

We continue in Genesis 12. This is getting into the life of Abraham and what God is doing in his life and primarily he is developing faith, so we will learn some principals of faith and even failing in faith.

- I. Primeval History 1.1-11.26
- II. Patriarchal History 11.27-50.26
 - A. History of Abraham 11.27-25.18
 - 1. His Faith and the Land 11.27-15.21
 - a. Call to the land 11.27-12.9

To set the context, we have completed Primeval History, the most important events of world history, four of them are essentially contained in the the first 11 chapters and then 11.27 starts individuals, the patriarchal history. So the bulk of Genesis deals with Where does Israel come from? and Why is Israel so important?—even though in the world today Israel is not viewed from a Biblical perspective.

And, obviously, the origin of Israel starts with the history of Abraham—so this is *historical*, including primeval history; that is why I use the word, to stress the historicity of the book of Genesis.

So we have the history of Abraham all the way to chapter 25, and I break it down into two parts: the first 11.27-15.21 where God is developing *faith*. The climax of that is where God enters into a covenant in chapter 15. That portion includes the Call to the Land and we studied that in two parts—to 12. 9. In the first 4 verses of chapter 12 we went over in some detail.

I like to look at the Abrahamic Covenant in terms of world history and the covenant lays out all the parameters for all the rest of world history which is why I often say, 'World History is Jewish' because God is going to focus His events and the major

events of world history around the children of Israel. We have the beginning of that with Abraham. And there is a future for Israel; the church does not replace Israel in the future. The culmination of world history ends with Israel as the primary nation during the Millennial Kingdom.

So it all begins with the call, and that call included 7 promises that we looked at in some detail.

7 promises

1. Great nation
2. Blessing
3. Name great
4. Will be blessing, an imperative that is predicted
5. Bless those who bless
6. Curse those who curse
7. All people blessed, including the gentiles

God promises to Abraham that his descendants will end up as a great nation, in fact the greatest nation that has ever existed because they are the focus of what God is going to do throughout world history. He is promised that he will be a blessing and God will bless him. And that his name will be great; we honor him even up to our day as well as other religious groups, including Christianity.

And then we have a not only an exhortation or an imperative. I spoke of 2 imperatives, the first was to leave the land that they were raised in and the second is to be a blessing, but it is also a promise: Abraham is going to be a blessing throughout his history. Now he failed in many ways in the OT, but ultimately God has brought the Messiah through Israel.

And, another promise, the 5th: that God will bless those who bless the nation of Israel. The counterpart is that He will curse those who curse Israel. Both of those have happened in world history and is even being played out in history today. So these are very far-reaching promises.

Then the 7th one is that *all* peoples will be blessed ultimately through the nation of Israel. And Paul in Galatians 3 applies this very verse to the work that Christ accomplished in blessing all men bringing salvation to all the nations—so all the nations are blessed in Abraham basically. These promises, in chapter 15 will be made into a covenant, so God makes a covenant with the children of Israel that will eventuate all these promises.

Kind of a summary here of the importance of Abraham and history, or world history.

Abram and History

Nations (unbelieving)

Individual (Abraham)

Nation (Israel)

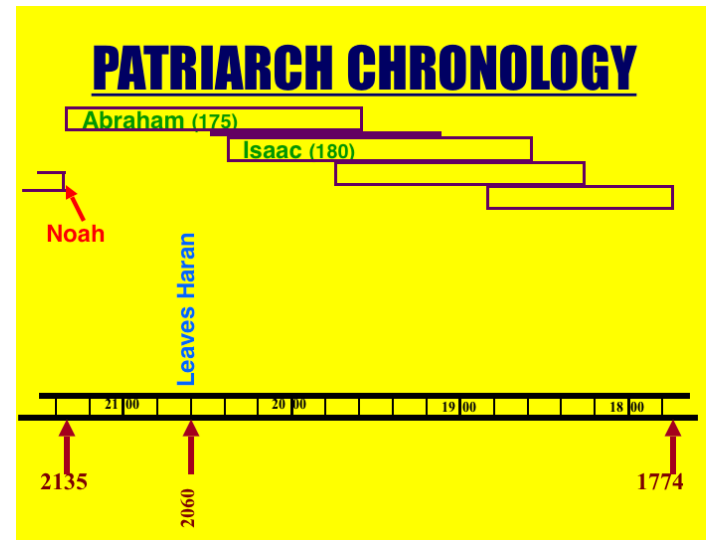
World (nations)

Out of the nations, the unbelieving nations, the last major event is Babel where the nations gathered—in fact they are not actually nations until God judges after He deals with their rebellion.

