

SERMON GUIDE

Genesis: The Faithfulness of God

Genesis 12:10-20



2.4.2024

SERMON NOTES:

God is faithful to His people even when we are faithless.

Before the people of Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua, the Lord warned them not to break His covenant; otherwise, He would expel them from the land. Listen to this from Deuteronomy 4. The Lord says,

25 “When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. 28 And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

In other words, when you enter the land, if you worship false gods, I will destroy you and kick you out of the land.

Eventually, God carried out this threat when He sent King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies to destroy Jerusalem in 607 BC. It was around 1400 BC when God warned about the exile. The Lord was patient with His people for 800 years, but even the Lord's patience runs out.

The Babylonians invaded Jerusalem. They destroyed the Temple, killed thousands of Jews, and took into captivity thousands more. Because of their faithlessness, God judged His people.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote a book during this time called Lamentations where he laments the destruction of Jerusalem. Listen to his reflections.

***1:1 How lonely sits the city
that was full of people!
How like a widow has she become,
she who was great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
has become a slave.***

***1:3 Judah has gone into exile because of affliction
and hard servitude;
she dwells now among the nations,
but finds no resting place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.***

Babylon's attack didn't happen in one night. They destroyed Jerusalem and took the people into captivity over the course of 20 years. It led the prophet to despair, but he never lost his hope in God. In the midst of the pain and suffering, Jeremiah says,

***3:21, But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.***

Lord, we have forsaken you, but you have not forsaken us! Great is your faithfulness! Church, what an incredibly kind and gracious God we have. Even when we are faithless and rebellious, He doesn't give up on us. He remains faithful even when we go astray.

I hope this is good news to you, because we get to dive back into Genesis 12, we will see a great example of the faithfulness of God in Abraham's life despite his failures.

Last week, we were introduced to the Abrahamic Covenant. God made promises to 1) make Abraham into a great nation—with land and numerous offspring 2) He will bless him and make his name great 3) through Abram the whole world will be blessed. We discussed how these promises are ultimately unconditional and fulfilled in Christ.

But there is a conditional element to this covenant as well. Abram must respond in obedience and faith, and that's what he does. He takes his family and all his possessions, leaves his homeland, and re-locates in the land of Canaan.

That's where we pick up today. In our passage, Abram is facing a severe famine and is forced to take his family to Egypt to survive. In this passage, we are going to see a strong contrast between the failures of Abram and the faithfulness of God.

In fact, those are the two main points I want to show you.

- 1. Abram's Failures (V10-15)**
- 2. God's Faithfulness (V16-20)**

Point #1 -- Abram's Failure (V10-15)

Subpoint #1 -- Abraham's test (V10)

Our story begins in verse 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.”***

Not long after Abram and Sarai arrive in the land of Canaan, they are confronted with a severe famine. There is a scarcity of food and they're lives are in danger because they might not be able to eat.

I remember in 2020 when food was scarce. Where I lived, they were letting people into the grocery stores in shifts and when you arrived, meat was in short supply. We never went hungry (thank God), but it did make us wonder if we would face a food shortage ourselves. That was scary for us. Abram's situation is infinitely worse than that. He and Sarai aren't just lacking meat. They're facing starvation.

So, think about this. Here they are in the promised land, where God told them to go, and they're facing starvation. I imagine they're thinking, “Lord, what are you doing? Why did you bring us here? I thought we were being faithful.”

Church, when you follow the Lord, and you're being faithful to Him, that doesn't mean you won't face hardships. The truth is, the Lord is probably testing Abram and Sarai. Remember, God just made these promises, and they responded in faith, but now it's time to test that faith.

The Lord will bring trials into your life, not because you're being disobedient but to purify and strengthen your faith. Listen to what Peter says,

6 “In this (your salvation) you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

God tests our faith like He did Abram's. The question is: how will we respond? We see how Abram responds in verse 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.” Abram does what most people did during this time. He went to Egypt. Even in times of drought, the Nile River provided ample water and produced plenty of crops. People from all over would make this journey to survive. As we progress through Genesis, we will see that Jacob, too, sent his sons to Egypt for food. So, this was very common.

