

## 22. Lapse of faith

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Have you ever been in a difficult situation when you were checking every possibility and only to realize that you don't have very much choices but doing what you thought was the best way to handle it? During your evaluation, you included all the possibilities, except one – God. Somehow you thought that He can sit this one out because you got this. Or you didn't even include Him in any of the options you were considering. We all have been that situation and made that miserable decision only to regret later.

Right after the promise of God's blank check blessing for Abram, he did one of the dumbest things in his life – instead of trusting and believing in his God's promise, he went along with his own logic that was a purely calculation in his human mind without the Lord's promise. To make the matter worse, he was rebuked by a heathen king for his scheme. I hope and pray that we would never repeat what we've done before and never to bring disgrace to the name of our Lord.

### A. LAPSE OF FAITH

*Genesis 12:10-13* Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. 12 Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you."

How about that, a famine in the place where God is leading! What a great disappointment this must have been to Abram and his family. God was testing their faith, to see if they were trusting the Lord. Instead of remaining in Canaan and trusting God, Abram chose to go down to Egypt. Did you notice that Abram didn't ask God if going to Egypt was what He wants? Did you also notice he didn't build an altar while he was in Egypt? He sure didn't.

Egypt symbolizes the world in the Bible, the life of self-confidence, lust and carnal life. But Canaan illustrates the life of faith and victory. Note that, they went "down to Egypt." Any step away from God is a step down from Him just like Jonah did:

*Jonah 1:3* But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

No matter what kind of situation occurs, the Word of God is our guide and we must not depart from it under the pretext of necessity or circumstances. We can easily justify the circumstances around us to favor what we have decided, but God's Word doesn't change.

In this verse 3, Jonah found a ship bound for Tarshish. Whenever we try to run away from God's will, we can be sure that satan will do anything to help us including preparing a ship to run away from God.

Did you notice that Jonah had to pay to get into the ship that would take him away from God's will? Whenever we get into sin, we have to pay the fare. Oh yes, there

are moments of pleasure in sin, but we pay the fare for our sins, sometimes with our lives.

Abram was not wrong for being concerned about famine and feeding his family. But Abram was wrong in thinking God could not provide for his needs in the place where God called him to live. After all, God called Abram to Canaan, not to Egypt.

Abram, like most of us, found it easier to trust God in the 'far-off' promises than in the 'right-now' needs.

In many occasion, we generally don't want to depend on God's promises, because His promises are unseen. Yet, what we have and what we can do are something tangible. In our unbelief, we'd prefer not to trade in those tangible things with God's distant and yet-to-be-seen promise.

Let's make a hypothetical example. You are driving your Ford Pinto with 200,000 miles into a mall parking lot. The owner of the Ferrari dealership comes over to your Pinto and looks around and kicks your tires and hands out his business card to you and say, "How about a straight trade-in? You take any one of the Ferraris from my dealership lot, I'll take your Pinto." You ought to be crazy not to take his Ferrari. Yes, you don't see that Ferrari in that mall parking lot, but you know the Ferrari dealership owner has many beautiful brand new souped-up Ferraris. You can take for his words or blow him off. That is like what the Lord is doing with us. A straight trade-in: our sins, hopelessness, worry, and a one-way ticket to hell for His holiness, righteousness, peace, love, and eternal life in heaven.

What Abram did reminds me of another biblical character in the OT – David. Before he became a king of Israel, he was Israel's most wanted. David was chased by king Saul in the wilderness about 10 years. If you have to look over your shoulder day in day out because someone tries to kill you, fugitive life can get old eventually. In the moment of the laps of his faith, David did this:

*1 Samuel 27:1 And David (1) said in his heart, "Now (2) I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. (3) There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me anymore in any part of Israel. So I shall escape out of his hand."*

### **Problem 1) David's problem starts at "said in his heart."**

As we notice at the beginning of chapter 27, we find him talking to himself. Does it mean that we cannot talk to ourselves? Is it unbiblical? No, what I mean is that instead of asking for guidance from God, he was acting upon his own decision. We can all relate to his behavior because we all have done it.

You see, David was tired and weary. That is the precise time when the devil comes after us. It is important for us to be refreshed through the Word of God and close fellowship with godly people regularly.

### **Problem 2) Forgetting God's promises and faithfulness**

If relying on his own ideas was not bad enough, David completely ignored the promise of God for him in chapter 16 that he would be a king of Israel after Saul someday.

Seeing his situation from his own limited and human point of view, David missed God's perspective and lost his trust in Him. All of sudden, Saul loomed larger than Goliath and twice as menacing.