But out of the nations that He rejects, He calls one individual by the name of Abraham. And from Abraham we have a nation, the nation of Israel, and the promises to the nation. And ultimately all of the nations are blessed, so it has world-wide implications. So it is through an individual that becomes a nation and through that nation all of the nations are blessed.

That is a summary of the first 3 verses and of world history and Abraham.

Then we said that it begins in terms of the land. In 2060 BC, after his father dies, Abraham leaves Kharan, and he enters into the land of Israel. And then, beginning in verse 10 the narrative continues.



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|---------------------------|-------------|
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| b. Challenge out of Land | 12.10-13.4 |

So the first thing we have is the challenge to Abraham, outside of the land. The land is very important; we will learn that when Abraham leaves the land, though not stated explicitly, it probably implied a lack of faith, because God is going to bless *in the land*. So that is the little narrative we are going to look at, beginning in 12.10, through 13.4.

In this narrative we can bring out some of the lessons *we* can learn and some of the challenges that we can learn and how we can deal with the challenges in our experience.

To break this down we start by mentioning that there is a series of *tests* throughout the life of Abraham. The last one is somewhat of a climatic one, but leading up to these faith tests we could go all the way back to Ur of Chaldees, in fact probably to 12.1 where he received the call to leave. So this is the *initial* test of faith: Will Abraham believe God? And it is probably in Ur that Abraham is converted from idolatry—to now a relationship with the Creator God, the God that brings judgment of the Genesis flood and the God that scattered the nations at Babel. Will Abraham believe Him? He does and leaves Ur. That is the first test of faith.

We stressed that Abraham was probably very comfortable; there was no reason to leave. There was not greener grass elsewhere. Ur was wealthy, was the center of all things in the world at the time. And now he has to leave and even leave his family, so that was an act of faith and Abraham responds rightly.

Faith Tests

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Depart from Ur - | initial (12.1) |
| 2. Famine in land - | physical (12.10-20) |
| 3. Strife with Lot - | relations (13.5-18) |
| 4. War with kings - | foreign (14) |
| 5. Issue with Hagar - | family (16) |
| 6. Trouble in Sodom - | morals (18-19) |
| 7. Sarai in danger - | wife (20) |
| 8. Sacrifice of son - | spiritual (22) |

Now we will have the first *challenge* to faith. There is famine in the land, so how is he going to respond? There are two things that he responds, probably negatively, in the passage, and we might summarize this as a physical test. Will he believe that God

can provide *physically* in the midst of a famine? The central text is 12.10-20 of the passage that we are going to look at.

Then beyond this we will see other tests as we move through, so let me just give you a quick rundown of some of them, because the emphasis, I think, in the life of Abraham is that God is *developing* faith, and He develops it through successful responses and sometimes failures. In the passage that we are going to look at is one of the failures in Abraham's life.

So the next one is strife amongst the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abraham; the land is very small and they apparently have lots of flocks by this time. So now this is a test of relationships and also a test of the land. We see that he deals with it rightly, in chapter 13.

Later on there will be an invasion by kings from the north and the east, so foreign tests of faith and Abraham again is able to trust God and defeat them. That we will see in chapter 14.

There there is another issue that arises: and even preceding the strife with Hagar, there is an issue of believing God in terms of providing that son that is promised; so Abraham has no children and yet God has promised that a great nation will come out of him. So he makes a little bit of a compromise, at the suggestion of his wife, Sarai; and then there is strife in the family with Hagar. And we have the incident that follows in chapter 16. Another failure.

Then there is a problem in Sodom, so dealing with moral issues, chapters 18 and 19 and Abraham deals well in that situation.

Then in chapter 20 we have another incident that is similar to the one that we are going to look at today where Sarai is again endangered involving a very close relationship with his wife.