But this does raise a question. Is Abram being disobedient by going to Egypt? God called him to live in the land of Canaan. Was he disobeying the Lord? Some say he was because he should have stayed in the promised land and trusted the Lord. I lean towards no; he wasn't being disobedient, and here's

why: In Hebrews 11:15, it says, ***“If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”*** If they were being disobedient, they would have returned to Ur, but they didn't because Abram at this point was trusting God, but all that is about to change, because Abram knows what's ahead.

Subpoint #2 -- Abram's Deception (V11-13)

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.”

As they are traveling to Egypt, Abram knows the danger he's about to face. When they arrive, he fears that the Egyptians will see how beautiful Sarai is, take her and kill him. So, Abram devises a plan. He instructs Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she is his sister, not his wife. The hope is, they will spare Abram's life for Sarai's sake.

Now, what's interesting is, this is not the only time this would happen to Abram. In Genesis 20, he is faced with the same circumstances. King Abimelech also wants Sarai to be his wife, and Abram again says she is his sister to preserve his own life. In that account, we learn that Sarai really is his half sister. They have the same father but not the same mother. So, technically, he isn't lying.

But Abram is clearly being deceitful. He's being selfish. He's willing to give up his bride to save his own neck. And all this stems from his lack of faith in God. God promised to bless him. To bless those who bless him and curse those who dishonor him. Nevertheless, Abram feels he must devise his own plans and not trust God.

There's so much application here but I will just point out a few things.

1. **We need to trust God when facing challenging circumstances.** Remember, God is testing Abram's faith. How he responds is crucial. Unfortunately, he responds in a fleshly way and compromises his family and their future.
2. **A half-truth is a whole lie.** Was Abram telling the truth about Sarai being his sister? Yes, but his motives were deceitful. Christians, we are people of the truth. We don't lie to one another. We speak the truth in love.
3. **Men need to protect their families.** Abram should have done whatever was necessary to lead, protect and provide. Instead, he sacrificed Sarai on the altar of his own self-preservation. Men, we are responsible for how we lead our families. May it not be said of us that we abdicated this role and or failed because of our own selfishness.

Abram's choices nearly lead to disastrous consequences.

Subpoint #3 -- Sarah's Abduction (V14-15)

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.

Abram said she is beautiful, and the Egyptians notice that she is VERY beautiful. Egypt, at this point in history, was already a well-established dynasty. Sarai is not just noticed by the natives. The king's princes are struck by her beauty, and they take her to be Pharaoh's wife.

It's debated whether or not Pharaoh and Sarai physically consummated their marriage. Some say they did because that's what kings do, and in verse 19, Pharaoh explicitly says, "I took her for my wife." Typically, if someone is your wife, it means you have consummated the marriage. Others disagree and say they didn't consummate the marriage because God wouldn't allow it.

Regardless of where you stand on that matter, one thing is clear: Abram put his family and the promises of God in jeopardy. He's supposed to have descendants with Sarah and become a great nation. But, because of his actions, he may never see his wife again.

Not unless someone intervenes. That brings us to our next point.

Point #2 -- God's Faithfulness (V16-20)

The Lord stands in direct contrast to Abram. Abram was faithless. But God was faithful. God is the hero of the story.

This is how you should read the Bible, by the way. It would be very easy to take this passage and give you a bunch of man-centered applications derived from Abram's life. And those do have their place. But we would miss the whole point of this passage if we read it that way.

God just made promises to Abram to make him into a great nation through which He would bless the world. And from a human perspective, Abram has put all of that at risk. But God will not let His promises fail. Even when His people act shameful, He remains faithful.

