

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When the Faithful Fail

Genesis 12:7–20



LET'S BEGIN HERE

After Abraham pulled up anchor in his homeland of Ur, his ship of faith sailed strong and true toward the land God promised. In Haran, he took shelter for a while until the death of his father, Terah. And then he launched out again:

He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12:5)

His first stop in Canaan was Shechem, where “he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh” (12:6). From this scenic overlook, Abraham set his eyes on Canaan’s verdant valleys and rolling hills, and “the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘I will give this land to your descendants’” (12:7). Basking in the nearness and blessing of God, Abraham built an altar and worshiped.

Then Abraham traveled south and set up camp at a spot between Bethel and Ai. “There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD” (12:8). Then he continued south into the Negev . . . where Abraham encountered his first crisis.

So far, Abraham’s faith sailed with the favorable winds of blessing and worship, but how seaworthy would his faith be when tested? Far from a safe harbor, the Negev proved to be a dry and sun-scorched place, and it was here that Abraham’s ship of faith ran aground.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we’ll discover what happened to test Abraham’s faith and reveal a weakness in this godly man’s character. Yes, the *Abraham whose faith we pedestalize was as human as the rest of us*. Fear undermined his faith when “a severe famine struck the land of Canaan” (Genesis 12:10).

Pray as you begin your study, and open yourself to hear God’s voice through the words of Scripture. Ask the Lord to search your heart for weak spots and to strengthen your trust in His love. The best fear cure is resting in God’s perfect love that “expels all fear” (1 John 4:18).

Quotable

*The good and the
godly are still weak
and imperfect.*

*The powerful and
influential still
have feet of clay.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: Overview of Abraham's Failure

As we turn to Genesis 12:7–20, we'll use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study to observe, interpret, correlate, and apply the text. Chuck Swindoll's book, *Searching the Scriptures*, explains these methods in more detail, and you can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries online store.

Searching the Scriptures Tool

A Bible map can be your handiest tool in digging into a passage of Scripture. This link takes you to a set of maps at Bible.org. Find “Old Testament Map 2—The Travels of the Patriarchs,” and follow Abraham's route after he arrived in Canaan. Locate **Shechem** and **Bethel**. Two other cities will be mentioned in coming narratives: **Beersheba** and **Hebron**, which are in a region known as the **Negev**. These locations set the stage for the patriarchal saga as it unfolds in the book of Genesis. The route between them, known as the “patriarch's highway,” was a well-traveled road for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Pinpoint these locations on the map, and keep them in mind. We'll return to them throughout our studies.

Read Genesis 12:10–20, and notice the shift in tone from the first half of Genesis 12. In the first half of the chapter, God speaks to Abraham and blesses him; in the second half, He allows a severe famine and sends plagues! What other differences do you find between the first half and the second half of Genesis 12? Specifically, take note of Abraham's actions in the first half compared to the second.

Abraham's faith-based obedience and worship in verses 1–9 degenerated into fear-prompted scheming and selfishness in verses 10–20. Why the shift? Abraham did what all humans tend to do when threatened; he took matters into his own hands rather than trust the goodness of God and rest in His promises.



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Next outline Genesis 12:10–20 by answering the following questions:

What was the divine test?

What was the human reaction?

What were the complicated consequences?

What was the ultimate outcome?



Interpretation: Uncovering the Meaning of Abraham's Failure

God often tests the faith of those He calls, as Abraham discovered when the hot winds of drought blew into Canaan.



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The Divine Test: A Severe Famine

The land was particularly susceptible to droughts that could reduce greenery to brittle twigs and riverbeds to cracked earth. Wells dried up, dust storms stirred up, and frequently people gave up. The pagan Canaanites deified the rivers, the wind, and the rain, believing the people were victims of these fickle and unfriendly “gods.” But Abraham, a servant of the one, true God, should have known that God alone was in control of nature. Abraham’s God could (and still can!) turn on the rain as easily as we turn on the faucet.



Correlation: A New Testament Truth

The text states that the severe famine *forced* “Abram to go down to Egypt” (Genesis 12:10). Harsh circumstances often force rash reactions. Based on James 1:2–5, what spiritual advice would you have given Abraham amid his trial?

