

...Now I Know

Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust the Lord (Genesis 12:1 - 22:1-19)

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 22:1-12

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” 6 And Abraham took the wood

of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. 9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Introduction

The teaching "Now I Know" is from the story and study of Abraham, the man that the Bible calls "the father of faith." We are going to consider the defining moments of Abraham's faith in God and gather wisdom and understanding of our defining moments of faith and how they can grow in strength and effectiveness. We will answer the questions surrounding

Abraham's faithfulness to God in those defining moments, and how he learned to righteously fear and unquestionably trust God - culminating in his final test of his faith in what historic the Hebraic tradition calls the "The Aqedah or, The Binding."

We are going to find both the historical and Biblical context for Abraham's tests of faith, as well as discover present-day applications from the timeline of Abraham's life and sojourning as it is chronicled by the Book of Genesis, chapters twelve through twenty-two. In the historical and Biblical context of these passages, we will pursue further understanding and revelation as to why Abraham made right and righteous choices in certain faith-defining moments. And yet, while in other equally defining circumstances, he would make some of his most questionable and troubling decisions.

Our pursuit of contextualizing the life and journey of an ancient Biblical character for present-day use will be strategic in that the faith-defining moments of Abraham's life will provide us with a timeless and proven template for helping us to develop and build our own faith. We will learn how to make faithful and unquestionable decisions in defining moments of faith, while also providing a deep-dive understanding of what it means for us today in real time to maintain and display a righteous fear and trust in the Almighty God during the most critically defining moments of our life.

We will also answer the big questions such as:

What are the differences if any, between having faith in God and becoming faithful to God?

What exactly is a faith-defining moment?

How do I know when I'm in one of those moments?

*What does **my** faithfulness have to do with the outcomes of those moments?*

What does it mean to righteously fear the Lord?

What is the relative connection between fearing the Lord and trusting the Lord?

How does fearing and trusting, impact our faith in God and our faithfulness to God?

So, off we go in pursuit of the Spirit's revelation and a Biblical understanding of our faith, faithfulness, and learning to righteously fear and trust the Lord in the most "outcome determining" moments of our lives. Even now, those moments are before us.

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Now I know You Fear God

Isaiah 33:5-6

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.

The righteous fear of God is the access to His sure and eternal foundation. The righteous fear of God unlocks the fullness of our salvation, as well as leads us to the approach points of the wisdom and knowledge of God's truth. Along with the love of God (the most important commandment), the fear of God is the construct of the very foundation of life! It will be important that we learn we cannot truly love God until we fear Him, nor can we righteously fear Him until we love Him.

In Jewish thought the love and fear of God are to be understood as complementing one another. Fear without love can easily result in being too rigorous and ultimately a stultifying approach to the spiritual life. Love without fear can just as easily degenerate into sheer sentimentalism.

From the many references in the Bible to both the love and the fear of God, without any clear distinction being made between the two, it would seem, as many biblical scholars suggest, that the two (fear and love) are essentially interdependent with an intense relationship with God, especially as realized in ethical and moral conduct.

The Biblical expression “the fear of God” often refers to an extraordinary degree of sacred worship and moral worth. Of the Hebrew midwives who defied Pharaoh’s order for them to kill the infants the verse says: “*The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live (Exodus 1:17).*” Job is described as “*wholehearted and upright, and one that feared God, and shunned evil (Job 1:1).*” In Hebraic literature, the usual expression for the fear of God is *yirat shamayim*, “the fear and awe of Heaven,” by which is meant the determination to carry out God’s will and precepts, while consecrating one's life to the awe and honor of worshipping **Yaweh** as Creator and Almighty God.

Leviticus 10:3

By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.

9.3.23

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Week One

The Historical and Biblical Timeline for Abraham's Most Defining Moments of Faith

Genesis 12:1-3

God tells Abraham to leave his homeland and family to be a stranger in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 12:10-13

Immediately after Abraham's arrival in Canaan - Negeb (the land of Promise), he encounters a famine.

Genesis 12:14-20

The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh.

Genesis 14:1-24

Abraham faces incredible odds in the battle of the four and five kings.

Genesis 16:1-15

He marries Hagar after not being able to have children with Sarah.

Genesis 17:1-14

God tells Abraham to circumcise himself at an advanced age.

Genesis 20:1-18

The king of Gerar captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself.

Genesis 21:1-14

God tells Abraham to send Hagar away after having a child with her.

Genesis 21:15-21

Abraham's son, Ishmael, becomes estranged.

Genesis 22:1-19

God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son of promise, Isaac, upon an altar.

9.10.23

...Now I Know

(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)

Week Two - God tells Abraham to leave his homeland and family to be a stranger in the land of Canaan.

