

ORIGINS

"THE BEGINNING OF TRUST"

GENESIS 12:10-20

This Week's Core Competency

Personal God – I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life. Psalm 121:1-2

*I lift up my eyes to the hills-
where does my help come from?
2 My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

When it comes to living by faith, fear is our Achilles' heel. Fear begets deceit and deception; we even use fear as our excuse for sinning. The following colorful biblical examples bring the truth home to us. In the beginning when God came looking for Adam in the garden, he was nowhere to be found. Then God called out to him, and hesitantly he emerged from behind the lush foliage and said, "I heard you in the garden, and I was *afraid* because I was naked; so I hid" (Ge 3:10). About Sarah, we are told that three men appeared to her husband to confirm that about the same time the following year she would have the son God had repeatedly promised (Ge 12:2; 15:4; 17:16). Eavesdropping at the tent's door, she overheard their words to Abraham and promptly laughed at the prospect of bearing a child at her age. Her laughter was probably triggered by the thought of how old she would be when he finished college! But when the LORD asked Abraham why

God's deliverance in no way condoned Abram's deception; rather, it embarrassed it.

– Allen P. Ross

Sarah laughed in doubt at God's ability to do what he promised, the writer tells us, "Sarah was *afraid*, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh'" (Ge 18:15). Isaac, following in the footsteps of his father, used fear as an excuse as well. While living in Philistine territory because there was a famine in the land, Isaac lied about Rebekah. "When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' because he was *afraid* to say, 'She is my wife.'" One last example should suffice. Israel's first king, Saul, blamed his disobedience on fear. After failing to completely destroy the Amalekites and everything that belonged to them as the Lord had commanded, he confessed to Samuel, "I have sinned; I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was *afraid* of the people and so I gave in to them" (1Sa 15:24).

We all know, of course, that faith is the antidote for fear, but living by faith when you're scared to death is hard; just ask Abraham. He had enough faith to leave his country, his people, and his father's household and go to the land that God promised to show him. The book of Hebrews tells us, "by faith Abraham . . . obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (11:8). And yet, later when he feared for his own life, he turned a half-truth in his favor to fool his Egyptian neighbors into believing that Sarah was not his wife. But as one commentator says, "using one half of the truth to conceal the other was so clearly a lie that on this occasion Abram attempted no defense" (Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC, 127). Abraham's scheme, born out of fear, backfired on him, so that the LORD had to intervene. Ironically,

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his attempt to assure the fulfillment of God's promise by protecting himself turned into a threat to the fulfillment of that very promise by putting Sarah at risk.

Faith begins by taking the word of God seriously. God had said to Abram:

"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." (Ge 12:2)

Hindsight is 20/20. Had Abram only remembered and relied on God's promise, he would have avoided resorting to the use of deception for protection. Obviously, Abraham's confidence in God's word grew over the years for by the time Isaac was a young lad, the patriarch was so confident in God's promise that the book of Hebrews says: "He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death" (11:17b-19).

Likewise when we're scared to death, we can do no better than remember and rely on what God has said to us:

"Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.'

So we say with confidence,

'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?'" (Heb 13:5-6)

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Genesis 12:10-20

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. 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."

14 When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she 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, menservants and maidservants, and camels.

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.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Circle "famine" (2x) in v. 10.

* Bracket "to live there for a while" in v. 10.

* Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 10.

* Underline "beautiful woman" in vv. 11, 14.

* Circle "sister" in v. 13.

* Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 13.

* Bracket "was taken" in v. 15.

* Bracket "for her sake" in v. 16.

* Number the things Abraham acquired from Pharaoh in v. 16.

* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 17.

* Circle "serious diseases" in v. 17.

* Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 18.

* Underline "what" and "why" (2x) in vv. 18-19.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Identify the two major characters center stage in each of the three paragraphs (vv. 10-13, 14-16, and 17-20) in the story.
2. What did Abraham hope to accomplish through a clever use of deception?
3. What do you suppose made him think his ploy would work?
4. His ploy apparently did work until it ran aground on an *unforeseen* complication. What was it?
5. Explain how the complication threatened the fulfillment of God's promise.
6. After reading verse 13, explain the *irony* of verse 16.
7. Identify the *climax* or turning point in the story.
8. The story then moves rapidly toward its conclusion. Identify the *conclusion* of the story.
9. Relate the conclusion to God's promise (cf., vv. 2, 3, 7).
10. **Discussion:** Talk about whether Abraham should have gone down to Egypt in the first place.

