

SESSION #3

Welcome back to “A Journey of Faith with the Patriarchs”! We have seen Abraham’s remarkable faith response as he embraced the call of God. But life’s journey – even Abraham’s – includes some dark valleys and now we find the Father of Faith...

C. FALTERING IN THE WALK OF FAITH

- the next 2 incidents recorded in chap. 12 & 13 show the **reality of a life of faith** – it is not easy; a battle is involved – even for Abraham, consistent living by faith was not automatic
- notice that his temptation of ‘unfaith’ comes **directly after** Abraham’s remarkable faith response to God’s call!
 - years later, **Elijah** was tested by Jezebel immediately after his triumph of faith at Mt. Carmel
 - in the NT, immediately after his baptism, **Jesus** was tempted in the wilderness ...it’s a common pattern and one which can be seen in our lives too
- both of these next stories begin with a **problem** (Abram & the famine could not live in the same land; Abram and Lot could not live in the same land), and both **end happily** (Abram left Egypt with his wife & great wealth; Abram received a fuller confirmation of the promise from God); and both include a crucial **intervention by God** in between (God inflicted diseases on Pharaoh; God marks the extent of the Promised Land and invites Abram to walk through it)
- the first story gives us the **negative** side of the picture; the 2nd story provides a **positive** counterpart

1. Abraham’s Failure

Gen 12:10-20

¹⁰ 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."

¹⁴ 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.

- verse 10 tells us there was a severe **famine** in the land
 - Gene Getz reminds us that we *will* face periodic crises in our Christian lives *even when* we are following God fully
- Abraham's **faith is tested** here
 - he focused on the "famine in the land" and forgot the "faithfulness of the Lord"
 - the **famine** led him to **forget God**; which produced **fear**, then **selfishness**, and finally **deceit**
- ...what was his deceit? Abram tells a **half truth**
 - Sarai was in fact his half sister (20:12)
 - but the intent was to hide the truth that Sarai was of course his **wife**
 - it was a commonly known practice in the ancient Near East for rulers to kill the husbands of beautiful women & appropriate the ladies for themselves
 - even in her mid-60s Sarai was apparently an exceptionally **beautiful** woman
 - maybe she had some jars of a Middle Eastern ancient cosmetic called "Oil of Delay"! [as Stuart Briscoe suggests]
 - but if Abraham is seen as Sarai's elder **brother**, with the power to negotiate her status, then **his** life would not be in danger
 - the father of faith puts his wife at risk in order to save his own skin!
- ...Abraham's walk of faith, which had been remarkably robust in vs. 4, is now wobbling on a rocky road!
- even if it had been *right* for him to go to Egypt for relief from the famine (as some would argue), his actions there concerning Sarai showed his **lack of faith in God's protection** (after all, God had promised "I will curse him who curses you")
 - now God's entire **set of promises is threatened** here – by the actions of one of the main characters!
 - he is out of the Promised **Land**
 - Sarai is out of his home and in Pharaoh's harem
 - this is now a threat to the promise of an **heir & nation**
 - and instead of being a **blessing**, Abraham is the source of *disasters* for Pharaoh
- no wonder Pharaoh's expulsion of Abram & Sarai is reported tersely, in just 4 Hebrew words: "Here...wife...take...go!"

- in contrast to Abraham's failure, now we see...

2. God's Faithfulness

- Abraham – the father of faith – **faltered** badly in his walk of faith
- but would **God fail** to keep His promise?
 - absolutely not! – God rescued Sarai & brought them both back into the Land again
- ...and here we see one of the Bible's major themes in sharp contrast:
 - man's unfaithfulness**, and **God's faithfulness**

Heb. 6:13-19 in the Living Bible translation tells us this:

“...there was God's promise to Abraham: God took an oath in his own name, since there was no one greater to swear by, that he would bless Abraham again and again, and give him a son and make him the father of a great nation of people...

God... bound himself with an oath, so that those he promised to help would be perfectly sure and never need to wonder whether he might change his plans. He has given us both his **promise** and his **oath**, two things we can completely count on, for it is impossible for God to tell a lie. Now all those who flee to him to save them can take new courage when they hear such assurances from God; now they can know without doubt that he will give them the salvation he has promised them. This certain hope of being saved is a strong and trustworthy *anchor for our souls*...”

- the fact that God's promise to Abraham was made doubly sure by His oath, gives us rock-solid assurance that God will also give us the salvation he promised us
- not only that; even this promise to Abraham finds its **ultimate fulfillment**, not in this flawed father of the faithful, but in **Jesus Christ**, the absolutely Faithful One

Gal. 3:16 “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is **Christ**.”(NIV)

- Jesus never faltered; he faithfully fulfilled God's will with absolute perfection, all the way to the cross & the grave; as a result, God raised him from the dead; and his **resurrection** assures us that the promises of God to us in Christ are utterly true & reliable