Test One - The Call and Promise

Genesis 12:1-9

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,

6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the

LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

The sojourning of Abram is in and of itself a great act of faith. In fact, historically it is acknowledged as one of the greatest acts of faith in the entire legacy of God and His people. Abraham remains a gold standard and preferred teaching template for building and expressing one's faith in God. Abram had a country, a people, and the house of his father. God chose Abram because He knew he would act in faith to God's plan to bless and establish an everlasting covenant with His people. And Abram did. At 75 years old Abram gathered up his possessions and his wife Sarai and went as the Lord had told him. With one exception - ***“and Lot went with him” (verse 4).***

Why?

There are many thoughts on this question - both the thoughts and the question are important to our own spiritual growth and understanding of faith and faithfulness while in the most critically defining moments of our lives.

Those who are in defense of Abram taking Lot with him say that Abram saw himself as a guardian over his nephew, or even as an adoptive parent who was under the authority dependency of Abram since his father Haran (Abram's brother) had died. This possibility would according to Hebraic tradition make Abram a Kinsmen Redeemer to Lot. Others have concluded that Abram at 75 years old had no direct heir to his name and inheritance and so including Lot would be his insurance plan for that possibility were it to take place. And there are others who have determined that Lot himself had built a strong faith in God and wanted to be a part of God's promise to his uncle Abram. The thinking is that Lot appealed to Abram and persuaded him to include him in his sojourning of faith.

The reality is that Scripture is silent on the specific details of Abram's process, but the Scripture is very clear on the outcomes and consequences of Abram's decision. But let's first go back and remember that Abram was told to leave not only his father's house but also his "country" and "relatives." The Hebrew word מוֹלֶדֶת *môledet* used in Genesis 12:1 and its meaning helps us to be more clear here. *Moledet* comes from a root word that normally indicates offspring or relatives who are direct family (which, if that were the case here, would seem to include even an "adoptive offspring" whom one is a guardian over). In this literary context, the word *moledet* included any extended relative as well.

Here is the call from God to Abram to do the following:

Go from your country.

Go from your family and your people.

Go from your father's house.

Go to the land that I will show you.

The call from God to Abram is very specific and detailed.

Here is what I want you to do Abram, and here is what I promise to you when you do it.

The one thing we do not hear in God's call to Abram is simple. We do not hear God say, "**Take Lot with you.**"

The decision to take Lot with him was a decision and choice Abram made on his own. As we will learn the God-less decision of Abram to bring Lot on his sojourning of faith became many things - but when it came to Lot, blessed and highly favored was not one of them.

Here are the historical facts and Biblical truths to support that claim.

- God gave the promise to Abram and his descendants, not to Lot.
- Lot never embraced God's promise to Abram.
- In fact, Lot would cause Abram nothing but difficulty.
- When their flocks became too large to tend together, Lot's people became contentious and disgruntled. Abram graciously offered Lot whatever land he chose. Lot greedily selected the choicest and most fertile land and left the desert for his kindhearted uncle (Genesis 13:5-13).
- When King Chedorlaomer and his allies captured Lot and his family as they sacked Sodom, Abram was forced to chase across the length of Israel in order to rescue his nephew (Genesis 14:13-17).

- When God was preparing to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abram interceded for the city, and God ultimately sent an angel to rescue Lot once again (Genesis 19:1-29).
- Lot hid in seclusion after the destruction of Sodom, his daughters, fearing they would not ever conceive, got him drunk and slept with him so that they would have a lineage. They did - the Moabites and the Amorites! (Genesis 19:30-38)
- Lot did nothing to assist Abram in his quest for God's promise and actually did more to inconvenience and distract him.

GOD IS IN THE DETAILS - OUR FAITHFULNESS TO HIM IS FOUND AND ACCOMPLISHED BY FULLY EMBRACING HIS MOST INTIMATE DETAILS

The greatest faith-defining moments of our lives are before us. In these moments our faith will only be as good as our faithfulness to the God in whom we have put our trust. As we pursue the Spirit's revelation and a Biblical understanding of the relationship of our faith - to our faithfulness, we are also learning to righteously fear and trust the Lord in those "faith-defining" moments. We must come to an understanding that fearing and trusting God fully allows us to see and prioritize the details of God's call and promise in our lives. Minding the details keeps us faithful to God and our faith in Him intact.

9.17.23

...Now I Know

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Week Two - Immediately after Abraham's arrival in Canaan - Negeb (the land of Promise), he encounters a famine.

Test Two - Dust or Trust

Genesis 12:10-13

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.

Abram’s story in Genesis 12-22 is indeed the story of faith, faithfulness, and learning to righteously fear and trust God. The story restores within us the reality that Abraham the patriarch and paragon of faith that we read of in the book of Hebrews struggled, just like we do. He struggled to reconcile God’s promises for the future with very difficult in-the-moment experiences requiring complete trust and faithfulness to God.

