

THE MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

Chapter Twelve

The Validation of Faithfulness through Testing

God in His grace is constantly testing the reality of our beliefs. Why does God test our faith? If God knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12), why then does He need to validate our faith in Him? I think the answer is obvious. God does not test our faith to validate the reality of our faith so He might know. God tests our faith to validate the reality of our faith to us so that we might know. Real faith ALWAYS acts upon what we say we believe (James 1:22). God wants us to know whether our faith in His promises is genuine or mere pretense. When God says He will do something, He ALWAYS fulfils His promises.

“² My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; ³ Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. ⁴ But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. ⁵ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. ⁷ For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. ⁸ A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways. ⁹ Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: ¹⁰ But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. ¹¹ For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. ¹² Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:2-12).

We must be careful in these times of the validation of our faith that we do not confuse this validation with the event of our salvation. Yes, the reality of our salvation may come into question during the times of the validation of our faith, but the validations that happen after the event of salvation are applicable to our *faithfulness to God*, not our *faith in God*. Perfect *faithfulness* does not *waver*. However, the arena in which God is perfecting our faithfulness is a very hostile and antichrist environment. Like the giant Oak tree, when the strong winds blow, the limbs that are weak and unstable are broken off leaving only the strongest to grow. That is what God does in our lives through the testing of our faithfulness. He

exposes *to us* where our weaknesses exist seeking to either remove those weaknesses or strengthen them through testing our resolve.

God validates our faithfulness through two basic responses to His promises and commands.

1. Obedience to God's commands –anything less is delusional

“¹⁰ Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, ¹¹ It repenteth me that I have set up Saul *to be* king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night. ¹² And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. ¹³ And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed *be* thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. ¹⁴ And Samuel said, What *meaneth* then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? ¹⁵ And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. ¹⁶ Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. ¹⁷ And Samuel said, When thou *wast* little in thine own sight, *wast* thou not *made* the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? ¹⁸ And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. ¹⁹ Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? ²⁰ And Saul said unto Samuel, **Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.** ²¹ **But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.** ²² And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion {*willful disobedience*} *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected {*through willful disobedience*} the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king” (I Samuel 15:10-23).

Obviously, Saul was deluding himself about his faithfulness to God's commands. It is amazing that anyone can think that he can deceive God into accepting the spiritual delusions with which he deludes himself. Then, after he is caught in his delusion and is exposed, he offers silly arguments to justify himself before others. These kinds of practices manifest serious unbelief.

2. Waiting for the Lord to respond when we pray

“²⁷ Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? ²⁸ Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *there is* no searching of his understanding. ²⁹ He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength. ³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: ³¹ But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:27-31).

Christians claim to be faithful to God and yet they are so quick to abandon their prayers to the realm of the impossible. Christians pray and quickly forget for what they pray thinking the matter must not be important to God if He does not answer immediately. We do not constantly repeat unanswered prayers to God because God forgets. We constantly repeat unanswered prayers because it is a way to communicate to God that we are still waiting on Him to accomplish His will in the matter. In this way, we communicate that our hearts remain connected to God's will in faith.

The instruction of Isaiah chapter forty is to the faithful remnant of Israel. The majority of Israel had departed from Jehovah into idolatry and paganism. God's chastisement was coming on the unfaithful nation of Israel. What were the faithful to do in these circumstances? Simply put, they were to remain faithful, keep praying, and wait upon the Lord. During this time of waiting, the faithful remnant were beginning to question whether God had abandoned His promises to Israel. The reference to mounting “up with wings of eagles” in Isaiah 40:31 refers to older eagles molting, losing their old feathers, and growing new feathers. In this text, God is speaking to the future revival of national Israel during the seven-year Tribulation. Although the generation to whom He was speaking through Isaiah did not know God was referring to thousands of years in the future, God still told them to wait faithfully “upon the LORD.”

It is easy to be faithful in the midst of blessings and bounty. God was telling the remnant of Israel that they needed to “wait upon the LORD” in the midst of

what appeared to be hopelessness and future captivity. We want God to work within *our* timetables. How we see time and how God sees time are completely incompatible views. “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (II Peter 3:8). God gave this verse to those being swayed by an unbelieving public opinion. People were saying that God’s promises of end-time judgment had long ago fallen from doubt to unbelief. God is reassuring believers that He is faithful to His Word.

