

## **THE IMPERFECTION OF FAITH GENESIS 12:10-20**

Have you ever been in a group where each person shared their most embarrassing moment in life? I have been a part of such groups on several occasions, but I must admit that I do not enjoy them. If Abram had ever found himself in such a group he might have shared the incidents that are involved in this chapter. It must have been for him one of life's most embarrassing moment.

The incidents described in this section came at such a surprising time. Abram had just arrived in the land God had promised him. He just had a fresh revelation from God with a promise to encourage his faith. He had just built an altar to the Lord and had called upon the Lord after offering a sacrifice. But in the midst of all these elements, he became painfully aware of the imperfection of his faith. His faith had been enough to enable him to leave the Ur of the Chaldeans and to journey to a land that God would give him. His faith had been enough to enable him to turn his back on family and friends and to choose God as the only hope of his life. His faith was enough to establish a relationship between him and the God of all the earth. But his faith was not perfect. He soon became painfully aware of the imperfection and immaturity of his faith.

All believers will make this same discovery. Your faith enabled you to turn your back upon the world and to turn to Jesus Christ for salvation. At the moment of that new experience of His grace you think that you are ready for whatever life may bring. Then there is a turn of events in which you become painfully aware that the faith that brought you to Christ is not a perfect faith.

I want us tonight to look at imperfect faith as it is demonstrated in this great man of faith.

## **I. IMPERFECT FAITH REVEALS ITSELF IN TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES.**

Abram is in the land that God has promised him. He may well have anticipated that from this point onward in his life everything will go well. He may have thought that the days of disappointment and difficulty were all behind him. Everything would be sunshine from this day forward. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Moses continues his account of the life of Abram with this telling line, “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.” All it took to make Abram aware of the imperfection of his faith was a devastating famine in the land of Canaan. Evidently the latter rains did not come. Instead when there should have been clouds and rain, the sun kept on shining. Those of us who live in West Texas that has a tendency toward droughts have no difficulty understanding the devastation that a drought can bring to an agricultural economy. Abram was a shepherd. He had flocks and herds that were dependent upon the grass of the fields. When there was no rain then there was no grass. This created an immediate and severe crisis of faith for Abram.

What do you do when you are a shepherd with a great flock of sheep and there is no water or grass? What do you do when this happens to you in the land that God has promised to you? Doubtlessly those strong in faith will take whatever steps they deem to be necessary, but they will stay in the land that God has promised them. Abram did not have a strong enough faith to withstand the trying of a time of severe famine. So, he followed the path that the rest of the

world, the unbelieving world, followed in those circumstances. He led his family and his flocks toward Egypt where he knew there would be grass for his herds and flocks. He turned to another alternative instead of leaning hard upon the promise of his God.

Have you had such an experience? Has there been something that happened in your life that made you painfully aware of just how imperfect your faith was? Was it some trying circumstance that prompted you to seek another alternative besides God? Those trying circumstances of life have a way of revealing the imperfection of our faith. They come to all of us.

## **II. IMPERFECT FAITH SURRENDERS TO THE FEAR OF MAN.**

When Abram and his family approached the borders to the land of Egypt, the fear of man became obvious in the life of Abram. Though he was a believer in God, his understanding of God was not deep enough nor his faith strong enough to overcome the fear of man.

The fear which Abram had of the Pharaoh was a natural and normal fear. Archeologists have uncovered reports of the Pharaoh forcefully taking a wife of some man that he desired. In order to take her and make her a part of his harem he would put to death her husband. Doubtlessly Abram had heard reports of such happenings in the land of Egypt. The fear of the Pharaoh putting him to death was just too much for his imperfect faith.

This imperfect faith caused him to cringe before the dangers of Egypt and to begin to plot ways to deal with those dangers.

Students of the Bible have struggled with this incident in the life of Abram. Some of them have sought for ways to excuse the actions of Abram. They have excused his venture into Egypt as being nothing more than an act of expediency. They have excused his actions toward the Pharaoh as being just an expression of practical wisdom. I think this is a misguided use of scripture. Everything in this context would seem to indicate that Abram was taking a wrong course of action. His actions were fresh evidence of the imperfection of his faith.

The fear of man is a reality with which all of us struggle. Some of us may struggle more than others, but everyone struggles with the fear of man. We especially struggle when the man that we fear is one who has power and is capable of doing us harm. This shepherd from the hills of Canaan with his little contingency was no match for the mighty Pharaoh with all of his armies. Abram understood that the Pharaoh would be able to do anything he sovereignly pleased to do. The one reality that Abram left out of his calculation is that the God that he had worshipped at Bethel is greater in power than the Pharaoh of Egypt. The God to whom he had built an altar was greater than all of the accumulated power of the Egyptian nation. There is no power known to man equal to the power and might of our God. It is our imperfect faith that causes us to cringe before the mighty of the earth.

