

Genesis 12:10 - 13:4

How To Face The Trials Of Life

Life is a series of tests, trials, and temptations. Whether you're strong in your Christian faith, seasoned after many years, or whether you are a brand new Christian, misfortunes, hardships, and just plain old tough stuff will happen.

And yet by God's design the trials of life do something positive for us. As much as we hate to face them they're the gymnasium that gives our faith a work out. The testings and the decisions we face exercise our sensitivity toward God, our ability to trust Him, and our understanding of His will for our lives.

The New Testament tells us *that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* I Peter 1:7

You use fire to purify gold. You heat gold up until it's molten and the impurities come to the top. Then you skim the gold to get rid of everything that makes it impure. That's the way the trials and testings of life purifies our faith.

Our study of Genesis has brought us to the life of a man that is really a keystone in the purposes of God for the planet.

Open your Bible to Genesis 12 Page 11

This man Abraham lived in a pagan, idolatrous culture that had quickly developed after the flood. We saw in the tower of Babel incident how rapidly human beings wanted to develop their own ways and forms of worship. It seems that man will go any lengths, even religiously, to avoid putting himself under the authority of the true and living God.

But God had promised to bring a deliverer for the human race. He would be a human being who would crush Satan's power and redeem men from the penalty of sin. On this side of the cross we know that that redeemer was Jesus Christ.

In 2000 BC, though, God was just beginning to reveal the details of his plan of redemption. Through Abraham, God was going to establish a nation of people through whom He could bless the world. Through the Jewish people would come the Messiah of Israel and the redeemer of all people.

And so God called Abraham out of his pagan environment.

He said, *Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.* Genesis 12:1

As we pick up in chapter 12 we find that Abraham has obeyed God. He has left and moved across the desert wilderness to the land of Palestine.

Once Abraham was actually in the land, God confirmed His promise with more specific information.

Before this, God had promised Abraham He would show him the land. Now when Abraham arrives in Canaan, God said *To your descendants I will give this land.* Genesis 12:7

The whole Arab, Israeli, Palestinian question is one that goes way beyond 1948 when Israel declared it's independence. God made an unconditional promise that Abraham's descendants would possess the land and the very fact that there is an Israel today is a striking confirmation of the truth of the Bible.

No other nation on the face of the earth has been scattered and persecuted for 2000 years and yet has still retained their national identity the way Israel has.

And even if Israel today isn't a final fulfillment of this promise because they are still in unbelief, the very fact that they exist shows that God's promises won't fail.

Well as God confirmed and expanded his promises to Abraham we read that Abraham responded with worship and prayer. He built an altar to Jehovah.

But Abraham's testings and trials were far from over. Abraham had come a long way in his spiritual growth and obedience to God but quickly he met his first major test of his walk with God.

I. The Trials of Life Can Be Extremely Difficult

Read verse 10

I can just imagine what must have gone through Abraham's mind at this point. God had promised to bless Abraham.

Abraham grew up in the very prosperous, productive, advanced city of UR, and then later moved to Haran, which was equally wealthy. These were cities in the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia, they were bordered by the Euphrates River and as far as we know never experienced drought or famine.

Abraham has traveled for miles across a barren desert to get to the land of promise and now there is a famine so serious it looks as if he and his family will be wiped out.

Imagine the response he must have gotten from his wife Sarah.

“Abraham I told you you were out of your mind to come way out here! So you obeyed your God. Look where it's gotten you. We left the city and the security of home so we could come here and die of thirst and starvation.”

There was a tremendous amount of pressure on Abraham. Pressure from others and pressure from his sense of self-preservation.

And when the pressure is on we need a close walk with God more than anything else. But if you'll look at the two preceding verses in Chapter 12 you'll see that Abraham had made a mistake. **Read verses 8 & 9**

He moved from Bethel (which means the house of God) and from his altar which was his place of worship.

Here's the root cause of all the problems that follow. Abraham's going to end up in Egypt in the midst of lying, compromise, disobedience, and dishonor and it all began by leaving the altar and the place of worship.

In the New Testament the Ephesian church strayed out of the will of God by leaving its first love. Any Christian who's in bondage in their life today can know that they're there because they've left their Bethel.

Well, there was a severe famine in the land of Canaan. But God hadn't brought Abraham all the way from Ur to let him die of hunger. The famine was to test and strengthen Abraham's faith.

Strong faith isn't something that just pops up overnight. It matures and develops with time.

Abraham made a decision. It looked like a logical decision. But Abraham forgot to do one important thing. He didn't bring God into the picture. He didn't consult the One who had led him to there in the first place.

Every difficult event in life has 2 sides. One can draw us to God and the other can draw us away from Him. This famine was that type of event.

If Abraham would have really believed that God was going to keep His promises to bless him and make his descendants great and numerous, than he would have known that God wasn't going to let him starve.

Going down to Egypt wasn't necessarily wrong. It was in Egypt, many years later, where Abraham's great-grandson Joseph was used by God to provide food for his family when they faced famine.

