

TORAHSCOPE: Lech Lecha (Get Yourself Out)

by Mark Huey posted 07 November, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

Genesis 12:1-17:27
Isaiah 40:27-41:16

“Trials, Faith, and Blessings”

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Genesis 12:1-3).

After two Torah readings have covered multiple millennia of world history, the Torah portion this week begins to focus on Abraham, considered the father of faith (Romans 4:12-16). In this reading, we are told that God has chosen one man and his descendants to be either a blessing or a curse to all humanity. We read that Abram, our imperfect forefather, experienced trials, exercised faith, and received the blessings of faithful obedience. His life, in many ways, exemplified for his descendants a standard of how each of us should approach our loving Creator. Certainly, as we ultimately discover, **“in him, all of the families of the earth will be blessed.”**

As you will recall, we were briefly introduced to Abram as *Noach* was concluding. Interestingly, as you read about Abram's immediate family, you might conclude that it was actually his father Terah, who was called out of Ur:

“And Terah took [*laqach*] Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there” (Genesis 11:31).

Abram, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot were supposed to go to Canaan. But as the text indicates, they went as far as Haran. This was the crossroads in the upper Euphrates east of Assyria, and part of the trade route that connected Egypt with the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. There they settled until the death of Terah.

In a cursory reading of last week's statement above, it appears that Terah “took” (Heb. *laqach*, לָקַח)¹ Abram and his other relatives. However, when we read further we see that the call to come out from among the people and circumstances of Ur was definitely made to Abraham.

First, we read Nehemiah's testimony that states that he understood exactly what the Torah said in its description of the life of Abraham:

“You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give *him* the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite—to give *it* to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, for You are righteous” (Nehemiah 9:7-8).

Stephen's testimony in the Book of Acts gives us more specific information regarding Abraham's departure from Ur:

“And he said, ‘Hear me, brethren and fathers! **The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.” Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living. And He gave him no inheritance in it,**

¹ In the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), used in Genesis 11:31, *laqach* means “take, lay hold of, seize” (William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988], 178).

not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him” (Acts 7:2-5).

Here we are told that Abraham himself had the “God of glory” appear to him when he was in Mesopotamia, “before” he lived in Haran. The command that he was to “**depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you**” (Acts 7:3), is spoken to Abraham when he was living in Ur.

Finally, the author of Hebrews completes our Scriptural understanding of this great “father of our faith” as it relates to the Creator of Heaven and Earth:

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:8-10).

With all of this confirming Scriptural evidence, we discover that the Lord was most concerned about His choice of Abraham to be the recipient of His blessings. God knew, from before time, that Abraham would exhibit the heart of faith and the obedience to His commands that would be pleasing to Him. As the Prophet Isaiah points out in this week’s complimentary Haftarah portion, “He has called for the generations from the beginning” (Isaiah 41:4):

As you read the narrative for this week, it begins with Abram hearing a command from the Most High that appears to be a repeat of the first appearance that occurred while the family lived in Ur. This time, Abram heard the voice of El Shaddai, and obeyed, after the death of Terah. After reading Stephen’s statement above (Acts 7:4), it appears that Abram did not continue on his journey into Canaan until after his father’s death:

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives And from your father's house, to the land which I will show you’” (Genesis 12:1).

Abram hears the command to “get yourself out” or “go forth” (Heb. *lech lecha*, לֵךְ-לְךָ), not only from his country, but his countrymen and even his very own relatives. Here in this portion, our trusting Patriarch begins his walk of faith. As we will learn, Abram soon realizes that representing the Almighty among men is peppered with life’s trials. But because he listened, believed, and obeyed, the blessings of obeying God are ultimately received in his lifetime. Of course in time, we will discover that those who have followed in his faithful footsteps have also partaken of those same blessings.

Faith Trials

While pondering the opening chapters regarding the life of the great Patriarch of our faith, I was struck by the fact that Abraham, just like the rest of his “faith-filled” descendants, was not spared the “trials of life” that we all must endure. Perhaps, I thought, there is a direct connection between faith and trials. With further thought, it dawned on me that perhaps there is a direct correlation between faith, trials, and the blessings of responding to life’s trials by faithful obedience to Him. After all, the walk of faith we are traversing is certainly beset with personal and corporate trials. **Is it possible that the Lord gives us trials so that we can exercise our faith in order to receive more of His blessings?**

I thought about how profound, yet elementary, this is to our faith. After all, are not tests, trials, and even tribulations designed by God to see if we are living and walking by faith and obedience to Him? **And does not the Holy One respond by blessing us when we react to trials by faithfully following His instruction manual known as the Holy Scriptures?**

Certainly, when one considers the inevitability of trials, many Scriptures come to mind. One of the most quoted brought a smile to my face:

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4).

