

THE CYCLE OF FAITH | GENESIS 12:9-13:18 | PASTOR MARK BOFILL | 7/16/2023

I. Retracting Faith (12:9-20) | II. Retracing Faith (13:1-4) | III. Reacting Faith 13: 5-13) | IV. Rewarding Faith (13:14-18)

INTRO: Our lesson last week was about **Abram Finding Faith in God** as he learned to Step Out into a new land. His faith actions were rewarded when **God appeared to him with a promise of the very land that he was standing on!** ***Abram responded by building altars to worship God!*** – A place of **Responding to God** and **Reverencing God**, reveals that we **Belong to God!** We know this **BY FAITH!** – Ahh, but **Abram’s Faith Lessons aren’t over**. In our text today, we’ll learn of **THE CYCLE OF FAITH**, which somehow activates when we fail to trust God in all circumstances. – As we grow in faith, ***there will most certainly come a time*** when a when we're walking with the Lord and we're growing in faith and we're worshipping our King, then suddenly...things **“Go South,”** in Abram’s case, literally and ironically!

I. RETRACTING FAITH (Gen. 12:9-20) – Christians never plan to retract their faith, but our decisions sometimes lead us away from God’s perfect will for our lives. *(When we do... incoming!)*

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1. Abram Journeyed Southward (9-10) – Possibly exploring the land, planting trees and making places of worship. But he went just a bit too far though, literally into **EGYPT**, the land of the Coptic’s. – At this time, **Egypt was strong and was well known for its Worldly Ways and Pagan Practices**. – Symbolically, we refer to Egypt as a type of the world.

- **The Circumstances: “Severe Famine”** caused a trigger in **Abram to respond naturally!** *(No mention of calling on God for direction. – We should call upon God for EVERYTHING!)* As a result...

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2. Abram Encountered FEAR (11-13) – This is one of those **“Faith Lapse Moments”** that ***Came Upon Abram!*** – Instead of trusting the Lord, **Finding Faith** in the unknown situation, **he allowed FEAR to grip his heart and mind!** – TBT, **He told Sarai to lie about being his wife!**

- **His fear was possibly caused by warnings or stories** of others. Particularly, fear fueled his mind because **his wife Sarai was a 65-year-old hottie!** *(He feared for his life, not hers!)*
- **Fear always thinks the worst!** **Faith** always Hopes in God for the Best. – This reveals **Abram’s adolescent faith!** – We all get the shakes sometimes...**but God is still there!** – If he only knew Solomon’s wisdom, **(Prov 18:10) *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.*** *(We too must learn this! e.g., Shad, Mesh, Abed; King David...)*
- **(Psalm 34:4) *I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.***
- But we must remember, **Abram is young in his faith, barely finding it**. What happens to him was actually **written for our learning**. – **(Rom 15:4) *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*** **(Does the Word of GOD PRODUCE HOPE IN YOU?)**

3. God Still Protected Abram (14-20) – Wow... ***it all came to pass!*** But God did not give up on Abram for his shortcomings. He knew exactly where he was, as well as the circumstances! – And God’s **DIVINE INTERVENTION** sustained Abram in this situation... **PLAGUING PHARAOH’S GREAT HOUSE!** – God’s **DIVINE PROTECTION** ***delivered*** Abram, Sarai, and all that he had...

WHY? B/C He was developing a man of faith! – (2 Tim 2:13) says, *If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself!*

- **Abram Retracted his faith** when he defaulted to his flesh, figuring it all out for himself! Only to protect his own neck! – Fear overcame him the very moment he went south! – (1 Tim 1:7) *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*
- In every circumstance, **the Cycle of Faith is Conditional.** We choose Faith or Fear – Faith or Flesh – Faithfulness or Faultiness! We are to **“walk by faith and not by sight.”**

INTRO: When we Falter in our faith, God is always there to help us! **BUT WE FEEL DEFEATED!** When this takes place...**RETRACE YOUR FAITH** back to the place where you first met with God?