Abraham and Sarah certainly had some time-span tests upon their faith. In Abraham and Sarah’s initial test of their faithfulness in God’s promise of the birth of a son, Abram and Sari failed. They decided they had waited long enough for God to do what He said He would do. They decided God needed some help in fulfilling His promise to them and Sarah concocted a marriage between Abraham and Hagar. Abraham failed the validation of his faith when he agreed to Sarah’s proposal.

However, it is very important to understand that God had already bestowed salvation to Abraham before this failure in the validation of his faithfulness. “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3). Paul is quoting from Genesis 15:6. However, we must remember that the reference in Genesis 15:6 is merely a confirmation of what God told Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 in the initial giving of the Abrahamic Covenant. I believe it was at that moment in Genesis 12:1-3 that Abraham was justified “by grace through faith.” Everything after that is God validating Abraham’s faithfulness in believing God’s promises to him. Genesis 22:1-3 is another such validation of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises.

“¹ And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, *here I am*. ² And he said, Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. ³ And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him” (Genesis 22:1-3).

Ussher’s chronology puts the birth of Isaac in 1896 BC. Therefore, all the events of Genesis chapters eighteen through twenty-one take place in the year of Isaac’s conception around 1897 or 1898 BC. Although we are not going to look at all of those events in this study, they are significant events that are very much part of the development of Abraham’s faith as they lead up to the testing of Abraham’s faith in Genesis chapter twenty-two. The events of Genesis chapter twenty-two

most probably took place around 1872 BC. If this date is accurate, this makes Isaac about 24 years old when his father Abraham was to offer him to God in sacrifice. Most scholars believe Isaac was at least ten years old. Isaac may very well have helped chop the very wood upon which Abraham would later offer him for sacrifice. Clearly, Isaac carried that wood to the place of his offering. Isaac was not an infant. There was no resistance by Isaac. He willfully went to where his father bid him go. Therefore, both Abraham and Isaac manifested extreme faith before God.

“⁴ Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. ⁵ And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. ⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid *it* upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. ⁷ And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here *am* I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where *is* the lamb for a burnt offering? ⁸ And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. ⁹ And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. ¹⁰ And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here *am* I. ¹² And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son* from me. ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said *to* this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. ¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, ¹⁶ And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*: ¹⁷ That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which *is* upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; ¹⁸ And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice. ¹⁹ So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba” (Genesis 22:1-19).

The word “lad” in Genesis 22:5 (referring to Isaac) is translated from the Hebrew word *na`ar* (nah'-ar). This word is often translated “young man.” This is the same Hebrew word translated “lad” in Genesis 21:18 referring to Ishmael. We know that Ishmael was seventeen years old at the time of this event in his life. Therefore, the Hebrew word *na`ar* includes a wide range of ages and is best translated *young man*. Isaac was at least ten years old and may have been as old as twenty-four at the time of his trip to the *altar of living sacrifice* in Genesis 22:1-19.

The ultimate trial of the reality of our faith is in our own time of death, or the death of a loved one. The ultimate test of faith is the testing of our belief in the reality of eternity and the reality of the resurrection from the dead (the “blessed hope”). We might call this the *centrifuge of faith*. This view of reality never sees death as the *loss of a loved one*. This view of reality sees death as but a *momentary absence* of our loved one.

“¹ For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: ³ If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. ⁴ For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. ⁵ Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. ⁶ Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁷ (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) ⁸ We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (II Corinthians 5:1-8).

What are the events of Abraham’s life that precede this trying of his faith in Genesis 22:1-19? Certainly, these events of his life are going through his mind at the time of this extended journey to the *altar of living sacrifice*. In most cases, Abraham defines his own history by his failures in being faithful. God defines His history with Abraham by His faithfulness to His promises. Yes, by comparison, Abraham’s life was mostly faithful. Yet, the major trials of his life proved his faith very *weak* and *wanting*. God was building Abraham’s faith by proving His faithfulness to His promises.

It is easy to be faithful when most of our lives are lived in the *easy chair* of blessings. God does not measure the faithfulness of a lifetime by the majority of our *easy chair* existence. God measures our faithfulness during the major events of our lives when we can *simply* trust *completely* in God’s promises. *Simply* and *completely* are definitive terms when it comes to the trials of our faith. **God**

always forges real faith in the fire of adversity tempered with the living waters of grace. The altar of living sacrifices is always in the midst of the fires of adversity, for it is only in the heat of trials that our faith in God's promises are proven real.

