

DIVINE INTERVENTION (vv. 17-20)

17 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.

1. The word for diseases can also be translated "plagues." Careful Bible students have observed some meaningful parallels between Abram's first encounter with Pharaoh and the Exodus. Abram went to Egypt because of a famine. He soon found himself at the mercy of a powerful ruler. God inflicts the ruler with plagues to deliver Abram and his family. Abram is expelled from Egypt with great wealth. While the parallels are impressive, there is at least one significant difference. What is it?
2. How would this story have encouraged Abram's descendants as they reflected on God's ability to deliver them from enslavement in Egypt? How would it have inspired another generation when they were in exile in Babylon? How does it encourage us?
3. Abram, like so many of us, is slow to learn. He will repeat this tactic later in the story, and his son, Isaac, will follow suit. What are some key lessons Abram should have learned from this incident? What are some lessons we ought to take to heart?
4. One of the lessons Abram should have learned was that "he desperately needed a savior." Why did Abram need a savior? Why do we need a savior?

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While the Bible speaks of Abram as a man of faith, his story is not as heroic as we might imagine. He is made of the same stuff you and I are. His best moments are often followed by his worst.

Abram's story begins on a high note. God appears to Abram and commands him, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." With the command comes a promise. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Abram takes God at his word and sets out on a journey without knowing where he will end up. He eventually finds himself at Shechem. The Lord enlarges his promise. "To your offspring, I will give this land." Overwhelmed by God's goodness, he builds an altar and worships the Lord. Abram begins to walk the length and breadth of the land God promised him. He moves into the interior and pitches his tent and builds an altar. From there, he makes his way to the rugged hill country of the Negev. Ominously there is no mention of an altar.

A famine follows. The Negev is brutal and unforgiving. The survival of Abram's family, servants, and herds hangs in the balance. If there was ever a time to build an altar and call on the name of the Lord, this is it. Rather than building an altar, however, Abram devises a scheme—a scheme that threatens the very heart of the promise God made to Abram. A man who was promised so much stands to lose it all.

A DESPERATE SITUATION (v. 10)

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.

1. The Hebrew of verse 10 begins and ends with the mention of the famine. “There was a famine in the land... the famine was severe.” The writer is underlining the severity of Abram’s circumstances. Abram may have felt God had forgotten him. When are we most vulnerable to feelings of abandonment?
2. What are some critical truths we can count on when we feel abandoned or forgotten?
3. What are some critical truths Abram should have called to mind?
4. What is God usually up to in these situations?

AN ILL-ADVISED SCHEME (vv. 11-13)

11 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.”

1. Inherent in God’s promise to Abram was the promise of protection. “whoever curses you I will curse.” Why do you think Abram resorted to this ill-advised scheme rather than trusting God?
2. What usually happens when we “lean into our own understanding” rather than “trusting in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5)?”
3. Commentators search in vain for ways to sanitize this scene. Abram is far from heroic. He is willing to risk Sarai’s safety and sexual integrity to save his skin.

What does the scene tell us about Abram?

What does it reveal about human nature after the fall?

4. In Genesis 1, men and women were both created in the image and likeness of God. In Genesis 2, Woman is taken from man’s side as an appropriate and equal partner. How does Abram’s treatment of Sarai violate the creation ideal?

5. In the New Testament, husbands are told: “love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.” How does Abram’s treatment of Sarai fall short of Christ’s ideal?
6. How do we fall short of God’s ideal in our treatment of others?

THINGS GO TERRIBLY WRONG (vv. 14-16)

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.

1. Some commentators speculate that as Sarai’s brother Abram would be able to negotiate her betrothal. He could use negotiations as a delaying tactic or name a price no one could meet. In Pharaoh, we find a man who was not used to negotiating and could match any price. We are not sure whether Pharaoh met Abram’s price or named his own. The text simply tells us, “she was taken to his palace.” How clever do you think Abram felt at the moment?
2. How did Abram’s scheme put God’s promises in jeopardy?
3. Ironically Abram asked Sarai to say that she was his sister so that he would “be treated well for her sake.” Verse 16 tells us, Pharaoh “treated Abram well for her sake.” How do you think Abram felt about his ill-gotten gains?
4. Why are wealth and safety apart from God empty and fleeting?
5. How would you describe Abram’s situation?