Going to Egypt wasn't the problem. The central issue was really Abraham taking matters into his own hands and going to Egypt without consulting God. It was a self-centered decision and when he got there he just became more self-focused.

Gene Getz writes, "If Abraham had looked to God for specific instructions, it is possible that God would have sent him on to Egypt anyway, but with a specific strategy on how to face the problems he encountered when he got there. But it is also possible that God had other plans for him."

If Abraham would have seen this famine as an opportunity to strengthen his faith and God didn't tell him to leave then he would have stayed till his last piece of bread was gone and then trusted God to give Him bread from heaven if need be.

That's where God wanted Abraham to be in his walk of faith. That's where God wants us all to be.

There was going to come a day when Abraham would have that kind of faith. God would tell him to offer up his only son on an altar and Abraham would move ahead in obedience believing that God was going to keep His promises, even raising his son from the dead if that is what it took.

But at this point he wasn't living out that kind of of faith. He had some more learning to do.

He wasn't ready to let God glorify Himself through sustaining him.

If Abraham would have asked and if God would have told Abraham to stay in the land and wait for his miraculous provision no matter what just think what a testimony it would have been to all the pagan Canaanites who probably thought Abraham was a little strange anyway - this worshiper of one God.

It appears that Abraham didn't give God the opportunity to display His mighty power. Rather, he acted on his own choosing what he believed was the only alternative.

He went down to Egypt.

I. The Trials Of Life Can Be Extremely Difficult

II. We Need To Respond To The Trials Of Life Using God's Way Of Thinking

One failure leads to another, and we **read in verses 11-13...**

If we leave God's path, even at a small angle, the distance between God's road and our road will increase. Abraham who had walked by faith all the way from UR to Canaan, began to walk by the circumstances of this famine. Then, without asking counsel from God, he took a second step to avoid further trial.

Abraham had forgotten the counsel and care of God, he forgot the promise of God concerning his descendant who was to come in the future.

Abraham and Sarah were childless at this point. God wouldn't let him be killed or the promise of his multiplying of descendants couldn't be fulfilled.

But rather than falling back on God's promises Abraham fell back on his own limited, faulty, inadequate reasoning.

Now Abraham did have a reason to fear. History records that Egyptian men were very impressed with Semitic women. Not only that, but it was fairly standard procedure in those days for men to pick up wives by murdering their husbands.

So Abraham had a plan - and notice how he rationalized his behavior. Sarah really was his half sister. Genesis 20:12 explains that she was the daughter of his father but not of his mother. So Abraham planned out a half-truth to tell the Egyptians.

Kind of like standing in the dry bathtub with all your clothes on and telling your husband or wife to answer the phone and say that you are in the tub.

Notice the down hill slide of Abraham so far. First, he left Bethel, he left his altar of worship. Then he questioned God's provision in the land.

Now he's so wrapped up in self that he is willing to sacrifice his wife to Pharaoh's harem to save his own neck when God's already promised him safety.

We can sink pretty low once we get out of touch with God.

Well, we find that the very thing that Abraham feared and wanted to avoid, came crashing in on him.

Read verses 14 - 15

If Abraham would have consulted God he might have been the first man God used to convey a powerful message to the people of Egypt; that the true and living God exists and wants to reach out to all nations.

God had to eventually come down on Egyptian in judgment. Here was an opportunity to extend God's grace to them.

If Abraham had allowed God to prepare the way for him in Egypt, his strategy would have been God centered and not self centered. But Abraham was operating under his own steam and acted from selfish motives. Motives of doubt and fear.

Although she was 65 years old now Sarah was still a stunning woman to look at.

History records that Egyptian women were noted for their rather unattractive features, and for the fact that they "faded early" according to Keil and Delitzsch.

In Verse 16 it looks like Abraham was rewarded for his deception. **Read verse 16**

That sudden accumulation of wealth probably delighted Abraham's nephew Lot. You can just see him saying, "Hey, Uncle Abraham, here comes another flock of sheep. Boy, you should see this herd of cows. And come look at all those servants!"

But all that wealth exacted a high price. To get it Abraham had to deny his God and loose his wife. Abraham played the fool. And yet how many of us are tempted to compromise our walk with Jesus Christ to make it in the world. How many of us want to do life our way instead of God's way.

See what Abraham did? Rather than follow out a commitment there was a sell out. Why? What was the bottom line? Abraham doubted that God would take care of him.

I. The Trials Of Life Can Be Extremely Difficult

II. We Need To Respond To The Trials Of Life Using God's Way Of Thinking

III. God Is Patient and Faithful

God had a plan for Abraham, and fortunately He stepped in to this mess that Abraham had allowed to happen.

Read verse 17

God's patience and faithfulness in our lives is absolutely amazing. I mean here God had intended Abraham to be a blessing. "In you all families of the earth will be blessed." Here was Abraham making contact with the top guy in a world power. God had put him in contact with a man that most Egyptian people themselves could never hope to meet. But instead of being a blessing, Abraham was a curse and Pharaoh's house was plagued with great plagues.

Well it couldn't last too long without Pharaoh reacting.