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The story of Abram in Egypt is an intriguing short story about a close call the patriarch and his wife had during their sojourn in Egypt to escape a severe famine in Canaan. About it Allen P. Ross writes: "The story presented here has much more to it than a lesson on honesty—although the teaching of the story does warn against deceit" (*Creation and Blessing*, 270). Another commentator probably goes too far when he writes: "The text offers no moralizing lesson from Abram's action of identifying Sarai as his sister . . . The Bible is not trying to teach us how to act or how not to act by Abram's example" (John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 398). Ross goes on to say: "The story is essentially about the threat to the ancestress, and thereby a threat to the fulfillment of promises in 12:1-3. It simply but adequately traces this plot through the tension of the fear and deception of Abram to its resolution by the Lord's intervention. The writer uses speech [i.e., Abram to Sarai in vv. 11-13 and Pharaoh to Abram in vv. 18-19] as well as narration to develop the story, but he never strays far from the main point of interest concerning the blessing. On the one hand, God had promised to bless Abram, and so the patriarch came away from this incident a wealthy man. On the other hand, God had promised to defend Abraham from those who harmed the blessing, and so the Pharaoh was prevented from interfering with Abram and his blessing. The interesting point in the story is that it was Abram who endangered the ancestress, but it was the Lord who delivered her" (270).

The story, which begins with the narrator telling his readers that Abram "went down to Egypt" and ends with him telling them that Abram "went up from Egypt" (13:1), can be divided into three scenes, each of which having two of the story's three major characters center stage. In the first scene (vv. 10-13), Abram and Sarai are center stage. The scene contains his speech to her regarding what they are to do when they arrive in Egypt. Given Sarai's beauty, Abram is worried that some unnamed Egyptian will be tempted to kill him and take her. Abram's ploy makes perfect sense humanly speaking. She is to say that she is his sister. That way, anyone who wants to marry her will have to deal with him for her hand, making him "a party to negotiate with rather than an

obstacle to be eliminated" (Walton, 396). Extended negotiations would make it possible for him to buy enough time for them to escape.

In the second scene (vv. 14-16), Sarai and Pharaoh are center stage. Abram's ploy appears to be working perfectly until the Pharaoh's officials see that Sarai is very beautiful. Posthaste they praise her to Pharaoh, who quickly takes her into his palace. Whether Sarai just became a member of Pharaoh's harem or whether she was actually introduced to the king himself is hard to say; Pharaoh's statement to Abram in verse 19 is ambiguous. He took her to be his wife but 'in a royal household it would take time for her to come before the monarch' (Ross, 277). In any case, this leaves Abram in an unenviable position. On the one hand, he is being treated very well by Pharaoh, who is either paying a generous bride price for Sarai or just displaying a ton of goodwill toward his new "brother-in-law." On the other hand, Abram is without his wife, the future mother of his promised offspring (v. 7). He had wanted to be "treated well" (v. 13) for Sarai's sake and he is but in most ironic circumstances.

In the final scene (vv. 17-20), the LORD comes to the rescue. He inflicts Pharaoh and his household with serious diseases whose outbreak correlates with Sarai's arrival in the palace. A royal investigation into their sudden onslaught ultimately leads to the discovery that Sarai is not only Abram's sister but also his wife! An outraged king summons Abram to condemn what he has done. Pharaoh's rapid-fire, accusatory questions—What? . . . Why? . . . Why?—leave Abram speechless. His deceitful actions clearly warrant the monarch's rebuke. Pharaoh's final words to Abram, "Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" suggest that he returned Sarai unharmed to Abram as his wife.

The narrative has to be understood at two levels; it tells an *upper* and a *lower* story. Ross puts it nicely: "Moses would have his readers learn how *God graciously protects his plan through divine intervention when his people complicate it with deception*. But Moses would also have them learn that *it is foolish to try to deliver oneself from threatening situations by means of deceptive schemes*" (278).

The Message of the Passage

When Abram's ploy threatened Sarai and jeopardized fulfillment of the promise, the LORD intervened to deliver them and assure its fulfillment, so when you're in a difficult situation, rather than resort to misleading ploys, rely on him to keep his word.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- Journal your answers to the following living questions:

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 10 **famine** Food shortages due to fluctuating rainfall in Canaan compelled the patriarchs to leave the land at different times (Gen. 26:1; 47:4; cf. Ruth 1:1). The annual flooding of the Nile made a much more predictable food supply available in Egypt. One ancient text reads, "Certain of the foreigners who know not how they may live have come. . . . Their countries are starving" (ANET, 251). "Modern archaeologists and geologists have found evidence of a massive three-hundred-year drought cycle that occurred during the end of the third millennium and the beginning of the second millennium—one of the time periods to which Abram is dated" (Walton, 395).

v. 10 **to live** "To sojourn" (NKJV). The Hebrew verb indicates that Abraham had no intention of turning his back on the promise. His stay in Egypt would be temporary (Ross, 275). Nevertheless, another commentator observes: "Since he receives no revelation to sojourn in Egypt (cf. 12:1; 26:2-6; 46:2-3), he is stepping out of the stones in God's will to find bread" (Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, 213).