That is how the devil operates. He wants us to ignore God's promises and faithfulness for us:

God promises us that He will never leave us, nor forsake us.

God promises us that He will provide all of our needs according to His riches in the glory.

God promises us that no one can snatch us out of His strong mighty hands.

God promises us that He would give us life more abundantly.

And God's promises go on.

But the devil wants us to forget all of those wonderful promises, but turn our eyes upon the circumstances and our own strength. It doesn't take a whole lot for us to get depressed and become suicidal if we listen to the devil and ourselves.

### **Problem 3) Moving in with the enemy of God**

David not only following his idea and ignoring the promises of God but also he decided that it would be safer for him to go into the enemy territory than staying with God.

Let's go back to Genesis 12: Can you believe what Abram is asking his wife to do? "By your beauty, I can save my hide." What a jerk! This was actually a half-truth. Sarai was Abram's half-sister. Yet a half-truth is a whole lie. Abram's intention here was clearly to deceive, and he trusted in his deception to protect his skin instead of trusting in the Lord.

Since he chose to go to Egypt against the will of God, he had to concoct a lie to sustain the life there. Isn't that a typical for us as well? We sin against the Lord, while we are in sin, we have to commit more sins to sustain the life of sin.

If we want to do something wrong, we can always find some flimsy excuses to do it. If we can't think of any excuses ourselves, the devil is more than happy to supply them.

By the way, do you know how old Sarai was at this point? She was 65. But the long life span of Abram and Sarai also explains her beauty at that age. Since Abram lived to be 175 and Sarai to be 127, this 65 years old was only a half age for her, perhaps corresponding to what we think of as late 20s or early 30s.

Before we continue to the next verses, let's think about the unbelief of believers. Unbelief is when we intentionally refuse to believe God's Word and do what He tells us not to do.

When a believer faces an insurmountable looking situation, he completely leaves God out of his thought and says, "I cannot overcome this." What that person is actually thinking is, "Since I cannot overcome this, God cannot either." If our God is at the same level and has the same capability as ours, I don't want to worship another pathetic thing. No, our God is all powerful, all merciful, and all wonderful God who can do all things.

Unbelief has serious consequences both for the unbelievers and for believers. For the former, their unbelief bars the entrance to heaven; for the latter, it shuts the gate to the blessings of God's rest. This is not the unreasonable penalty imposed on helpless humanity that has no choice by some cynically twisted deity. But God of Christianity

who created and owns everyone and everything in the universe gives them choices to choose from – His way to eternal blessings or their ways to eternal destruction.

Unbelief is NOT inability to understand what God is speaking through the Bible, rather it is an individual's conscious decision of unwillingness to trust Him. It is the chosen decision of a sinner, nothing else. Unbelief is not a weakness of faith in God; it sets oneself in opposition to Him.

Does it mean that any time we have a sincere doubt for not understanding the ways of God is unbelief? No. Jesus never rebuked the doubts of His disciple Thomas. He helped him understand the truth.

## **B. THE ULTIMATE REBUKE BY A HEATHEN KING**

*Genesis 12:14-20 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. 15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way." 20 So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.*

What Abram did to Sarai was pure selfishness. The selfishness that comes from pride is the root of our sin. The implication is that this is both a selfish decision and one out of fear and unbelief in God and His promise.

Though Pharaoh was a heathen king, he would have been a better "husband" for Sarai than Abram. He seemed more concerned about protecting Sarai than Abram did.

What a shame that believing Abram should be rebuked by an unbelieving king! It is a sad thing that unbelievers have a better handle on how the believers should live than believers in Christ and rebuke them for it.

God does not tempt, but He often allows tests of our profession of faith in Him. Abram did not consult God in the famine. He just went to Egypt on his own initiative. God interceded the situation to protect Sarai from being taken as a Pharaoh's wife.

Listen, when our actions are out of fear instead of faith, the Lord may allow tests of our profession of faith in Him. Will we trust God through our financial famine? Will we trust God to protect us and our family? Will we trust God to fulfill His promise, even when circumstances make it look uncertain?

Abram's obedience in God's call in v1-9 does not excuse his sin and failure in the test. One moment of faith does not free from our guilt or responsibility from future sin or protect us from temptation. We must always be vigilant against sin.

Remember this: "Faith is living without scheming."

### **C. APPLICATIONS**

- 1) We must be willing to think ahead and weigh the long-term consequences of alternative courses of action away from God's.
- 2) We must see everything from God's perspective instead of ours.
- 3) We must be willing to wait on the Lord.