Then we have the *ultimate* test in chapter 22: the sacrifice of his son, or God calls him to sacrifice that only son—only in that he is the unique son that the promise will go through. So this is the greatest and ultimate test of his spirituality; and by this time

his faith has been strengthened and developed so that he responds *rightly*.

That is a summary of the major tests that we have in Genesis in the life of Abraham.

Let's go back to chapter 12 and look at the challenge in the land.

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1) Complication	12.10-16
a) Caution of Abram	12.10-13

First of all there is a complication that arises in verses 10-16. And there is a caution of Abraham dealing with the famine and the danger that he and his wife are about to face.

12.10 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.

Now there was a famine in the land. An emphasis on the *land*. It is not unusual in the Middle East; in fact there are lots of examples in the OT of famines arising, and actually, when we get to the book of Deuteronomy we will see that famine is often brought about by God Himself in order to test the children of Israel—very similar to what we have here in terms of Abram. And oftentimes it is also brought as a result of the children of Israel responding wrongly in terms of their relationship to God. That is the issue, the circumstance that will test the faith of Abraham, and I think immediately, though not stated, because of the way things work out we see...

12.10 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.

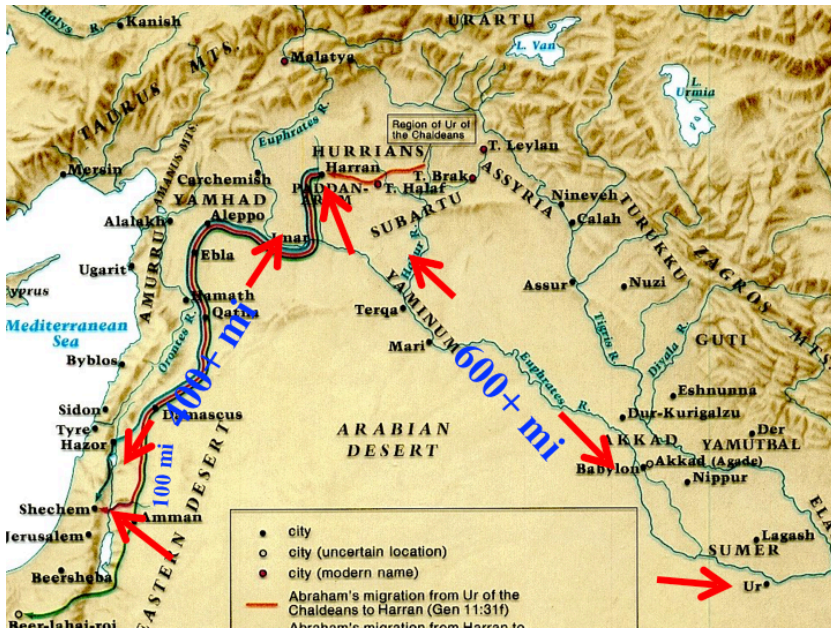
...so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there. Obviously the word 'sojourn' implies that it is not a permanent move; it's temporary, but I think it's a lapse in faith. God could have provided *in the land* and maybe God intended him to stay to avoid the problems that he will encounter in Egypt. And again we are introduced to Egypt—which is going to play a large role in the children of Israel.

In fact after Genesis Egypt is going to be one of the major geographical regions where the children end up. And Egypt will be a place of hardship and difficulty. And already we have a little foreshadowing in that Abraham goes down to Egypt. In fact, at the end here, there are several elements: you might want to jot them down; this is one of the first ones where it is seen that this passage is going to *foreshadow* the children of Israel's later experience with the empire of Egypt.

These are real events, in real places, so we look at the map: Starting in Ur the red line traces the journey from Ur that we looked at at the end of chapter 11. They end up at Kharan, Terah dies, and then he leaves Kharan. In chapter 12, he leaves and ends up in Shechem. And now there is a famine in the land, Shechem being at the central part of the land of Canaan, and they go down to Egypt, south and a little bit west.

Another map to give you a scale of miles, about 600 miles from Ur to Kharan, about 400+ miles from Kharan to Shechem, and a little over 100 miles further into the land of Egypt.

And now we begin to see—and this is where we can apply the passage—the path of unbelief.



