

Genesis 12:10-13:1 — Egypt

November 15, 2015

Sometimes we make a total mess of life. We sin majorly. We fail royally. I am not talking about small oversights, like forgetting to take out the garbage after your wife asks you six times. I am talking about making sinful choices that if or when your spouse found out, it crushed her heart. If your children found out, they would be filled with shame. We dishonor God. Sometimes we do incredibly dumb things and sinful things that we didn't even think we were capable of doing. Does anybody know what I am talking about?

What should we do after we make a huge mess of our lives? What should we do after we make a mess of our marriages, we compromise our integrity or we swashbuckle our futures? Is there any hope? Today we will find out the answer.

My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. On both of our campuses we are preaching through the book of Genesis. We just completed Genesis 1 to 11. Those were big chapters where God worked with the world in global events, like the flood or the creation of nations. Most of these events took long periods of time, even hundreds of years. Nothing changed. The passing of time didn't make things better, they only became worse.

Beginning in Genesis 12, God started a new plan. Instead of working worldwide, he focused his plan to rescue us from sin on one man and his descendants through which he promised to bless all nations and change the

world. Last week Pastor Jordan did a great job introducing us to this man. His name was Abram.

Abram was a major character in world history and biblical history. His story dominates the middle of Genesis from chapter 11 to 25. Abram's name appears more than 300 times in the Bible. Eleven of the 27 New Testament books talk about him. In Hebrews 11, which describes heroes of the faith, most of the great heroes get one verse. Moses gets six. Abram gets twelve. Abram is a huge figure in Bible and world history.

For us to understand the next part of his story, I need to refresh our memories with part of his back story that Pastor Jordan introduced to us last week. Last week we learned that Abram came from the city of Ur around the year 2,000 B.C. This was a powerful Babylonian city right next to the tower of Babel. It was a city of four square miles on each side with a population of approximately half a million people. It was a busy city and a modern city with supermarkets, a library and schools. Archaeological excavations of the city have even discovered children's school papers plus their grades on report cards. It was a modern, comfortable, luxurious city. Abram spent most of his life as a financially comfortable, modern city dweller.

It was to Abram, this modern cosmopolitan pagan, that God appeared. Why did God choose to show grace to Abram and pluck him out of the sea of lost pagans to show grace to him and ultimately transform the world through his life and descendants? Just because. The Bible tells us there was nothing special about Abram. It was only God's underserved mercy working in his life. In the

same way, when God chooses to pluck us from a life of being lost and draws us to him through his son Jesus so we are born again, we don't deserve any of this. Just like Abram, it is God showing his underserved grace in our lives, just like he did in Abram's.

God told Abram to leave three things — his country, his culture and his family and then to go to the land of Canaan. God also gave Abram seven promises which included special blessing, supernatural protection, making his children into a great nation and giving them a promised land. God also promised the entire world would be blessed through him. That ultimate blessing was Jesus Christ, who was a descendant of Abram.

Abram didn't start off strong. Instead of leaving his family and heading for Canaan, his family went with him. Terah, his father, and Lot, his relative, came along like extra luggage. Abram and his family left town and followed the Euphrates river northwest to the city of Haran, which was another big and comfortable pagan city that worshipped the moon God, just like the city of Ur. Abram only accomplished one of the three things God told him to. He left his country but he went to another country that had the same culture that he came from. He didn't leave his family. He brought his family. As a result Abram found himself stuck in Haran for the next 15 years until his father died.



Abram's partial obedience cost him a 15-year delay in entering the Promised Land. Thankfully God was patient with Abram and his partial

obedience. Thankfully God is also patient with us when we are partially obedient to his clearly revealed will.

After Abram's father, Terah, died, Abram got back to the plan and he took Lot with his family and they headed south into Canaan. The big difference is Ur and Haran were modern cities. They were comfortable cities. Abram and his family were wealthy. When they headed south to the land of Canaan they met the wilderness and the desert. This was like moving from downtown Chicago and eating deep dish pizza at five star restaurants to a perpetual camping trip with no Internet, no Wal-Mart and a diet of military MREs. This was a major step of faith for a 75-year-old man.

When Abram went into the land of Canaan the first thing we find is the land was filled with Canaanites. Earlier in our study we learned the Canaanites were the descendants of the Ham, the wicked son of Noah. True to their family line, archaeology and secular history confirm that the Canaanites were an extremely perverted people that were especially far from God. Abram left the comfortable city life to move to the wilderness to live around a bunch of perverted rednecks. He moved into a really bad neighborhood.