Hebrews 11:8-12

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as

many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Abram/Abraham took a "leap of faith" when he gathered up his family and left his people (except Lot) and home to answer God's call, and his faith shows that initially, he feared God and fully trusted Him enough to follow through on His promises made. His faith however was quickly tested when he arrived in the land of promise and was immediately faced with famine. Not only did Abram feel compelled to leave the land he was promised, but he also foolishly and unfaithfully lied and deceived the Egyptian pharaoh, putting at risk his wife Sarai/Sarah's life and the promise given to him by God. Abram's lack of trust and unfaithful behavior in Egypt should encourage us to question not only how much he fully trusted God, but also push us to have spiritually healthy and honest conversations about how Abram's story also provides us evidence that God is faithful even when our faithfulness and trust in Him struggles and fails us during some of the most critical and challenging times. Let's dig a little deeper to see just how Abram got to his place of compromise and fear.

First, let's look at how unrealistic it is to regard Egypt as a forbidden territory to God's people at this stage in history when it was soon to be expressly allotted to them as a place of favor and refuge, and that their presence there would not nullify or damage their claim to Canaan. The reality is that Abram had to feel his way forward (verses 8, 9) without a moment-to-moment revelation or personal daily instruction at every step, guided often-times largely by physical and natural circumstances.

Secondly, It was a common practice in ancient history for people groups to be nomadic when in the circumstance of providing food, water, and shelter for family and people. In the region of Canaan where famine had hit hard it might well seem a providence or even provisional that Egypt was nearby, plentiful in crops and livestock, watered by the flooding of the Nile. We can see that Abram greatly feared his ability to provide for his family, enough to abandon God's promise, plan, and purpose.

Why?

The fear of Abram's circumstances overshadowed his ability to be faithful to the promised blessing and favor of God - provision. Some would say *"You can't eat a promise."* But others would say, *"Yes, but you can live by faith while being faithful to what God has promised."*

What provision did Abram have available to help him to stay the course, overcome his natural fear, and remain faithful in a faith-defining moment?

The Call of God - leave all behind and go to the place I show you.

The Promise of God - generational blessing and favor.

The Purpose and Place of God - worship and dwelling in Canaan.

When he left his homeland in Haran, Abram was no longer living life under common rules or circumstances. His life was set apart, a life of calling, promise, and purpose - there is nothing common about that. He was called not only to live and walk by faith but to do so in the fear of only God, moving forward in faithfulness and complete trust in the ONE who called him. It is clear that Abram had placed His faith in God. It is also

clear that He had not yet learned how to be completely faithful in trusting God during those faith-defining moments. Trusting God for all that He had called him to, and then faithfully walking in all that He had promised to him. Sound familiar? Of course, it does. Here is what we see Abram do in the critical faith-defining moment of famine.

(Verse 10) Abram leaves Canaan for Egypt.

(Verses 11-13) Abram conspires with his wife Sarai to lie to Pharaoh. "Tell him you are my sister."

(Verses 14-16) Based on a lie, Abram accepted the goodwill and gifts of Pharaoh in exchange for what he thought was Abram's sister.

(Verses 17-20) Abram keeps silent and continues to hide the truth while Pharaoh endured plagues and hardship for taking Sarai. There is nothing faithful about Abram's behavior.

What Can We Learn

Could Abram not trust God enough to provide food and provision, even in the land that he had specifically selected for him and his people? All the indications are that Abram did not stop or stay long enough to find out. Instead, he went on his own initiative, taking everything into account but God's call and promise. *His faithless and trustless processes are doubly revealing, both of the duplicitous natural character of this spiritual hero and patriarch and of the sudden transition that can be made from the righteous place of faith to that unrighteous place of fear.* Caught in the trap of his deception, Abram found himself unable to refuse his questionable earnings (16), if indeed he wished to, and unable to answer Pharaoh's

stinging rebuke. Yet if this experience lay behind his powerful reply to the king of Sodom in 14:22, then there was something worth salvaging from it.

The crucial importance of the story, however, is its bearing on the promise of land and people. This is the true theme of these chapters, with Abram's vision under constant challenge. Here, at the first touch of hunger, fear, and opportunity for riches, the vision was lost and the whole enterprise put at risk: it would need plagues to restore Sarai to her destiny (17), and deportation (20) to get Abram back to Canaan.

**THE RIGHTEOUS FEAR OF GOD WILL ALWAYS DELIVER US FROM
THE UNRIGHTEOUS FEAR OF MEN - BUT AN UNRIGHTEOUS FEAR
OF MEN WILL ALWAYS KEEP US IN BONDAGE TO DISTRUST AND
KEEP US FROM THE RIGHTEOUS FEAR OF GOD. IN THIS POSITION
MINDSET WE ARE INCAPABLE OF FULLY TRUSTING GOD AND
BEING FAITHFUL TO HIM DURING THE FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS
OF OUR LIVES.**