v. 11 **beautiful** Sarah was a striking woman at the age of sixty-five (Gen. 12:4; cf. 17:17). One commentator explains that "well-endowed matronly figures, not slim youthful ones" represent the ancients' ideal of womanhood (Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15*, 288); another claims "the key to the whole problem lies with the patriarchal life-span, which was still approximately double our own . . . Sarai's sixties would therefore presumably correspond with our thirties or forties" (Kidner, 128). Still another claims such explanations are not necessary. Contemporary society has its examples of beautiful women Sarah's age, e.g., Sophia Loren. What's more, one commentator writes, "We need not think that every culture is so superficial in their assessments of beauty as ours is. The phrase used here is also used to describe a fine specimen of cow (Gen. 41:2). We need not therefore assume that Sarai has miraculously retained the stunning beauty of youth. Her dignity, her bearing, her countenance, her outfitting may all contribute to the impression that she is a striking woman" (Walton, 396-97).

v. 12 **kill me** "Abraham's fear demonstrates a lack of trust in God's recent promises. Although God has promised to make Abraham's seed abundant (a promise still to be fulfilled) and to curse those who curse Abraham, Abraham fears for his life" (Waltke, 213).

v. 13 **sister** While Sarah was indeed Abraham's half-sister (Ge 20:12), he knew how the Egyptians would interpret her words and intentionally used a half-truth to deceive them. Using one-half of the truth to conceal the other is clearly a lie (Kidner, 127).

v. 15 **was taken** "Abram hoped that by claiming to be Sarai's brother he could fend off suitors by promises of marriage without actually giving her away. This suggestion is confirmed by other stories in Genesis where brothers try to delay their sisters' marriages (24:55, Laban and Rebekah; 34:13-17, Dinah and her brothers)" (Wenham, 288). However, events spin out of Abraham's control when Sarah is taken into Pharaoh's household. His scheme worked with the Egyptians, but Pharaoh had the power to add her to his harem without negotiating for her "brother's" consent. Whether Sarah had sexual intercourse with Pharaoh is unclear. On the one hand, "the Hebrew here does not necessarily entail sexual intercourse (see 20:2, 6); to signify intercourse the text might have included 'and violated her' (see 34:2) or 'and lay with her' (see 38:2)" (Waltke, 214). But on the other, "that plagues were sent seems to indicate that Pharaoh did actually commit adultery" (Wenham, 289).

v. 16 **camels** "The reference to camels in the patriarchal narratives has raised questions about their historicity. Some contend from archaeological evidence that the effective domestication of the camel did not occur before the twelfth century B.C. Speiser, however, suggests that 'the camel may have come into limited use at an early period (as did also the horse), but required centuries before it ceased to be a luxury.' K. A. Kitchen also cites counter archaeological evidence for a limited domestication of the animal as early as 3000 B.C.. Sarna cites evidence proving knowledge of the dromedary in Old Babylonian times (ca. 2000-1700 B.C.). Possession of the rare animal signaled wealth and status (Gen. 24)" (Waltke, 215).

v. 17 **serious diseases** "Though the nature of the diseases is unexplained, it probably pertains to sex so as to suggest to Pharaoh that Sarah is their cause" (Waltke, 215; cf., Wenham, 289).

v. 19 **here is your wife** Pharaoh's abrupt command to Abraham is "barked out" (Wenham, 290) in four Hebrew words: "Here . . . wife . . . take . . . go."

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Last week we saw God call Abram into a beautiful relationship with Himself. He promised Abram land, descendants and that all people would be blessed through Him. The Messiah, the Savior of the World, would eventually come through Abram's family line. Talk about a mountaintop experience! Abram had just entered into a covenant relationship with the living God and then we see him stumble. I am usually quick to judge Abram on this point. So there was a little famine in Canaan? Was that enough for him to leave the land God told him to settle in and then lie about his wife being his sister? And then I think about times in my own life when I forget the amazing things God has done and I doubt. I become afraid; my faith falters. I begin to make plans on my own. Recently, I was stressing over a family dinner that I was hosting. I was worried about getting the house clean and if I was serving the right thing. Would there be enough? After complaining to a friend, she simply asked if I had prayed about it. Um . . . no. For a moment I had forgotten that God cares about all things in my life. He wants me to trust Him in everything. Abram forgot to trust in the Lord when he packed his bags and headed to Egypt. Lord, help us this week to trust you with EVERYTHING!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ge 12:10-20

1. Why did Abram go to Egypt?
2. What did he say to his wife on the way there?
3. According to verse 17, what happened because of Abram's lie?

What Do You Think

1. Why do you think Abram lied?
2. Have you ever lied in an attempt to get yourself out of some trouble?
3. How did Abram demonstrate a lack of trust in God?

What R U Going To Do

Have your family make a list of everything they need to do or decisions that have to be made this week. Include little things like walking the dog or picking up toys. As a family pray through the entire list asking God to help you trust Him in everything!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Personal God - I believe God cares about everything in my life.

Memory Verse

Psalm 100:1-5

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** ____ **Think** ____ **Do** ____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.