

Abraham, Victory in the Tests of Faith

~Clayton Graybill

The question is sometimes asked, “Can people who have faith in God have this faith tested?” We are confident from Scripture and know by experience that the answer to this question is yes.

The areas of testing will vary with every individual who endeavors to live by faith in God. Victory is realized when an individual demonstrates self-commitment to God. In this commitment, he must possess an unwavering trust in and obedience to a God that is greater than any obstacle or allurements that would work to deter or weaken that commitment.

Such an individual is Abraham. We have the account of Abraham’s faith in God recorded in His Word for us. While God’s call to Abraham (then Abram) and God’s promise were unique, we can reasonably assume that the experiences of his life of faith were an integral part of his faith. His departure from Ur of the Chaldees, his building of altars, his calling on the name of the Lord, and his daily choices to live a faithful life all indicate that his understanding of and respect for God had deep roots.

Let us consider the accounts of Abraham’s faithfulness found in the Word and learn more of his victories in the tests of faith. Abram’s genealogy is given in the latter part of Genesis 11. He was the tenth generation from Noah through Noah’s son Seth and was born about three hundred fifty years after the Flood. We are given very little detail of Abram’s knowledge of God or the circumstances wherein he first expressed faith in God. We probably consider one of Abram’s first tests as coming when God said to him, “*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.*” This was a command with God’s promise accompanying it. However, obedience to God appears to be more in focus than the promise, “*So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him.*” after he was in the land of Canaan, “*the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he and altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.*” In these occasions we might understand the event as a test of Abram’s devotion to the Lord and his response of faith. It seems that settled faith in God’s promises and worship of God went together.

As a result of a grievous famine in the land, Abram sojourned in the land of Egypt. The famine circumstance could also have tested Abram’s faith in God. We do recognize God’s overruling and protecting hand over Abram and all that he had? We see Abram returning to Canaan “*Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.*”

The next recorded test seems to center on Abram’s view of material things particularly as they related to interpersonal relationships. Abram saw human relationships to be of far greater value than material gain. Abram likely remembered that God had said, “*Unto thy seed will I give this land,*” yet he offered to Lot the choice of the land because of a deep desire for good brotherhood relationships, “*for we be brethren.*”

After his separation from Lot, the Lord again spoke to Abram, telling him to look in all directions. The Lord now told Abram that He would be the One to establish ownership of the land. He told

Abram that all the land that he could see would be given to him and his seed after him. At this time again God promised that his seed would be as the dust of the earth. While a verbal response from Abram to God is not recorded, we read, *“Then Abram removed his tent and came and dwelt in... Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord,”* yet another test of faith would come in relation to Lot. When Abram heard that Lot had been taken captive, it was his faith in God that moved him to go to Lot’s rescue. Abram’s small group of men, the distance involved, coupled with his prompt response indicated a strong faith in God.

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, ‘Fear not Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.’” Abram reminded God that he had no children and that one of his servants would be his heir. God reassured him that one born to him would be his heir. God challenged Abram to count the stars and said, *“So shall thy seed be.”* This was truly a test of faith. *“And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.”*

Another test of Abram’s faith was God’s appearance with the message of an everlasting covenant that God was going to make with him and his seed. At this time, God also changed his name to Abraham, and Sarai’s name to Sarah. God assured him of an everlasting covenant and instituted the covenant of circumcision. We note Abraham’s very prompt and careful obedience to all that God commanded him.

Perhaps the greatest trial and the greatest victory of Abraham’s faith appears when God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac his son for a burnt offering. Abraham obeyed without delay. *“And Abraham rose up early in the morning.”* The account in Hebrews 11:17–19 may best detail this experience: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”* We then see the special blessing that God gave him for this obedience. *“And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, ‘By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall the nation of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed My voice.’”* Abraham’s faith in God moved him to help provide for the spiritual good of future generations. This burden is clearly conveyed in his instructions that his servant should not take a wife for Isaac of the daughters of the Canaanites and equally strong that Isaac should not be brought again to the land Abraham came from. His faith is clearly displayed in his words, *“The Lord of heaven which took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that swear unto me, saying Unto thy seed will I give this land; He shall send His angel before, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.”* The Lord blessed and prospered the servant’s way, and Rebekah was identified as a wife for Isaac.

What guiding principles can we learn from Abraham’s faith? It is faith which separates the child of God from the children of the devil. It is faith which turns our face and heart toward God. It is faith which causes us to, *“Believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”* The Christian anchors his life in the simple statement, *“The just shall live by faith.”* God sends tests

of our faith for the further strengthening, purifying and perfecting of our faith. as we consider Abraham's life, we learn God calls us to worship Him and call upon Him regularly. God calls us to a life of separation and holiness. God always desires us to seek His leading rather than rely on our own "wisdom". He wants us to value good interpersonal relationships rather than material gain. He wants us to be of help to our fellow men as He directs us. He promises His presence and help and calls us to keep an active and firm faith in Him. God has instructed us concerning ordinances to help us understand and remember that we belong to Him.

Jesus is at God's right hand interceding for us and we are commanded to be faithful in interceding for others. as we read of God's faithfulness to Abraham we must remember God will always keep His Word. God longs to teach us that whatever the sacrifice or circumstance He calls us to, the completion of His will to the honor of His glory is worth any cost. God calls us to do all we can so those who follow will also be victorious in the tests of faith.

~ Richfield, PA
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