Path of Unbelief
 Test of Faith
 |
 Abandon promise

For all of us that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ life doesn't always come out pleasantly. In fact God is developing faith in us and there will be the beginning of tests of faith and several of you have experienced many tests and have grown as a result of it. And now we are seeing God testing Abraham, so we will be reminded of some things that perhaps you and I have experienced already.

So you can expect that God is going to test your faith; in fact it is inevitable, it's part of the sanctifying process, part of God conforming us to His image, so don't be surprised by it. In fact

don't be surprised if you are opposed by the world and your faith is tested which is exactly what we have here.

And, probably, in verse 10, we have an abandonment of the promise. God promised. We will see later on how the land is very pivotal, very important—staying in the land and prospering in the land and tests that will occur in the land where the family lives. And, rather than staying in the land he abandons the promise to some extent and goes to a *foreign* land, in fact a dangerous one, to sojourn there.



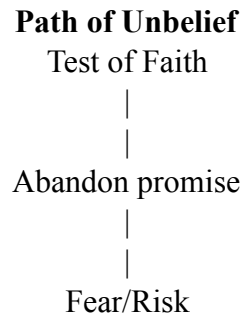
So the next passage is going to take another step in the decline:

12.11 It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

They fled the land of Canaan. Abraham, knowing the culture, knowing the world, knowing something about Egypt, informs his wife. He knows there is going to be danger ahead, so he says, See, now I know that you are a beautiful woman, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife, and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

That's a circumstance that was very common: foreigners entering the land of Egypt would be taken advantage of by the Egyptians. And apparently it was not unusual, if they took a liking to the women, that they would kill the husband. So this is very realistic in terms of the time and culture in the time of Abraham.

Once they had left Canaan, the next step: how do we deal with the danger that we are going to face in Egypt? So often, if we respond rightly to the tests of faith, then I think that God can empower us to endure whatever challenge—He can encourage us and bless us and we can grow—but if we don't respond rightly oftentimes, by abandoning the promise we end up in a situation of high risk and because of the high risk it produces fear, so Abraham is expressing the fear of the Egyptians in verses 11 and 12.



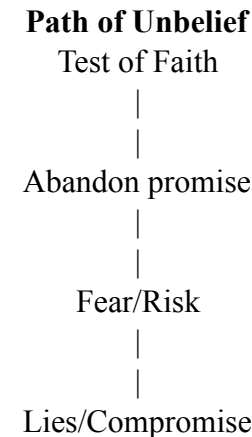
Then he goes on,—this is still part of the cautious steps he is taking—

12.13 “Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.”

Please say that you are my sister. Is that true or is it an overt lie? We find out later on, in chapter 20, that there was a relationship of her being his half-sister. So it was a little bit of a half-truth, you might say. Part of it is right, but it is also deceptive, and that is the purpose of it—to deceive the Egyptians.

I could have commented on Sarai being beautiful: in terms of our timeframe she is fairly old—since she gave birth to Isaac at 90, she is maybe 60, near middle-age by those times.

He continues: so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you. In other words, if we compromise and you say this ‘little white lie’, they won't kill me, and both of us can survive the Egyptian experience. So verse 13 is the overt disobedience, you might say...



So we have the compromise, reverting to at least half-truths if not overt lies or deception. That will lead to verses 14-16.

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- 1) Complication 12.10-16
 - a) Caution of Abram 12.10-13
 - b) Contact with Egyptians 12.14-16

And here we have the contact with the Egyptians.

12.14 It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

15 Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. The emphasis is on appearance and apparently the attraction by the Egyptians.

12.14 It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

15 Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

Then the Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; that is, this is probably a surprise. I don't know if Abraham just understood the Egyptian people, but now she is going to be in great risk. So, apparently Pharaoh finds her beautiful as well, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house which I don't think was anticipated by Abraham.

12.16 Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake, thinking that he is the brother, but not the husband, so he doesn't have to kill him and treats him well. Part of the plan is working out as Abraham had planned, but I don't think he had planned to have the Pharaoh

there. So Abraham is treated well, in fact *very* well. You might almost think, 'Is God rewarding Abraham for lying?' Well, probably not, but part of the plan that Abraham has is working itself out.

Then we have a list of riches that are bestowed upon Abraham. And he gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels. So all these animal and even servants—to care for animals and care for Abraham. He is basically negotiating in such a way that he is going to take Sarai as one of his wives perhaps. He is very generous.

