

Abraham's Journey of Faith: A Picture of God's Work in His Elect

Genesis 12:10-20, 13:1-4

Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Romans 8:28-39



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Pursuing our Goals

- What are we doing to pursue our goals? (1 Corinthians 9:24)
 - Catechism Questions and Meditation
 - Scripture Memorization and Meditation

What We Learnt Last Week

- The God who calls - when God calls things happen! (Genesis 1:3; John 11:43-45).
- Abraham's call and our call - a radical call to be pilgrims and strangers in this world (Genesis 12:1-3; Hebrews 11:13-16).

The Testing God

- God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures as a testing God - consider the examples of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Job and the Israelites. Every single trial is a test from God.
- Jesus, the Son of God, was tested all through His life on earth. He passed all His tests in order to qualify as our substitute and High Priest (Hebrews 4:15; Luke 4:1-2; Mark 1:12-13).

Why does God test His elect?

- To conform us into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).
- To enable us know the true state of our heart. Through the tests we will know whether we will keep God's commandments or not (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Deuteronomy 13:1-3).
- To humble us to rely on God not ourselves (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).
- To teach us that man does not live by bread alone but by every word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3; Luke 4:4; Job 23:12).
- To be approved by God to receive the crown of life (James 1:12).
- For our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness (Heb 12:10).
- To refine our faith (1 Peter 1:6-9; Isaiah 48:10).

- To show us that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).
- The testing of our faith produces perseverance (James 1:2-4 NIV).
- Tribulations produce perseverance, perseverance produces character and character produces hope (Romans 5:3-4). We are encouraged to glory in tribulations!
- It is important to know that God has a purpose for every single trial or temptation which comes our way. All our tests and trials are part of God's eternal purpose.

The Test of Famine

- The first thing we see after God makes great promises to Abraham (in Genesis 12:2-3) is a test of famine in the land of promise.
- One would have thought that after such great promises there would be an immediate manifestation, but that is not the case. God is not in a hurry; He works in His own appointed time!
- We are introduced to a test of famine which is part of God's way of making Abraham totally dependent on Him.
- Although Abraham has been called by God, he is still a sinner who needs to be 'conformed into the image of Christ' (Romans 8:29).
- In the same way, God has chosen His elect in Christ from the foundation of the world but God has also predestined us to be conformed into the image of His Son.
- We can be certain that God will do that through a process of sanctification which will involve a series of tests, trials and discipline (Hebrews 12:6,11).
- Abraham's journey of faith gives us a clear picture of how God purifies the faith and life of His elect to make them partake in His holiness - this is the Glorious Gospel (Philippians 1:6)!

The events of Abraham's test and what they signify (Genesis 12:10-20; 13:1-4)

- ① The famine in the promised land of Canaan symbolises trials in the midst of promises. The elect are promised eternity with God but in the meantime we have to sojourn in this fallen world (remember last week's sermon - we are strangers and pilgrims in this world; Hebrews 11:13)
- ② Abraham departs to Egypt. In going to Egypt, Abraham reveals a weakness of not trusting God for provision (Proverbs 3:5-7).

- ③ Abraham plans with Sarah to deceive Pharaoh. Abraham's selfishness is revealed here as he cares about his own welfare and not that of his wife.
- ④ God plagues Pharaoh, demonstrating that God does not support Abraham's mischief. This also shows that God will never leave nor forsake his elect even if they fall into sin.
- ⑤ Pharaoh sends Abraham and his family away. We see God's providence at work. God uses Pharaoh to send Abraham back to the land of promise, where he is supposed to be in the first place. Pharaoh, an unbeliever, is used by God to fulfil His purpose.
- ⑥ Abraham returns to Bethel and calls on the name of the Lord. This demonstrates repentance on the part of Abraham. This signifies that true believers will repent when the Holy Spirit reveals their sins to them. (Consider the example of David in Psalm 51). Contrast this genuine repentance with the negative attitude and excuses of Adam, Eve and Cain when they sinned.

The Journey of Calling to Glorification: Abraham a picture of the elect

- God takes the initiative by calling Abraham from being an idol worshipper to Himself. In the same way, God calls His elect from their spiritual blindness/death and makes them alive to Him (1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9; 1 John 5:21). What are our idols and have we turned away from them?
- God makes promises to Abraham as God makes promises to His elect (Jeremiah 31:33-34).
- When God calls Abraham, He gives him a new heart which desires and longs after God, this is seen in Abraham's building of altars and calling on the name of God (Genesis 12:6-7) - likewise, the elect have a new heart with new affections and desires for God. The elect love to commune with God in prayer, meditating on His word and obeying His commandments (Psalms 1:1-3; Job 23:12; Psalm 42:1-2).
- Between the period of God's promise to Abraham and its fulfilment is a period of testing, trials and sanctification. Similarly, between the period of God calling the elect until their glorification is a period of tests and trials which is part of God's work of sanctification (conforming us into the image of His Son) - Romans 5:3-4; Romans 8:28-29; James 1:2-4; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Deuteronomy 8:2. We must not despise the discipline of the Lord!

- Although Abraham fails the test of famine by not trusting God (he seeks greener pastures in Egypt) God restores him and brings him back to 'the place of the altar and he calls on the name of the Lord' (Gen. 13:3-4) - similarly, the elect will fail some of the tests God brings our way but He will restore us back to Him through genuine repentance. God has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5; Proverbs 24:16)

God's Provision in our tests and trials

- God's grace is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- God is working our light affliction for an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Romans 8:18).
- God is faithful and He will help us to bear our trials (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- God will complete the good work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).
- Our labour in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- God will be with us always (Matthew 28:20; Psalms 37:24; Isaiah 43:2).
- God provides for our needs (Matthew 6:25-34)
- God is working ALL things for good (whatever God defines to be good) for His elect (Romans 8:28).

How should we respond to tests and trials in our journey of faith?

- ❶ Trust God and believe His promises (Proverbs 3:5-7; Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 12:1-2; Isaiah 41:10).
- ❷ Study, know and believe God's promises by being a diligent student of His word (Luke 4:4; Matthew 4:4; Joshua 1:8; 1 Timothy 4:13).
- ❸ Come boldly to the throne of grace (through prayer) to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16; Matthew 6:13).
- ❹ Follow them who through faith and patience obtain the promises (Hebrews 6:10-12).
- ❺ Do not waste any trial - Ask God what He wants you to learn from this trial (James 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Luke 22:41-42).
- ❻ Repent and return to God when you fail a test (1 Samuel 12:20-21; Proverbs 24:16; Luke 15:17-19; Philippians 3:13-14).