When a believer disobeys God and sins under trial, he fails to enter the *fires of adversity*. Instead, he enters the *fires of chastisement*. God intends for both of these fires to forge a living faith in God's promises. God will use every resource at His disposal to teach us to trust Him. God intends His longsuffering to work to our good and to His glory. Unbelief views trials and chastisements from a worldly and carnal perspective. Unbelief sees both trials and chastisements as *unloving* things.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“⁴ Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. ⁵ And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: ⁶ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. ⁷ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ⁸ But if ye be without chastisement, whereof **all** {*of God's 'born again' children*} are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Hebrews 12:4-8).

In Genesis 22:1-19, God gives us the details of what we might call *life's crucial test*. God's *crucial test* of the reality of our faith in His promises usually involves the persons or things we love the most and hold dearest to our hearts. We pass this test when we arise from the ashes of the fiery trial with our integrity intact because we were obedient and our hope intact because we can rejoice in the blessings of the knowledge of eternity to which real faith clings.

A person with real faith knows that God does not wrap His real blessings in the trappings of material gifts. God's real blessings are eternal and spiritual and He wraps them in a glorified body. When we view the death of a “born again” loved one through the eternal lens of the “blessed hope,” we do not see loss. We see gain. We may weep a few tears of sorrow, but we must envelope those tears with the joy of knowing there will be a blessed day of resurrection.

This is what was going through Abraham's mind on that three-day journey to the *altar of living sacrifice*. Although, when we look at this through *our* faith, we might assume Abraham struggled with the looming death of his son. This is an assumption that God does not give us any dialogue about. We might also look at this through the eyes of perfect faith and assume Abraham looked forward to the

event believing with full assurance that God was going to resurrect his sacrificed son. After all, God promised that He would raise up a nation of people with numbers as the sands of the seashore from Isaac's descendants. If Abraham believed that promise, he also had to believe God would either resurrect his son or provide a substitute sacrifice in his son's stead.

Genesis 22:8 gives us Abraham's statement of faith – "And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together." We should always confirm our statements of faith with actions of faithfulness. God only blesses this kind of faithfulness. Would Abraham have discovered God's faithfulness had he not obeyed in this crucial testing of his faith? We miss so many discoveries when we disobey God's commands. How many great things about God have you missed discovering because you continue to walk the pathways of unbelief and disobedience?

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

The last six words of Genesis 22:13 are definitive regarding both God's faithfulness to His eternal promises and our faithfulness to our missional purpose. **Christ died in our stead (place) so that we might live in His stead (place).** This is the definitive statement of New Testament Christianity. Living our new *Christ-life* is the common *crucial test* of faithfulness for every New Testament believer. So often, Christians stop at their knowledge of Christ's substitutionary death for our redemption and our reconciliation to God. That is just a beginning, not an end. From that new beginning, EVERY Christian is to live in the place of Christ ministering His teachings and doing what He would be doing if He were still on Earth. This *crucial test* of living the Christ-life is the reality of faithfully preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone in the realm of our influence and leading those people to faith in Christ to be saved. We must follow this by our leading those saved to be baptized and formally unite with a local church of common doctrine, purpose, and practice. We must follow this with each believer involving himself in his own personal discipleship and the discipleship of others so that everyone of us can "observe all things" that Jesus commanded us to do (Matthew 28:18-20). We cannot separate the missional purpose of Christ from His expectation of us to live *in His stead*. Herein lays the *crucial test* of faithfulness for all Church Age believers.

¹⁶ Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more

{*Jesus is now glorified and ascended to the Father*}.¹⁷ Therefore if any man be in Christ {*'born again' into the 'new creation'*}, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become {*perfect tense*} new {*kainos*}.¹⁸ {*now the 'new' life*} And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us **the ministry of reconciliation**;¹⁹ To wit {*here are the defining principles*}, **that God was in Christ**, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us **the word of reconciliation**.²⁰ **Now then** {*because Christ is in us in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit*} we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: {*here then is the plea and message or 'word of reconciliation'*} we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.²¹ For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; **that we might be made the righteousness of God in him** {*practically, not merely positionally*}" (II Corinthians 5:16-21).