Subpoint #1 -- God's Blessings (V.16)

That begins by how God blessed Abram. ***16 And for her sake he (Pharaoh) dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.***

In response to Abram giving his “sister” away in marriage, Pharaoh blesses Abram for Sarai’s sake by giving him livestock and servants. This would have made Abram a very rich man.

God is blessing Abram despite his actions. Friends, this is called grace. When God sets His love and mercy upon a person, He showers them with His blessings even when they’re in sin.

This highlights God’s covenant faithfulness. God is blessing Abram, not for Abram’s sake, but to remain faithful to His promises and His own name. Friends, this is an incredible reality we have in Christ. God has set His love and mercy upon us, and He will be faithful to His people, not for our sake, but for the sake of His Son.

God blesses Abram, and now he is going to rescue Sarai. Remember, Sarai is in Pharaoh’s house, and unless Abram wants to be killed, there is nothing he can do to get her back.

Subpoint #2 -- God’s Rescue (V17)

But God intervenes. Verse 17: ***“But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.”***

That word “But” at the beginning of verse 17 showcases the contrast between Abram and God. Abram was enjoying his riches while his wife was a prisoner. But God.

How many of you can say, “But God”?

- I was ruining my marriage, but God.
- I was a greedy self-centered person, but God.
- I was enslaved to my addiction, but God.
- I was on my way to Hell, but God.

If you’re a Christian, you have a “but God” moment—a moment when you were utterly hopeless, but the Lord intervened to rescue you.

That’s what He does. God pours out plagues on Pharaoh’s house for Sarai’s sake. This is very similar to what God will do in the Exodus when Pharaoh won’t let Israel free. These plagues are diseases and illnesses. And these were not insignificant. These were “great plagues.” God’s judgment spread all throughout Pharaoh’s household. People are dying.

This highlights a major biblical theme—God’s salvation through judgment. God loves to save His people by judging His enemies. He’s done this already with the flood. God judged the whole world, but He saved Noah by the Ark. Through Moses, God saved His people Israel from slavery by pouring His plagues upon the Egyptians, and then He crushed Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea as Israel passed through safely. Of course, the greatest display of this truth is seen in Jesus. On the cross, Jesus

becomes the enemy of God by taking our sin upon Himself. God judges Christ in our place and saves us as a result. In the end, when Christ returns, He will defeat His enemies once more and save His church. You could argue that the main theme of Scripture, as Jim Hamilton has put it, is God's glory in salvation through judgment. God delights to destroy His enemies, and in doing so, save His people.

Christians that's what God did in your life. He saved you when He defeated your sin, defeated the devil and He conquered death. God has received glory in your life through your salvation and the judgment of your enemies.

Subpoint #3 -- God's deliverance (V18-20)

This is certainly what happens in this account. **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.**

How Pharaoh knew what was happening, we can't be sure. But I imagine that he noticed that everyone in his household was getting sick, except Sarai, and he started connecting the dots.

Pharaoh scolds Abram, and rightfully so. He is outraged that Abram would lie and withhold the truth that Sarai was his wife and not just his sister. He knows these plagues have fallen because of this. He doesn't know they're from God, but he knows it's because of Abram.

So, Pharaoh expels Abram. "Get out of here and don't come back. And here, take your wife with you!" I believe the author of Genesis, Moses, is once again contrasting the failure of Abram and the faithfulness of God. Abram is put to shame by a pagan king. At the same time, God is providentially allowing Abram to return home with his family. And he's returning in better shape than when he arrived. He was facing starvations, but he is leaving with riches, food, and servants. God is faithful. He was faithful to Abram and Sarai, and if you're in Christ, He is faithful to you.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

God's faithfulness doesn't mean that you will get immediate answers to your prayers or that you will never face a trial. His faithfulness means you can trust Him. He's reliable. He's true to Himself. He will never break His promises.

His faithfulness means God is always there for you. He promises, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. Even when we feel like God is distant, His faithfulness means He is near and ready to help. Jeremiah said, **"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"** (Lamentations 3:22-23).