The Human Reaction: A Quick Escape

When Abraham chose to escape to Egypt rather than seek God’s counsel and trust His leading, he set an unhealthy precedent that his descendants would follow in the future. Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah warned Israel: “What sorrow awaits those who look to Egypt for help . . . instead of looking to the LORD” (Isaiah 31:1).

By looking to Egypt for help, Abraham chose to:

- Walk by sight rather than _____.
- Rely on self-effort rather than _____.
- Turn to the schemes of the flesh rather than _____.

When Abraham’s perspective shifted from vertical to horizontal, from God-oriented obedience to self-focused deviousness, the result was a carnal mess!



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The Complicated Consequences: A Carnal Mess

Human to the core, Abraham followed sin's well-worn path familiar to us all. As you reflect on Genesis 12:11–17, identify the steps that led Abraham astray.

Step one: What emotions do you perceive in Abraham?

Step two: What negative thoughts did his emotions generate?

Step three: What scheme did his thoughts concoct?

Step four: What godly values did his scheme violate?

Step five: Who suffered because he violated God's values?



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Abraham convinced Sarah to tell a half-truth. She was his *step*-sister (Genesis 20:12). That half-truth led Pharaoh to assume beautiful Sarah was unmarried and available to take into his harem—which, to Sarah's dismay, he did! Abraham's sinful scheme to protect himself put Sarah at risk. Chuck Swindoll elaborates:

How *dare* he treat his wife like that! How dare Abraham not protect this lovely woman who trusted him as she left Ur with him and stood alongside him as he built the altar at Bethel . . . and then suddenly she's in Pharaoh's court and he's making plans for a night of lovemaking. I wonder how *she* felt. And then the Lord says, "That's enough. That's it! If you, Abraham, are not going to protect her, I will!"

The Ultimate Outcome: A Personal Offense

Read Genesis 12:18–20. What harm could a little white lie cause? Plenty! The sin not only hurt Sarah but also Pharaoh and his household when the Lord afflicted them with plagues. In addition, how did Abraham's lie jeopardize the covenant that God made with him, which included God's plan of redemption?

The disgraceful story concludes with Pharaoh expelling Abraham from Egypt with an escort to make certain he left for good!



Application: Lessons Learned from Abraham's Failure

In the somber aftermath of Abraham's sin, we glean five practical take-aways from this unsavory stretch in this godly man's journey. Don't rush through these points. Take time to meditate on each application.

There are famines in every life. As you recall recent events in your life, can you identify hot winds sent to test your faith? Likely, a host of trials have dotted the radar. Have you struggled like Abraham to trust God and stay true to God's values? What happened and how did you respond? What would you like to do differently going forward?



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There is a lie in every carnal escape. It's better to go through our trials by trusting God than trying to lie our way out of tight corners. How does this lesson apply to you now?

There is a weakness in every Abraham. We tend to put people we admire on pedestals, which leads to unrealistic expectations and heartbreaking disillusionment when they fail. How can you adjust your perspective in this area?

There's a Sarah in every compromise. We never travel alone across the bridge of compromise, and those we love often pay the highest toll. How does this sobering reminder help you stay true today?

There's a Pharaoh in every Egypt. God could have met Abraham's needs in the famine, but Abraham never asked Him for help. Also, God could have blessed Pharaoh through Abraham, but instead, by operating in the flesh, Abraham set the man's teeth on edge. "Get out of here!" were the last words Abraham heard from him. The final application for us is a reminder: our trust in God during trials is the best evidence of the reality of God to a watching world.

As we close in prayer, ask the Lord for strength to stay faithful during whatever trial you may face in the days to come.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to never underestimate the fallout of carnality. We live in a world in which people will do whatever is necessary to escape their trials. People lie, cheat, manipulate, and scheme every day. Help me to be different. I want to trust You through my trials because You are my God and Savior, the only one worthy of worship. You can get me through. Amen.



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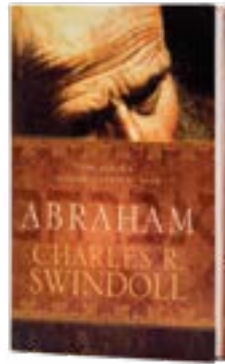
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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