

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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ABRAM'S FAULTY COMPASS

Genesis 12:10-13:4

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I have two points to my message today:

- Abram's plan to help God took him off course.
- To get back on course, Abram returned to the last place he worshipped.

INTRODUCTION: Last week I told you the early story of Abram and Sarai. Both were older and they had no children. Abram heard the call of God and packed up everything he had and began the long journey of going where God wanted him to go. The only catch was he didn't know where that was. What we see early on is that Abram's journey was not so much about settling in a new country as it was having his faith tested and strengthened by God. We need to keep in mind that Moses is the one who recorded the story of Abraham. Moses came along six generations after Abraham, or Abram as he was named at this part of the story.

We also learned last week that as Abram traveled, he came upon the land of Canaan, and God told him that his descendants would settle there some day. Six generations later, Moses would look at that land as well, although he would never cross over into it. Abram had a promise from God. Moses would bring God's people right to the border many generations later.

I shared with you how I believe one of the main motivators for Abram to follow God's call was the promise of offspring.

ABRAM'S PLAN TO HELP GOD TOOK HIM OFF COURSE

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12:10

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.

EXPLANATION: Now we see that a famine was in the land, and Abram and Sarai had servants and livestock to take care of. A decision had to be made so Abram went to Egypt. That doesn't sound like he made a mistake. But as we look at this, we realize he had gone off course.

We run into Abram's first crisis of faith – how could he feed and water all of his family, servants, and livestock? He had plenty of money. But gold won't buy water or food if it isn't available. He made a decision based upon his responsibilities – instead of continuing south, he went southwest, into Egypt.

What's interesting here is that earlier in chapter 12, verse 4, it says, “*So Abram went, as the LORD had told him;*” and listed are the places he went. It is easy to assume that Abram was going to the places where God told him to go, getting a glimpse of the land that God would give his offspring. But then when the famine came, he decided to go to Egypt. The scripture doesn't say that God told him to go to Egypt. Up until this point, God had been faithful to Abram. Can you imagine being a nomadic group of people with all of this livestock? Abram had to have a firm trust in God to feed everyone every single day. Did Abram think that God brought him into this desert just to stay there and die? Looks like he stopped asking God what to do. We see here a new pattern of behavior for Abram here, a character flaw. Trying to help God out.

Abram, being an educated man, had probably heard about Egypt since it was an advanced civilization. The annual flooding of the Nile River provided for a stable food supply. So instead of going south and circling the land that God had promised Abram, he went southwest. No doubt Abram and his hungry and thirsty wanderers were relieved when they saw Egypt on the horizon.

Abram's first attempt to help God led to his second attempt to help God.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12:11-16

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.”

¹⁴ When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. ¹⁵ And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

EXPLANATION: This is an interesting cultural situation. Sarai was a real cutie pie and Abram knew other men would desire her. He knew he'd be killed if he introduced himself as her husband. Then she'd be single and available to the Pharaoh. Later in Genesis 20, we find that Sarai is his half-sister as well as his wife, but he didn't want the Pharaoh to know that. But there was something different about her being presented as Abram's sister. They wouldn't kill him. Instead they would treat him well. I believe Abram thought they'd only be there for a short while. He must have underestimated the power of the Pharaoh, because she was in his presence soon after their arrival.

At this point, it appears Abram forgot the original reason why he set out on this journey. It appears he'd forgotten how God had been faithful thus far. It appears Abram wasn't really thinking about the promised offspring. Pharaoh's officials took the beautiful Sarai to him for one reason and you know exactly what that was. But having a child by the Pharaoh was not in God's plan.

The question is this: How do we know the difference between helping God in a manner that's outside his will and following him within his will? I believe we have the answer here in scripture. Look at chapter twelve closely with me and we'll put a simple timeline on it.

- In verses 1-4, we clearly read Abram's rich interaction with God. It stands to reason that Abram already had a relationship with God.
- Verses 4 and 5 tell us that he left Harran to go to Canaan some 400+ miles away. That journey took a long time. They moved as nomads. When he arrived there, he worshipped God and God spoke to him.
- Then he went a little further and pitched his tent near Bethel. This probably took a few days total. While there, he called on the name of God.
- Then he headed south toward the desert Negev. That took a while. Months.

If we add up all the time on our simple timeline, we easily conclude that Abram was close to God for a long time. Let's do another simple timeline.