Now if our evil plans ever materialize and things seem to go well, it's not always God that is blessing, and sometimes it can fool you into thinking that you got away with the sin that is beginning to bring you down. But in reality you will see things that take place here...

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1) Complication	12.10-16
2) Counteraction	12.17-20
a) Calamities on Pharaoh	12.17

...So now we have counteraction by God, verses 17-20, where God is going to intervene and very clearly the Lord is intervening in order to rescue Abraham from compromising the family and what is ultimately at stake here is the promise that God made. So God is intervening to *protect His plan* ultimately.

12.17 But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Verse 17, But the LORD struck Pharaoh. So we have divine action, very direct. and his house with great plagues. because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Now Pharaoh probably does not know but he eventually begins to suspect and perhaps there is some relationship that God uses to make it evident that it is because of Sarai.

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 - a) Calamities on Pharaoh 12.17
 - b) Complaint to Abram 12.18-20

And now, here's where it is going to take a turn and Pharaoh being the ultimate authority in Egypt, Abraham is at greater risk and his life is probably at stake here, but we have the Complaint to Abraham by Pharaoh:

12.18 Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?"

Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? So he ties it to Abraham; he knows that there is something related to Abraham. Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? That is, the truth somehow came out. Now the

text doesn't tell us, but the question is 'What...Why didn't you say...?' So he is being reprimanded here and Pharaoh is complaining, you might say.

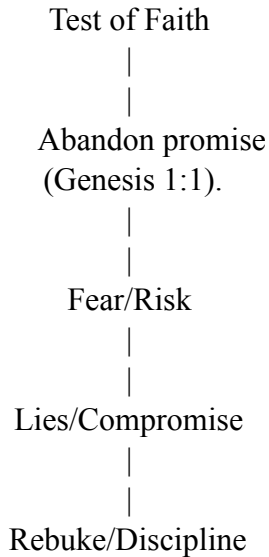
19 "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go."

"Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? And there is the clear statement that he intended to take her as a wife. And then, rather than executing Abraham, he actually tells him to leave, so Now then, here is your wife, take her and go." I think the plagues communicated that he needed to get rid of both of them in order to be rid of the plagues. So I think the divine intervention accomplished the purpose that God had.

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 - 2) Counteraction 12.17
 - a) Calamities on Pharaoh 12.17
 - b) Complaint to Abram 12.18-19
 - c) Corrective for Abram 12.20

So in verse 20 we have the Corrective for Abraham where Abraham has to get back on track.

12.20 Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

Path of Unbelief

He is cast out of the land of Egypt. The Path of Unbelief ends in rebuke by the Pharaoh, by the ultimate authority and you might even say that Abraham lost his testimony and in fact experienced the discipline of the Lord in that now he has to go back to the land of Israel where probably the famine still exists. But it doesn't say anything about that other than that it puts Abraham back on track and I call that the Corrective for Abraham in verse 20.

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2) Counteraction	12.17-20
3) Continuation of Faith	13.1-4

Then in 13.1 we see his Continuation of Faith where he goes back to the land. And there will be another incident after he gets back.

13.1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him.
2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.

You remember that he left the central part of Israel where he built an altar. There are no altars built in Egypt—in fact it is an experience of rebuke and disciplined so no altars—altars are only built in the land. And now he goes back to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him. And then a little note here because it is going to introduce Lot in the next passage, and Lot with him even though it didn't mention that Lot was with him when they went down.

Then verse 2: Now Abram was very rich. Apparently Pharaoh didn't take back all the riches, so he leaves Egypt very enriched. It also includes money, in silver and in gold, the precious metals of the time. It could be exchanged for commodities. So he comes up from the Negev, the South, into the land. The next passage tells us where they end up in the land. Verse 3:

12.3 He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, between Bethel and Ai, To the place where his tent had been at the beginning.

Remember he built an altar there, so another arrow on the map between Bethel and Ai. Bethel is central Israel. The Negev in the south is desolate today with a very dry climate. It is greener toward the north. Then verse 4:

12.4 to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Specifically, reminding us of the place of the altar implying that there has been some repentance, so lessons learned, some re-establishing of fellowship more than likely. Abram called on the name of the LORD—so we have restoration. Back in the land, back to the place of blessing, back to the place where he established the altar, committing the land back to the Lord.



