

GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

The Arena of Faith

Faith Tested:

¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. ¹¹You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; ¹²you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance. (Psalm 66:10-12)

There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.

These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.

So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1:6b-7 NLT)

All those who are God's will have their faith tested. Abram was no exception:

God called him and SENT him (Gen. 12:1).

Abram HESITATED and DELAYED his obedience, yet God pushed him out (Acts 7:4).

Allen P. Ross writes,

"This brief narrative provides a powerful portrayal of faith. Against a thoroughly pagan background and with very little information, Abram simply took God at his Word and went to the land of Canaan and became a blessing. The subsequent chapters show the struggles he faced in his new calling, tracing the development of his new faith as well as the realization of the promised blessing.

For Israel, the call of their great ancestor was instructive. It demonstrated that the promises they lived for were indeed from God—the promises of a great nation, a land, sovereign protection, and future blessings. The Lord's appearance and confirmation proved that Canaan was their destiny. Moreover, the pilgrimage of Abram provided them with their central march. He came to Shechem, Bethel, Ai, and the Negev; they would go up from the Negev to Bethel, Ai, and Shechem, where the covenant would be enacted (Josh. 24). But God required faith for any generation that wished to share in those promised blessings.

Israel thus shared the same call that their founding ancestor received—to go on a pilgrimage by faith to the Land of Promise and to worship and proclaim God there. They would have to believe in the promises in order to go, and their going and serving would be evidence of their faith. The lesson has many areas of application: *Those who truly believe the Word of the Lord will forsake all else to become worshipers of the Lord and to serve in his program to bring blessing to the world.*"

Now, Abram is about to endure a series of tests that will threaten the FULFILLMENT of God's promises. If he responds well, God will be GLORIFIED and Abram's faith will be DISPLAYED. If he fails, God will be DISHONORED and Abram and those around him will SUFFER.

Famine, Egypt, and a Beautiful Wife

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So, Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake." ¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸ So 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,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go." ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. (Genesis 12:10-20)

Abram's first failure of faith was ABANDONING CANAAN.

Remember, God called Abram to a SPECIFIC place (12:7). When his first real test came in his new life, he failed! Believing what he could SEE rather than what he was TOLD, Abram went DOWN to Egypt. Most likely, God intended to teach Abram that He would provide for him THRU the famine. Abram never gave God that chance.

To his credit, it doesn't appear that Abram intended to RELOCATE to Egypt. The word "SOJOURN" suggests that he expected this to be a TEMPORARY detour from his calling. However, he began a CHAIN REACTION (or a ripple effect) of negative outcomes:

- He put his WIFE (and himself) in a terrible position.
- He exposed LOT to the garbage of EGYPT (see 12:4, 13:10).
- He created long-lasting ANIMOSITY.

The second failure is far more significant. By plotting to DECEIVE the Egyptians about the true identity of Sarai, he hoped to preserve his own LIFE and perhaps allow for a NEGOTIATION regarding Sarai. He seems to be trying to BUY TIME. Instead, his deception displays a lack of FAITH, WISDOM, and MORALITY and ends up extracting a significant cost.

Pharaoh's princes agreed with Abram's assessment of Sarai ("very beautiful") and report this back to Pharaoh. He does not NEGOTIATE. He TAKES.

Ironically, Abram BENEFITTED from his deception (v. 16), But all that newfound wealth was a reminder to him of what he had LOST.

Humanly speaking, the covenant promise (made to Abram and by implication to Sarai) is LOST.

God must now INTERVENE to assure His will is done and his promises kept. "... the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues." Without any clarification of the nature of the plagues or how they knew they were there because of Sarai, the passage makes clear that God was their author.

The response of Pharaoh was swift: "... here is your wife; take her, and go."

Several lessons in conclusion:

Sin sometimes PAYS ...

But disobedience always COSTS ...

This encounter teaches us a huge lesson on the SOVEREIGNTY of God ...

There is a HUMAN element and a DIVINE element ...

God will DO what He has PROMISED.

But how we choose to OBEY or DISOBEY will have consequences.

And ... God may not always DELIVER US from our predicaments that we brought on ourselves.

Allen Ross:

"Divine intervention alone could deliver the wife of Abram untouched from the harem of Pharaoh. There were times in the experience of the nation of Israel, however, when God did not deliver his people from their predicaments, especially if their sin had been prolonged and rebellious. For this reason, the expositor must be careful in wording the point—God at times may deliver his people, but he may not. In this passage the predicament was such that, if there was to be any deliverance, any way out, the Lord would have to provide it. And he did it because his Word was at stake. In a similar way Ezekiel described the divine motivation for the restoration of God's people. "Thus says the Lord God, 'I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went'" (36:22)."

REBUKES from the WORLD are very painful for a child of God.

There are REPERCUSSIONS to our actions today that might very well affect us for a LONG TIME to come.

The wealth ...

LOT and his herdsmen ...

An Egyptian maiden named HAGAR ...

Next week: My Faith and My Influence