- The distance from the Negev to Egypt is over 200 miles. How long did that take?
- The time spent in Egypt was a pretty good while because Abram's assets grew considerably.
- When Abram was kicked out of Egypt, he went back to Bethel, hundreds of miles away. That took a long time.

If we add up all the time of this detour, we see easily see this took quite a long time. It was not a week long vacation in Egypt. During this whole detour into Egypt there is no mention of Abram's acknowledgment of God at all. He did not build an altar and worship. God did not speak to him. Yes, God was clearly there, but Abram was doing his own thing.

So the answer to the question about knowing the difference between helping God in a manner that's outside his will and following him within his will is directly related to seeking God's will and worshipping him.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12:17-20 – 13:1-2

But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹ 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!" ²⁰ Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

13 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ² Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

EXPLANATION: At this point in the story we see that Abram was better as a businessman than he was at following God's will.

He should not have lied to the Pharaoh. We don't know how Pharaoh found out Sarai was actually his wife, but he must have put two and two together when the diseases hit him and his family. And Abram doesn't really learn his lesson here, because he tries to help God again later on.

TO RECHART HIS COURSE, ABRAM RETURNED TO HIS LAST PLACE OF WORSHIP

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 13:3-4

From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴ and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

EXPLANATION: Now Abram gets back to business.

If you look at chapter twelve, it's clear Abram was in God's will as he headed south into the desert land of the Negev. Had he called on the Lord then, as he faced the famine, what would the Lord have told him? We don't know, because he didn't ask. He built an altar and worshipped when times were good, but he forgot to do that when the famine came. Had he called out to God then, God would have been faithful to him.

If God had told him to go to Egypt, he would have given him instructions on how to handle himself. I don't think that's what the Lord wanted. I believe God was going to challenge Abram's faith in the desert and prove himself faithful. Had Abram continued south he would have come up on the oasis of Kadesh Barnea. Later on, we'll see that Abram goes to the Negev desert region again and lives at the oasis. But here, Abram bailed on God too early and took matters into his own hands.

And now, after having taken a huge detour of several hundred miles to Egypt and back, he returns to the place where he last worshipped God. With his detour, he tried to help God twice, but realized that his help wasn't what was best. In God's mercy, God intervened in order to protect the promise he'd made to Abram about blessing him with a child.

APPLICATION: So the lesson is -- when you've blown it, return to the last place where you heard God speak. It's easy to get detoured. Standing in a desert is not fun, and if you have no clue that an oasis is up ahead, it's inviting to detour to Egypt and try to work things out. It's easy to forget God's faithfulness.

ILLUSTRATION: I think about the disciples after Jesus was crucified. After spending several years with him preparing for the time he would no longer be with him, they went back to fishing after the crucifixion. They still had not figured out that what he was doing was preparing them to carry on the Gospel message after he was gone. Then out of mercy, the resurrected Lord appeared to them. After that, as far as we know, they never fished again. They had a completely new purpose in life.

ILLUSTRATION: On a corporate level, churches sometimes get off track with ridiculously long detours only to realize they've messed up along the way. I've referenced the parody called *The Gospel Blimp*, which was a story written in the 1960s and turned into a short film. In the story as I recall, a group of people come up with this idea of using a blimp with messages on it to share the Gospel. Over time they create a social club of blimp supporters... and the simple idea of sharing the Gospel with their neighbor gets lost. Churches get off track when they cease to meet needs and begin chasing other things. When I first came here as pastor, I heard a lot about the past. I heard a lot of opinions about a lot of things...and my conclusion was simple: let's be creative and ask God to help us meet the needs of the community and see what happens. Well, we're still here, and I am certain there are some who pass by and scratch their heads wondering how that's possible.

CONCLUSION: Abram started out on a simple journey of faith. He muddied it up by making things complicated when they didn't need to be. God used Abram's mistakes to teach him lessons. He was not a quick learner. Abram had a long way to go before he was the man God wanted him to be.

I don't want to be judgmental about the beloved Father Abraham. I didn't walk in his shoes. I don't know what it's like to be faced with a famine while having a family, servants, and livestock. I can, however, learn from his successes and mistakes. Here are some conclusions:

- When he was close to God, his compass led him in God's will.
- When he was not close to God, when he started on his own path, his compass led him away from God's will and God had to bail him out in order to keep his promise to Abram.

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