### **III. IMPERFECT FAITH PROMPTS FOOLISH COMPROMISE.**

We know from the reconstruction of the events recorded in Genesis that Sarai was in her middle years. This good woman lived to be 120 years old, so she was approximately sixty years old when Abram took her and his flocks into the land of Egypt. In the culture of that day she was a beautiful and very desirable woman.

Abram's plan was a plan of moral compromise. He gave instruction to Sarai that she was to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister. There was some element of truth in this statement but it was a half truth. She was obviously more than his sister because she had entered into a covenant of marriage with him. It was obviously the hope of Abram that this compromise would save both Sarai and himself from harm. But it is obvious that at this point in his life he was more concerned about saving his own skin than he was that of his wife.

The half truth or lie of Abram led to a tragic circumstance. When some of the princes of the Pharaoh saw Sarai, they knew that the Pharaoh would want her in his harem. They approached Abram to secure Sarai for the harem of the Pharaoh. They even rewarded Abram with added sheep to his flock, cattle to his herd, and riches to his coffers. Through this compromise he brought material prosperity to himself, and great danger to Sarai and the purpose of God.

You must keep in mind what was at stake here. Sarai is Abram's wife. She was the chosen one through whom "the seed" would come. She was the chosen one through whom the Messiah would come. If this evil compromise of Abram was carried out, then that channel through which God had promised to work would be rendered useless.

Have you ever found yourself conniving a foolish compromise because your faith was weak? Has your imperfect faith every given birth to such plans that put you and those you love in danger? Anytime you find yourself plotting to do something that is built upon deception and involving something less than what is right, your faith is not as strong as it should be. A strong

and mature faith would enable a man or woman to stand strong and do what is right in such an incident of moral crisis.

#### **IV. IMPERFECT FAITH LEADS TO SHAMEFUL HUMILIATION.**

I mentioned in the beginning Abram's more embarrassing moment. It could have well been in that moment when this man of faith stood before the Pharaoh of Egypt and was subjected to a stern rebuke. Moses reports the encounter like this, "So Pharaoh summoned Abram. What have you done to me?" he said. Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'she is my sister,' so I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!"

This rebuke on the part of Pharaoh was prompted by God's hand of judgment falling upon the Pharaoh and his household. If Abram would not protect Sarai, then God would. In order to prevent the defilement of Sarai when Abram's imperfect faith put her in danger, God intervened by inflicting serious diseases on the Pharaoh and his household. When Pharaoh became aware of the cause of these serious afflictions, he took prompt action. He delivered the stern rebuke to the faltering man of faith.

Can you not imagine how Abram must have felt in that moment? Can you imagine the depth of his shame? He must have asked himself again and again, "Why did I ever do such a stupid thing? Why did I ever put my wife in such a treacherous circumstance? Why was I so weak in faith so that I dishonored God in a moment of crises? Why didn't I stay in the land of Canaan where God had blessed me? What am I doing in a place like this?" Questions like that must have haunted him day and night as he led his family and company back toward Bethel.

Your imperfect faith will result in such shameful humiliation on your part. I may never have known a moment quite as public and prominent as that of Abram but I have known some painful moments created by my own imperfect faith. My compromise and my unbelief have put me in a position where I suffered shame. Have you been there? It is a sign of the imperfection of our faith.

As we step back from this recorded incident in the life of Abram there is a couple of things we need to see for our own encouragement. While it is true that we may never have perfect faith in this world, we can have growing faith. God does not expect perfect faith, but He does expect faith to grow. God wants to use the trying circumstances in our lives to bring about growth in our faith. Instead of responding like the world to the trying circumstances of life, let's surrender to God and give him an opportunity to build and develop our faith.

Then we need to take courage from the truth that God's faithfulness prevails when our imperfect faith leads to failure. Abram left Egypt a terrible failure, but Abram's God did not fail. When Abram stumbles, Abram's God comes to the rescue. Abram's God in faithfulness intervenes to overturn a circumstance that Abram has created through his compromise. God will remain faithful even when we fail. This is a tremendous source of encouragement to my life. I may fail and falter, but my God will not fail. He is greater than my failures and compromises.

May God grant to you and to me a growing faith! May He enable us to see the difficulties that come our way as opportunities for faith to grow!