The implication in the narrative is that there is restoration. So we can draw several applications. We can learn the lesson that Abraham illustrates for us from the negative aspect. Whenever we have a test of faith, rather than take things into our own hands, is perhaps seek the Lord. We see lots of grace, lots of mercy and Abraham is young, you might say, in the faith, so God is developing his faith; he is not severe with him. He does receive the rebuke, but he is also moved along such that he can grow from this experience. And you can go back to your foundation, your beginnings, back to the Word and re-establish that fellowship that we lose when we step out of His will. It's like 1John 1.9 in the

NT: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Applications

1. God blesses abundantly
2. Expect tests of faith
3. Obey based on faith in promises
4. When failing learn lesson
5. Confess & recommit
6. Develop habits of worship

We can apply that God continually blesses us abundantly and in the midst of those blessings oftentimes you ought not to be surprised, but be awakened to the possibility of God bringing a test. And I think that after a time of great blessing it is not unusual for God to bring a test of faith and of faithfulness. So we should expect in our Christian walk various tests and it can be a daily thing or a periodic thing but we can expect to have our faith tested.

We live in a world that is antagonistic and often those tests come from the culture. But they can be physical ailments, tragedies, but we can expect them; they can be little, they can be huge, depending upon what God is doing in our lives at the time.

The greater the test, the greater trust that God has in us to be able to face it, and the greater resources He will provide.

And, we should obey based on faith in the promises that He has made. Just like Abraham has at least these 7 major promises and several related to them. There are many promises that God has given to us that are in the New Testament and, in fact it is good to even list many of them to remind us or have them memorized, the promises of God and our obedience is based on *them*. In fact we can *claim* them as promises, for example, the promise to never test us beyond our ability to handle it.

Even when we fail, we ought to be able to learn a lesson from the test and in the future, if we have something similar we can perhaps avoid the pitfalls that the first test took upon us and learn the lessons. Of course we ought to confess and recommit. I think we have that implied at least in the passage.

Then, Abraham goes back to a place of worship. And we need to develop a habit of worship. And I think it is in that context of habitually praising and enjoying fellowship and worshipping Him on a moment by moment basis that we not only *learn* from the failure, but we also are *strengthened* to be able to respond differently when the different tests come about.

I don't know if Moses intended it, but there seem to be some striking foreshadowings in this passage. There is not a verse that says this but I get this from some of the commentators that bring this out. These are some that seem to foreshadow Israel even before they are a nation, in terms of Egypt.

Foreshadowing??

1. Famine in land - 12.10 —> 43.1
2. Descent to Egypt - 12.10 —> 47.4
3. Egyptians afflict - 12.12-15 —> Exodus 1.11
4. Fear of Egyptians - 12.12 —> Exodus 1.16, 22
5. Plagues applied - 12.17 —> Exodus 7.14-12.30
6. Leave with riches - 12.20 —> Exodus 12.33-36
7. Return through Negev - 13.1, 3 —> Exodus 17.1
8. Arrive and Worship 13.3-4 —> Exodus 15.17

For example, Abraham saw a famine and went to Egypt and later on in Genesis 43, it's the famine in the land of Israel that moved the children of Israel to Egypt and the book of Genesis ends with them in Egypt.

Another, not on this list, is the attack on the lineage of Christ with the issue of Sarai. There are others as well, that seem to

foreshadow in this first *challenge* that Abraham has that seems to almost hint that the children of Israel as a group, as a family are going to experience similar things later on, particularly in the book of Exodus timeframe.

God's grace protects and preserves even when His own fail! The grace is that this could have turned out a lot worse. The seed of the woman that would eventuate into the son that would carry the line all the way to the Messiah is protected and Abraham is protected and experiences God's grace, and he is preserved even in the midst of his failure in the challenge of faith. So we can be encouraged that God is going to protect us.

Now we will suffer consequences and we can get out of fellowship and lose blessing, but God is going to complete a work that He began in us, Philippians 1.6 *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.* And He will deliver us spotless and without wrinkle, as Paul says in Ephesians 5.27 *that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.*