The Lord's faithfulness is based on His covenant love. In a covenant, God obligates Himself to His people by His word, and God cannot break His word. In the New Covenant, God has committed Himself to everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ. Jesus has fulfilled all of the requirements of God and has secured the salvation of His people by His blood; thereby, purchasing you for you God.

There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God in Christ. The Lord has eternally bound Himself to you, and nothing can break His bond. Psalm 40:11, ***“As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!”***

God's faithfulness is best illustrated in the parent/child relationship. Parents have natural feelings of love and attachment to their children, and God has given us that relationship, at least in part, to illustrate for us how He feels about His children.

There's a great illustration of this in Isaiah 49. Israel thinks God forgot her. ***14 But Zion (Israel) said, “The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.”*** Listen to how God responds. ***15 “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. 16 Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”***

I know I could never abandon my daughter. I love her too much. Friends, how much more does our Father in Heaven love us? His love is infinitely greater than ours.

My daughter and I have a thing where I make “daddy promises” to her. She knows that a daddy promise is guaranteed, because I would never break my word to her. I started this because my hope is that she will have a glimpse of our Heavenly Father in me. But I am able to break my promises. My car could break down. My health may fail. I could forget. My moral character could break down. But none of this could be said of God. Nothing will prevent Him from being faithful to His promises. Nothing will stand in His way from keeping His word to His children. He is faithful for eternity. And He will never forget what He promised.

Friends, God will never go back on the promises He made to you in Christ. If you have trusted Jesus, you can be confident that you are born again, you have been justified by faith, declared righteous and forgiven, God has given you His Spirit and He will ensure that you inherit eternal life.

Abram may have sacrificed his bride to save himself, but Jesus sacrificed himself to save his bride, and now there is nothing in Heaven, on Earth or in Hell below that separates us from the faithful love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

LOOK BACK

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you GROW in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you GO to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?

BUILD UP

- **REVIEW:**
 - Read Genesis 12:10-20 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
 - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
 - Additional Scripture:
 - Proverbs 3:5
 - Psalm 9:10
 - Joshua 1:9
 - 1 John 1:9
 - 2 Timothy 2:13
 - Hebrews 10:23
 - Deuteronomy 7:9
 - James 1:2-4
 - 1 Peter 1:7
 - 2 Corinthians 1:20
- **REFLECT:**
 - Was Abram wrong for leaving the promised land and going to Egypt during the drought?
 - How did Abram fail this test by God?
 - How did God prove His faithfulness when Abram was unfaithful?
 - How does this help us trust the faithfulness of God?
- **RESPOND:**
 - What are some "but God" moments in your life?
- **MEDITATE:**
 - Genesis 12:16-17 -- *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.*

- **MEMORIZE:**

- Galatians 6:9 -- *And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

SEND OUT

- **GROW:** How will you abide in Christ this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?
- **GO:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story or the gospel?

- **PRAYER:**

- Pray over any request from your group members.
- Director of Creative & Communication - **Ally Johnson**
- Ministry - **For the Nations**
- **Pray for our long-term families on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
- **Pray for our mid-term sent ones on the field:**
 - Kaesi
- **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG):** Central-Eastern Fulani in Niger



- **Population in country:** 812,000
- **Global population:** 844,000
- **Christian Adherent:** 0.10%
- **Evangelical:** 0.00%
- **Primary Religion:** Islam
- **Primary Language:** Fulfulde, Central-Eastern Niger
- **Summary:** The Sokoto Fulani, who are a subgroup of the greater Fulani tribe, are on the border of Niger and Nigeria. The Sokoto comprise the ruling class (Toroobe) as well as semi-nomadic shepherds (Bororo). The ruling class live in

towns and cities, are educated, and fill leadership positions at the municipal and state level.

- **Prayer Focus:** 2 Timothy 2:21 says, "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work." (ESV) Pray that the Sokoto Fulani would become "useful" to the one true Holy God. Pray that this would be the decade when the Sokoto Fulani have an unstoppable movement to Christ.
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