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II. RETRACING FAITH (1-4) – Abram should have never gone down to Egypt, but as he left Egypt, notice the phrase, **“He Went UP!”** i.e., **from the worldly place,** to the Negev, which is south of Shechem. Approx. 250 miles. (*Stepping away from the world is most certainly a step up!*)

1. **“He Went WITH” (1-2)** – Sarai, Lot, much livestock, and riches (*a very wealthy man!*)
2. **“He Went ON” his journey (3)** – from the south **to Bethel!** Which means that **“He Went BACK!”** – Imagine how he felt on the **250-mile journey...** Defeated, Discouraged, Deflated, Abram was Busted and Disgusted! (*This is exactly how we feel as Christians when we disobey God!*)
3. When God reveals that **“We’re Off-Course,”** then call upon His name as before! **Go back to Bethel...the House of God, the place where you started,** and (1 John 1:9) it! – That’s right... **(tt. Rev 2:5) it!** (*i.e. Confess it and 3 R it!*)

P/A – This is how you do it church... RETRACE -> RETURN -> REPEAT! When you are faithful to do this, it **RESETS YOU** on to the next step in **the Cycle of Faith!** *A Cycle that pleases God...*

III. REACTING BY FAITH (5-13) – **Great...Abram is back on tract!** But oh, church...here we learn that many times, our faith will be tested again by those closest to us... OUR FAAMILY!

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1. **Conflict Arises (5-8)** – Growth and Prosperity can be great, but **they can also cause Problems!** – You know... the kind that **“Invades your Space”**, the kind that **“Rubs you Wrong!”** In this case, *the land was too small* for **Abram and Lot’s livestock,** so **STRIFE** arose. **Amongst their herdsman...** i.e., Friction, Contention, Arguing, Disputing, or Fighting.
 - a. Notice Abram’s REACTION to the matter, **it was rooted in humility.** He Reacted not as the greater, but with grace. (*This is what the Cycle of Faith produces!*)
 - b. Abram was first to initiate resolve for a few reasons:
 - First, their fighting in the field was **witnessed by the Canaanites and Perizzites (7).** – God’s people are to be known for their Love, not for their Strife! (**John 13:34-35**).
 - Secondly, Abram knew that family relationships were far more important than possessions! (*Satan, the deceiver often tempts us to hate our brother! – cf. 1 Cor 6:7*)

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2. **Abram let Lot have the best of the land (9-11)** – Abram’s response reveals some helpful practices when dealing with conflict or strife – **In Wisdom, he did not blame lot for anything!** (*Whereas Lot, who gained his possessions by dwelling with Abram should have respected his uncle*) **That’s okay...Abram covered it with love!** – **In Faith, he allowed Lot (the younger) to choose his own land.** (Rom 12:18) says, *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, leave peaceably with all men.”* (especially your family - **UNITY is more important than your rights.** (Matt 5:9) *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*)

a. In (v.9) we’re told that **Abram’s choice for land was based on FATE.** In (v.10) we’re told that **Lot’s choice was based on sight!** (*the lust of the eyes!*). **Lot lifted his eyes, but not high enough!** (*When making decisions in life, we should always look to the Lord for His perfect will!*)

b. We will learn in chapter 19 that **Lot’s Faithless Choice will end up in smoke! Sodom and Gomorrah** would become a lesson

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3. **Faith Let’s God Choose What’s Best (12-13)** - Abram’s trusted God to provide the best land for him! (2 Cor 5:7) tells us that we are to... *“Walk by faith, not by sight!”*

- Lot’s heart was centered on wealth and worldly achievement, while Abraham wanted only to please the Lord. *“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”* (Amos 3:3)

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IV. REWARDING FAITH (14-18) – Notice that Abram didn’t demand his portion of land! But as soon as he separated himself from Lot, he was immediately spoken to by God. – God knew that **Abram Reacted in Faith** as he allowed Lot to choose his land first. God also knew that **Abram Trusted his Fate** to the land that God would choose!

*When you give God a “**blank check**” to do whatever He desires for you, **be assured that God will reward your Faith in Him!***

1. **God told Abram to Look Outward:** N, S, E, and W (14) – *A visual confirmation for Abram.*
2. In (v.15-16), God Reaffirmed His Covenant Promise from earlier (Gen 12:1-3). *“I will make your descendant as the dust of the earth...”* (*God’s multiplication scale!*)
3. **God shifts Abram** from *“Lift Up Your Eyes and Look”* in (14), to *“Lift up your feet and walk”* in (17),... followed by the phrase, **“I give it to you.”** (*i.e ‘Here’s the keys Abram!’*)
 - His inheritance was later claimed by his descendants, who also responded in faith! (Josh. 1:1–3; Deut. 11:24a) *“Every place on which the sole of your foot treats shall be yours...”*
4. **The Cycle of Faith Completed (18)** – Abram moved his tent in the right direction! Not far from where he was, to the **Terebinth Trees of Mamre**, in **Hebron**, 19 miles SW of Jerusalem.
 - I love this! **Mamre** = Strength or Fatness, and **Hebron** = Communion. **By faith, Abram dwelt in a place where he would be strengthened... a place where abundant overflow would continue in his life as he remained in Communion with God!** (*Where do you dwell?*)