
Genesis 12:10-20 Weak in Egypt Ephesians 4:22-27

1. Last week we met a hero – today we meet a zero. Last week we saw how Abram obediently left his homeland and settled in Kanaan; today we see how the same man makes a mess of things. By contrast, and in contrast with many Bible stories, in this case the king of Egypt (pharaoh) is not a bad guy; he behaves with decency.
2. A famine causes Abram and Sarah to travel to Egypt in search of food. Once they have travelled down, Abram loses his nerve: when the Egyptians see that Sarah is beautiful, they will want her. As her husband he is likely to be killed, but if she were his sister, no harm would come to him. So he tells a blatant lie. In doing so, he puts God's promises of land, descendants and blessing at risk. God's representative does not speak the truth – what a bad testimony to the Egyptians! Abram even brings pharaoh in danger, who is rightly indignant.
The narrator does not tell us what happened to Sarah in pharaoh's harem, but that is easy to guess.
3. In Abram's defence, God allows the famine to take place. God tempts him. Can God be trusted? That's what Abram is still finding out. He fails the first test. His faith is not up to the situation.
4. Speaking the truth, reliability, are vital in church, family and society. What do we do in a difficult situation? Do we trust God and speak the truth? Are we willing to suffer for the truth? Do we act honourably or do we e.g. pretend we didn't know the rules?
There is hardly such thing as a white lie. We simply need to speak the truth. (And we should not ask our partners if we look good in something if we know we don't.) If we follow God faithfully, that does not guarantee us success. But he will make sure his promises are fulfilled.
5. Many characters in the Bible are flawed – but that is no excuse for us. We have to do better than they. We have been given the Holy Spirit to help us. It is a comfort to us that if we fail, God is still faithful. Yet we must speak the truth at all times. This is countercultural, because in adverts, in politics and in local government the truth is in short supply. In Ephesians 4:25 Paul writes: 'Speak truthfully to your neighbour.'
6. This story also teaches something about God: he is faithful, he keeps using and blessing Abram. What a faithful God we have!

PS Afterwards Hetty and I agreed that telling a lie is acceptable if it needed to save a life, e.g. in a situation of foreign occupation or a terrorist attack. When you are hiding people whose lives are in danger, you may deny that you know where they are. This is what Rahab did in Joshua 2 and it was the right thing. As the Jews say, the duty to preserve life trumps the duty to speak the truth.