In this passage, James the Just is encouraging First Century Believers that they should be expecting various trials that have been designed to test their faith. James states that responding by faith will produce endurance, which will have its perfect result in that the saints will be perfect, complete and lacking in nothing. **Talk about a blessing! Can you imagine the blessing of lacking in nothing?** This is not a bad reward for considering joyfully the trials of life—recognizing their source—and that they have been specifically designed by God for each person as he is being perfected in his walk of faith!

The Apostle Peter had a very similar approach to handling trials with rejoicing and joy inexpressible:

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6-9).

Peter, also writing to First Century Believers, understood that the trials that would be encountered should be handled joyfully by the faith that resides in the revelation that Yeshua HaMashiach is Savior. The ultimate blessing is that this belief will result in the salvation of one's soul.

You can readily see that there is a direct correlation between the trials you encounter, how you respond by faith, and the blessings associated with proper faith based responses.

As I considered this spiritual axiom, I thought about the magnitude, severity, and frequency of trials. **Is it possible that the greater the trials and the more faithful the response, the greater the blessings?**

Certainly, the trials endured by Abraham as described in the Torah, and his faithful responses, were definitely rewarded with a huge blessing. Is it possible to detect some parallels in the balance of Scripture that might confirm this observation?

Of course, the entire Bible is replete with testimonies about how people when challenged with various trials responded by faith. You can go to Hebrews 11 and read about some of the champions of faith who were blessed in a variety of ways as a result of their faith filled responses to trials, tests, and tribulation. But even the author of Hebrews reminds us that there are a “cloud of witnesses” that make up too many testimonies to try to consider:

“And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:32-40).

Suffice it to say, the concept of experiencing trials, responding in faith, and receiving the blessings of the Almighty are basic concepts of Judeo-Christian theology.

As I reflected on this truth, I was also reminded of the trials and persecutions that the Apostle Paul endured during his walk of faith. In 2 Corinthians, he encouraged the Corinthians to tolerate some trials and, listing some of the afflictions that he had endured in his own ministry for the gospel:

“Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly. For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face. To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison. But in whatever respect anyone else is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am just as bold myself. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Messiah? (I speak as if insane) I more so; **in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.** Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the assemblies. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Messiah Yeshua, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands” (2 Corinthians 11:18-33).

As I thought about all of these trials, and Paul’s faithful response to his accusers and those who personally abused him, I was again reminded of the blessings that he received. As author of almost two-thirds of the Apostolic Scriptures, he will be receiving his rewards for eternity for how his writings have been used by the Ruach HaKodesh to bring untold millions to a saving knowledge of the Messiah of Israel. Once again, the correlation between trials, faith, and blessings seem to form some degree of symbiosis.

Personal Application

While thinking through these verses, another viable form of trial kept coming to mind. This was the inevitability of the persecution that comes with the walk of faith that has been exercised by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and God’s people throughout the ages. We certainly all know that Israel has been persecuted throughout the ages.

But now that the revelation of God’s Son and His completed work at Golgotha has been accomplished, belief and proclamation of that gospel are guaranteed to bring persecution and trials beyond being a part of a single ethnicity. After all, if you are going to walk by faith in the knowledge of Yeshua as the Messiah, you will be persecuted according to the very words of Yeshua, Himself:

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, **they will also persecute you**; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me” (John 15:20-21).

It is interesting that Yeshua also encourages one to “rejoice and be exceedingly glad,” for one’s reward or blessings in Heaven will be great. But remember brethren, the persecutions will definitely come if you keep His Word. I would ask you,

- Have you been enduring any trials lately?
- Do you consider them to be great trials of the magnitude experienced by Paul, Peter, James, or any of the other Apostles?
- How about trials that rival the persecution experienced by the Prophets?
- Have you been stoned, flirted with a sword, or sawed in two lately?

For the most part, all you have probably had to endure has been an occasional mocking or put-down, but life-threatening events are few and far between. And yet, we all do experience some tests and trials during our Earthly sojourn.

Is it possible that trials are specifically designed by our Creator to give each of us an opportunity to exercise our faith? Then, when the trials or tests come, do we exercise our faith, by turning to the Torah and the rest of the Scriptures to find the prescriptions for the trials? Do we follow His Word as opposed to the inclinations of our flesh? If we do, then according to the trustful patterns established by Abraham, we will receive the blessings of faithful obedience. Perhaps we ought to look at these tests and trials as an opportunity to exercise our faith. Perhaps we should examine just how well we responded to what we might perceive as great tests or trials.

Did we follow the admonitions that are described in Bible when we faced the tests of life? If the answer is yes, then the blessings will flow. And do you know what else? The rejoicing will follow in due course. When you realize that you have been chosen (like Abraham or Moses, David, or Paul) to endure certain trials and tests—and that by your faith, you choose to follow His Word—you truly have something to rejoice about!

After all, we should all be rejoicing that our faith is resulting in the salvation of our souls. That is the ultimate blessing that following the walk of faith established by father Abraham determines. May we all be found thankful for the trials and rejoicing with the blessings of the faithful!

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