Knowing the background of wealthy cosmopolitan Abram learning to rough it in the wilderness with the hard-core Canaanite pagans, we pick up the story.

And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. Genesis 12:5-7 (ESV)

After passing through the desert, Abram went to the heart of one of the Canaanites' towns. God appeared to him and promised to give to him and his descendants the very land into which he drove his tent stakes. In response, Abram built an altar to worship God. The oak of Moreh at Shechem was a place of Canaanites worship. In the middle of this dark pagan city where they practiced demonic worship, Abram built an altar to the true God of the universe and he worshipped.

Everyone was wondering about Abram. "Why isn't he worshipping our gods? What makes Abram's God different?" Abram was telling people about the God that appeared to him. Abram was a flickering light in a very dark place. Abram was the first evangelist. Abram was the original church planter. Abram was setting up a place of true worship in a pagan city.

From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. Genesis 12:8 (ESV)

In this country if you raised animals, you kept them on the plain for grass in the winter, but in the summer you took them to the hill country to avoid the heat. This is what Abram did. Summer came and it was time to move to a town in the hill country for his flocks. Shechem, Bethel and Ai were close. The difference was one of elevation. Abram was simply moving to a nearby town that was in the mountains. When he got there, Abram went back to his church planting strategies. He built an altar to the Lord and worshipped. He was a witness to the people around him. He was telling people about the one true God. Things were really kicking into gear. Life was



good. Abram was talking about God in a foreign land. God was speaking to him again. God promised to give him the land he is living on as a foreigner. Ministry was great.

Then the bottom fell out.

And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. Genesis 12:9 (ESV)

Today when we think of the Negev, we think about desert. Archaeologists tell us it wasn't always that way. There were times when the Negev had villages and it was a nice place to live. Sometimes the weather turned and it transformed into a desert almost overnight. That is exactly what happened to Abram. He headed into what he thought was a good thing and it turned out to be a tough thing, a famine.

Remember Abram's background. This is important. He was from the city. He was from a modern city. His entire life he was used to an easy three square meals each day plus snacks. For the first time he faced starvation in the desert. This is the first time he and his family experienced serious hunger. Before, everything was going well in his new relationship with God. Then everyone was starving. Sarai was complaining because all she had left was one box of Bisquick in the pantry. The animals were showing their ribs. The servants were in a panic. Life was falling apart. Can you picture the scene? Has anybody faced one of those times where things started out well but almost overnight they went from delightful to disaster? That was Abram's life. Today, it might also be yours.

Abram faced a trial.

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. Genesis 12:10 (ESV)

God promised to bless Abram. God promised to make him into a great nation. God promised to give him the Promised Land. God promised to sustain Abram in the Promised Land. As soon as a famine hit, we don't find Abram turning to God and trusting in God's promises, even though God had appeared to him audibly and visibly twice. We don't find Abram seeking God's guidance. Abram simply pulled up stakes and made a beeline out of the Promised Land to suburbia in the land of Egypt because he knew they had a Wal-Mart. Egypt always had food because it has the Nile River. Here is the first lesson we learn from Abram.

In a crisis, while we don't deny God, it is easy to ignore God. Did you notice that Abram never gave God a chance to come to the rescue? He didn't pray about it. He didn't think about it. He just said, "I know what to do. Skip town and head to Egypt for a grocery store. It doesn't matter that God is now speaking to me again. It doesn't matter that God promised divine supernatural protection. I know how to solve this problem. Get out of this crazy place and run to Egypt."

We are not much different from Abram. We are self-sufficient Americans. When we a crisis hits, there is no need to bother God. There is no need to think about it or pray about it. We know how to solve the problem with our own wisdom. We don't deny God in the crisis, we just ignore him and try to solve everything on our own. We think we know how to handle things without praying

or turning to God. We do what seems expedient without ever stopping to pray or ask God to direct our lives. I am guilty of this. I know each of us is guilty. Abram was guilty of this.

Could God have provided for Abram in the famine? Yes. In the future God brought water out of a rock on the way to the Promised Land when his people were dying of thirst. In the future God brought manna every morning to feed an entire nation in the wilderness. Think about what God could have done in this crisis to make his name famous through Abram's life in front of the Canaanites. That didn't happen because Abram didn't even try to seek God in the crisis and ask for him to come to the rescue. He just skipped town.

