part did **she** play in **God's** will with **her** husband? **She** agreed to **Abram's** plan because **she** loved **him**, but was **she** merely to be the object of **her** husband's protection? Was this **her** purpose in life? Or did **ADONAI** have something else in mind for **her**? Whatever it was, **His** silence toward **her** was deafening. On the other hand, **Abram** needed to learn that neither **he** nor **his wife** could survive by human strategy, but only by protection from **the LORD**; **He** is the one who intervenes to save **Abram** even though **he** had sinned. **God's** promises are unconditional.

Perhaps through the **serious diseases**, **Pharaoh** was able to discern the problem. Or maybe it was divine revelation as will be the case with **Abimelech** in a similar situation with **Abraham (20:3-7)**. Either way, **Pharaoh summoned Abram** and asked **him** three questions. First **he** asked: **What have you done to me?** **Pharaoh** had suffered greatly because of **Abram's** lie. Secondly, **he** asked: **Why didn't you tell me she was your wife (12:18)?** This was the truth that was hidden. Thirdly, **he** asked: **Why did you say, "She is my sister, so that I took her to be my wife" (12:19a)?** **Pharaoh's** intent was to make **her** a real **wife**, but through the providence of **the LORD**, the **serious diseases** struck before any sexual union actually took place.

Pharaoh now feared to harm either **Sarai** or **Abram**; **but** he did sharply rebuke **Abram**. **ADONAI** held **Abram** accountable for what went on between **he** and **his** wife (see **Bf - Your Desire Will Be For Your Husband and He Will Rule Over You**). **Pharaoh** had lost all respect for them, and of course was not attracted to **their God**. Because of **their** fearfulness and compromise, **they** had caused the house of **Pharaoh** to suffer greatly and **the Egyptians** had finally come to despise **them**. The only thing **he** could do was to tell **them** to leave **his** country, which **they** did, taking all the possessions **they** had acquired in **Egypt**.²³⁸

Pharaoh said: **Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go (12:19b)!** Under normal circumstances, **Pharaoh** could have executed **Abram**. But after experiencing the power behind **Abram**, **he** went no further than **he** already had. **Abram** was escorted and banished from **Egypt**. **Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had (12:20)**. So **Abram** left **Egypt** a richer man than when **he** came. But the riches would prove to be very costly. **They** should have never gone to **Egypt** in the first place. But once there, **they** should have maintained **their** testimony at all costs. **ADONAI** would have protected **them**, indeed, **He did** protect **them** despite **their** compromise. While in **Egypt**, **Abram** never built an altar or called upon the



name of **the LORD**.

The rabbis teach that this whole incident foreshadowed the future: Abram went down to Egypt because of the famine, the Egyptians robbed him of his wife for which they were punished with great plagues; Abram was then loaded with gifts, and Pharaoh charged men to see that he left the country. Similarly, the Israelites will go down to Egypt because of famine; there they will be oppressed and their wives taken from them; this being the purpose of Pharaoh's edict to spare the daughters. The Egyptians will be punished by great plagues (Exodus 7:14 to 11:10), and subsequently the Israelites departed with great wealth and were also hastened out of the country.

It is easy for us to criticize **Abram** for his actions. But given the same circumstances, we would probably have done the same thing. How many times do we take the easy way out in our lives? We compromise and then rationalize our actions. We also need to learn the same lesson **he** did and often we have to learn it in the same way, by being rebuked by the very unbelievers we would like to win to **Christ**. **So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (Second Corinthians 10:12-13).**