Read Verse 18- 20

Whether God actually spoke to Pharaoh, or whether he found out about it by talking to Lot or to one of Abraham's servants, the king of Egypt soon came to realize that Sarah was already married.

Before you know it Abraham was brought before Pharaoh and the truth was made exposed. "Why did you do this to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?"

Abraham had no answer. He just stood there tongue tied and embarrassed in the presence of this indignant king. God had placed Abraham in a position where he

could have talked about God's glory to Pharaoh himself. But he lost that opportunity and suffered shame because he had compromised the truth.

You read through here and you think all in all, Pharaoh the pagan, comes across looking better than Abraham the believer.

You can almost hear Pharaoh turn to his court as Abraham and Sarah slink away feeling fortunate to be alive, and saying "Well, if that is an example of a believer in this God Jehovah, I sure hope I never meet another one."

How important it is that we guard our testimony so well, that we never by what we say or what we do, misrepresent our God to the world.

Now God doesn't boot Abraham out after this failure. God is patient and gracious. It was God who watched out for Abraham through all of this. In fact, Abraham was actually escorted out of Egypt back to Canaan where he belonged. Ironically God used a pagan king to rebuke Abraham and then pagan people to get him back on the right track.

Abraham seemed to have learned his lesson well. Look where he heads. **Read 13:1-4**

Abraham blew it big time. He failed that test. but we don't want to miss the fact that he learned from his failures. Abraham drifted in to Egypt a saved man, but he emerged from Egypt a spiritual man.

Three marks characterize a spiritual individual and all three show up in these 4 verses.

The first is separation - Abraham went out of Egypt and he stayed out.

Second is dedication - Abraham not only separated himself from Egypt but he went to Bethel, the house of God. He put off the old and put on the new. He said, "I need to move towards God not away from God."

Third is sacrifice - The Egyptians didn't live in tents. They weren't nomads and Abraham surely lived in a house while he was there. Now he was back in his tent. The tent symbolized Abraham's place in this world. He was a pilgrim and a stranger, he wouldn't put his roots down here, he'd be ready to move at a moments notice in the will of God.

His altar symbolized his attitude toward the next world. He would offer up anything demanded of him by God. So he called on the name of the Lord. His altar was a signal to God that he was ready to do what he said.

Now there is certainly a lot of different applications that we could draw from this story of Abraham but the thing that stands out to me is the example of his wrong decision. He didn't face the trial God's way.

How did Abraham, father of the faithful, get himself into such a mess down in Egypt? We need to learn from his mistake so we don't repeat it.

Remember there will be recurring trials in our Christian lives. Some of these trials God brings directly into our lives because He wants to teach us and prepare us for serving Him. Sometimes it's to reach others through us when they see us trust Him through the storm.

Other trials come because of the natural circumstances of life, because of the sin principle at work in the world. We have to expect difficulties; physically, mentally and spiritually.

But remember, no matter where the problems come from each one is an opportunity to grow in our understanding of God. Each one is another opportunity to trust God.

But then still other problems come when we are disobedient to God. We reap what we sow in life. But even then God lovingly and graciously, sometimes painfully brings us back.

Now, at first you might look at Abraham with all his riches and say that it looks like Abe got away with something here. He disobeyed God and still left Egypt a richer man than when he had first come.

But Abraham paid a price for his disobedience. He was able to learn from it but he still paid a price. And even though God was very gracious to Him in sparing his life and blessing him materially Abraham's negative influence on his nephew Lot was going to generate a lot of hardships for them all in the future.

Sometimes the results of our disobedience to God are not immediate, but believe me they come in due time.

So there will be testings in life. It would be absurd for us to see everyone around us going through suffering and think that we shouldn't face any ourselves. The key to making the right decisions when the testings come is rooted in our walk with God. If we're not at our Beth-el (at our altar), then we are not in communication with God.

And when we're in a situation like Abraham was where we're under tremendous pressure to do something, we are not going to have the spiritual wisdom to make those right decisions.

God honors good thinking and God honors human responsibility. But, we're only going to think right if we have the right stuff plugged into our mind and heart in the first place.

And we are only going to have that right thinking if we're like the godly man in Psalm 1. His delight is in the law of the Lord and in His word he meditates day and night.

Abraham wouldn't have lied about Sarah if he had been meditating on God's promises.

But he was under pressure, he had left his altar, he was fearful and apparently the last thing that was on his mind as he entered Egypt was God's Word.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the wisdom that we need is from above.

That wisdom starts when we realize that God is not only our Creator but our Savior. God not only established spiritual parameters for our life but He became the sacrifice when we violate those parameters. That wisdom starts when we place our faith in God alone for the forgiveness of our sins.

Then we can begin to grow.

What decision are you wrestling with today? Have you presented yourself to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God? Have you been transformed by the renewing of your mind? Have you looked steadfastly into the law of liberty so that the spirit of the Lord could change you into the same image as Christ, from glory to glory?

Are you trusting in the Lord with all of your heart, not leaning on your own understanding? In all of your ways are you acknowledging God, so that He might straighten your paths before you?

That's the key to facing trials. That's the lesson we can learn from Abraham's first test.