The first thing we learn is we need to be careful in a crisis. We may not deny God but are we ignoring God by trying to handle the crisis by ourselves and not coming to him in prayer looking for his grace and his rescue?

Another question is why did God allow this famine in the first place? I think the reason God allowed the famine in Abram's life was to test his faith and grow his faith. The truth is the only way Abram's faith and trust in God grew in Genesis was when God put Abram in a trial so Abram was forced to trust God and lean on him. The same is true for us. The only way our trust and love for God will grow is when God puts us in our version of a famine, a trial. The only time we call out desperately to God is when we have nothing else to rely on other than him. If you want a close relationship with God, the only way to get it is hard times. I know that is hard to hear but it is true. Every person you find that is close with Jesus has a heart-wrenching story about what taught them to draw

close to God. We never learn how much God loves us and that we can trust him until we have to trust him.

God put Abram in a famine to teach him that he can rely on God in a crisis. The same is true for our lives.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4 (ESV)

God promises to allow trials in our lives, not because he hates us, but because he loves us. He loves us too much to give us trial-free lives that would lead to perpetual immaturity.

Today if you are in a trial, thank God for that trial. Not because any of us likes the pain of a trial but because of what God is doing in your heart and life in the trial to draw you close to him and show you how much he loves and cares for you. Only trials have the power to chip away at the hard-crusted sin in our hearts. We will never be closer to God than when we are in a trial. We never call out to God with all our hearts like when we are broken and desperate. That was God's plan for Abram, to teach him that even in a famine, God will keep his promises and provide. It is God's plan for us in a trial.

Abram feared the future.

When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake." When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. Genesis 12:11–16 (ESV)

This is one of those parts of Abram's story that we don't tell our children. We don't tell our kids about Noah drunk and naked on the couch and we don't tell our kids that Abram, the great father of faith, told his wife to take off her wedding ring and flirt with the single guys in Egypt.

While Sarai was an antique, she was an antique that was in pristine condition. Apparently she was a very foxy lady. We are talking extremely hot. Sizzling hot! Abram knew that when Sarai entered a room men's jaws dropped open and their eyeballs popped out of their heads. Apparently she was off the charts beautiful; even at age 65 she looked like a cover model in her twenties.

I love the way Abram rationalized this.

Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake. Genesis 12:13 (ESV)

Ladies, if your husband ever tells you to take off your wedding ring and flirt with other men so things go well with him for your sake... just deck him. This is not one of those parts in the Bible you want to follow. This was Abram not trusting in God's promise of supernatural protection of him and his family. This was Abram not protecting his wife. Abram should have told Sarai that the only way anyone was touching her would be over his dead body. He should have been sacrificing his life for his wife, not sacrificing his wife his comfort.

Why did Abram rationalize this way? Why did he say this screwy convoluted statement? It was because Abram was living in fear. Here is another lesson. *Living in fear leads to living in sin.* This was Abram living in fear of the future so he was willing to risk his wife and their marriage. This is not a man of faith. This is a man that out of fear in the famine ran to Egypt. This is a man

that out of fear of his wife's beauty pawned her off as a single sister. When you think the future is in your hands, and not in God's hands, you will plot and scheme to keep yourself safe. You will play politics to protect your interests, while you can't sleep at night out of fear for the future. That will lead you to sinful choices.

My friends, it is the same for us. Many of us this morning are afraid of the future. We are afraid of what might happen at work so we manipulate the boss. We try to keep others down so we stay front and center. Others of us are afraid of what might happen in the stock market so we try insider trading or we don't report all of our income. Fear of the future leads to living in sin. We are afraid of what might happen in our marriages so we start to do screwy things and dumb things to spy on our spouses or manipulate our spouses for our own interests, just like Abram. Abram didn't need to do that. We don't need to do that. Living in fear leads to living in sin.

In Hebrews 13:5 God promises he will never leave us or forsake us. 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to cast all our worries and anxieties on God knowing he cares for us. God promises to care for us. He holds the future. We don't need to scheme and rationalize sin to protect ourselves.

Some students cheat on exams because they are fearful of bad grades. They cheat because they are afraid they won't get into the college of their choice. Sometimes our fear of the future leads to anxiety where we treat others poorly and become sarcastic, nasty, moody, irritable and downright mean to others. Why do we do that? Anxiety about the possible problems in our future leads to

sin with our mouth. Sometimes our fear of the future leads us to do some really dumb stuff.

Genesis 20:12 tells us Sarai technically was Abram's sister, though they had different mothers. Scholars tell us that since Sarai was Abram's brother, he was considered her guardian. Any potential suitors would need to talk with Abram before marrying Sarai. Abram's plans were that this would give them time to escape Egypt. We don't know if that is true. What we do know is that rationalizing sin never works out. It backfires. In this case, it literally turned into a royal mess.

When Abram and Sarai entered Egypt, Sarai's drop-dead beauty was noticed, but it was noticed by the princes of Egypt. They recommended her to Pharaoh. With Pharaoh, there were no bride negotiations. He just came to her tent, scooped up Sarai, and added her to his harem.

To honor Abram, Pharaoh sent Abram all kinds of gifts. Abram, who was already rich, became filthy rich. He was given servants and donkeys and camels. That doesn't sound impressive but in its historical context it was impressive.

Donkeys were not common at that time in history. Having a donkey in your stable was like having a BMW or a Lexus in your garage. Now Abram had garages full of BMWs, and not the cheap ones. The camels were even more interesting. Camels were just getting popular in this part of the world and the only people that had them were the ultra rich. To drive a camel was roughly the equivalent of driving a Ferrari Testarosa. They were the exotic transportation of

the ancient world. Abram didn't just have one but he had multiple camels in his garage.

Abram told Sarai to stop acting like his wife and claim she was his sister so things would go well for with Abram for her sake. Things went very well for Abram. He had servants making his meals and tending to his needs. He had high-priced exotic transportation. He was living in the lap of luxury. One small but important piece backfired. Sarai was locked in Pharaoh's house with the servants prepping her for what Pharaoh thought would be the most amazing wedding night with his new drop-dead gorgeous wife that was 65 years old. In reality it was about to be a huge act of adultery that Abram forced his wife into through his cowardice and sin. Abram's well-laid plans backfired.

This brings us to another lesson. *When we sin, others will suffer.* Many times the ones who suffer most are those we love the most. How enjoyable was Abram's exotic transportation, his servants and living with the filthy rich while his dreams were filled with thoughts of another man violating his wife. That pretty much negates all the luxuries.

When we sin, others suffer. Often times it is those we love the most who pay the most.

Here is where the story gets funny. Abram was helpless and hopeless. He was caught in a web of his own sin. He was about to learn that God is incredibly gracious in the face of our sin. No matter how hopeless the situation, God can turn it around. That hopeless situation could be a famine or it could be you are powerless to protect your wife from being violated.

Only God can rescue Abram from his sin.

But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 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." And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. Genesis 12:17–20 (ESV)

It says God afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai. The word for plagues is the word used for skin disease in Leviticus. The Hebrew literally says God touched Pharaoh in such a way that he could not touch Sarai. Some of the best Hebrew commentators, like Bruce Waltke, believe this was a skin disease that dealt with the sexual organs. I don't know for sure but it seems like God caused Pharaoh, and his entire harem, to have a sudden and painful breakout of an STD. The wedding night was called off. Everybody was in pain. God touched Pharaoh so there was no way he could even think about violating Sarai. The way I picture this is everybody was suffering but one person. Who do you think didn't get these plagues? Sarai. Then everyone knew she was different because she was untouched. I don't know for sure but I suspect that from this point it didn't take long for the rest of the story to unfold and it probably came from Sarai.

She confessed she wasn't just Abram's sister, she was his wife. She also told Pharaoh that the God of the universe had promised supernatural divine protection for her husband and to bless those who bless him and to curse those who curse him. Then Sarai told Pharaoh that the pain that kept him bent over at the waist was just a small sampling about what God's cursing looks like when he

touched Abram's wife, even in good conscience because he thought she was single.

Pharaoh grabbed Abram and said, "How could you do this to me? My household is cursed by God. Everyone is in pain. I could have touched your wife." Then Pharaoh said only four words in Hebrew. "HERE, WIFE, TAKE, GO." Get out of here.

Abram slinked out of town with Pharaoh and his household suffering in pain because of Abram's sin, not their own. Sarai suffered because of Abram's sin, not her own.

Was God's name made famous in Egypt? Yes. It wasn't made famous through Abram. It was made famous in spite of Abram. Will God make his name famous? Yes, he will. His desire is that he makes his name famous through our lives, but even if we sin, God will make his name famous in spite of our lives.

Pharaoh sent Abram out of town with all the animals for a wedding gift plus all the servants. Some people say, "at least Abram benefited from this because he ended up filthy rich." *Whatever we gain by sin is always a curse.* Whatever we gain by sin is always a curse. In the next chapter, Abram and Lot had too many animals when they returned to the Promised Land so Abram was forced to split the land with Lot because they had too much wealth and couldn't live together. Lot wasn't given any land by God. It was all given to Abram but their excessive possessions made Abram give away a portion. Whatever we gain by sin will turn into a curse because God never wanted us to have it in the first place.

Later in their lives, when Sarai was old and couldn't get pregnant, rather than responding in faith and trusting God, she gave her Egyptian maidservant Hagar to Abram to be his girlfriend. Where did Hagar come from? Right here. She was brought into their household as one of Abram's illegitimate wedding gifts from Pharaoh.

Hagar gave birth to Ishmael which led us to the Arab people and the mess we are in today. I tell you every gain we make because of sin is always a curse in the long run. If God didn't want us to have something in the first place, it will always work against us in the long run.

If you profited from something illegal or immoral, the wisest thing you can do from it is get rid of it. God didn't want it part of your life. It will not do you any good in the rest of your life. If you made profit from insider trading that is illegal, that wealth will work against you, not for you. If you kept your taxes and didn't report your taxes, that wealth will work against you and not for you.

What should I do after I blow it?

When Abram left Egypt, he hadn't built any altars. He hadn't proclaimed the greatness of God. He slinked out of town. He failed his God. He failed his wife. He was rebuked by a pagan king that held marriage with higher honor than he did. The ride back to Canaan was one of those long car rides when you are fighting with your spouse. Don't you love those car trips? Those are long rides. That was Abram.

I want you to see where Abram went and what Abram did after making a complete mess of life.

So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. Genesis 13:1–4 (ESV)

He went back to the beginning. This is repentance. Repentance is turning around and going back. Many people start sinning and they keep sinning. You get into a business relationship that you knew was wrong but you rationalize that it would be too much work to get out so you continue in sin. You get into a dating relationship you know is wrong but you are afraid of being alone so you stay in it. Get out. Back up. Retrace your steps. Sin doesn't resolve itself with additional sin. It only resolves itself by going back to where you were in a right relationship with God and on good terms with Jesus and picking up where you left off.

This is what Abram did. He went back to the altar where he called upon the name of the Lord and he confesses his sin. I believe he confesses his sin to God, to his wife and to others in his family.

The point is simply this. When we sin and make a mess of life, repent. Repent means going back to where things were right with God and where it all began and after confessing our sin picking up from there and walking again with God.

Maybe you were reading through the book of Ephesians when you were distracted by sin and fear and life. Today God is calling you to repent. Go back to where you where you left off in Ephesians and start reading again. Go back to the beginning.

Maybe things were going good in your marriage but in the last few months or years things have spun out of control. Repent of your sin to God and your spouse. Go back to the beginning. Do what you did at first. Take the baby steps in your marriage by loving and romancing your spouse. Go back to praying together before bed and texting one another a Bible verse during the day.

Some of you drifted away from church and community. Sometimes I see people that are gone for a few months or years but they are back. You can tell it by the look in their eyes that they were like Abram and they went down to Egypt. Things didn't go well so now they are back.

Is that you this morning? Have you gone down to Egypt and relied on your ingenuity and scheming and it lead you into sin? If that is you, God invites you to repent, to come back to the beginning and walk with him like you did at first.

What I love most about this passage is even after Abram's incredible failure that included pawning off his wife. God did not give up on Abram. He didn't let him go. God stepped in and saved Abram when he was helpless caught in the web of his own sin.

Did you know that this is exactly what God did for us. When we were hopelessly trapped in the web of our own sin God stepped in to save us by sending the descendant of Abram who would bless the whole world, Jesus Christ. He died in our place for our sin to completely free us from the consequences of our sin eternally and the power that sin holds over us every day. God stepped in to save Abram. God stepped in to save us.

Today, will you repent of your sin and come back to God through Jesus?
Like Abram, repent of your sin and go back to the beginning and do what you did
at first when you were close with God.



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