

The Great Test of Doubt

Prov. 24:10 “If you are slack in the day of distress, Your strength is limited.”

I. Doubters & Their Reasons

A. Abraham - Overwhelmed

He was far from home, alone, afraid, not in the place God had spoke to Him.

He faced a severe famine in a strange land, and fearing for his personal safety.

Gen. 12:10-20 “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.

11 And 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 it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

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."

14 And it came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

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

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.

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

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?"

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

Abraham is our great example of justification by faith even with this doubt because of his overcoming this.

Rom. 4:1-9 “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.

3 For what does the Scripture say? "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

When he faltered he did not give up.

16 For this reason *it is* by faith, that *it might be* in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

17 (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the sight of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

18 In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

22 Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

His faith did not stagger or waver when he considered all that God had promised.

B. Sarah - It Just Can't Be!

Gen. 18:9-15 "Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent."

10 And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

12 And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear *a child*, when I am *so old*?"

14 Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

15 Sarah denied *it* however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh." I'm to old, I cannot give birth. Laughed - scoffingly, and then lied.

Yet she listened and was faithful.

Heb. 11:11,12 "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised;

12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.*"

She did not keep her doubts or let them overwhelm her faith.

C. Moses - Certainly Not Me!

Ex. 3:1-11 "Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up."

4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 And the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.

8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

9 And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.

10 Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"

12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."

Who me? This even after God spoke to him in the burning bush.

13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?"

14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

How can I go, the people don't even know who you are!

Ex. 4:1 "Then Moses answered and said, "What if they will not believe me, or listen to what I say? For they

may say, "The LORD has not appeared to you."

The people won't follow, they'll scoff

Ex. 4:10 "Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

I can't speak well enough!

Still he led the people, listed with the faithful, given as our example

Heb. 3:5 "Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;

6 but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."

He was faithful.

He went and did it!

D. Elijah - Frustration & Discouragement

Great victory over prophets of Baal.

1 Kings 18:38,40 "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."

40 Then Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape." So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there."

But then, overwhelmed.

1 Kings 19:1-16 "Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

3 And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

5 And he lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat."

6 Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake *baked on* hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.

7 And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you."

8 So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

9 Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Got discouraged at Jezebel's threats and flees to Zion, God tells him to go back.

I've done all this work – for nuthin'.

God said, "Get back to work -

13 And it came about when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

15 And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazeel king over Aram;

16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place."

He went back to work

2 Thess. 3:13 "But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good."

E. Thomas - Didn't Believe Testimony

He wouldn't believe until he saw.

Jn. 20:24,25 "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Then he saw & believed.

Jn. 20:26-29 "And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace *be* with you."

27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing."

28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed."

We are more blessed because we believe by hearing.

He believed due to the evidence seen with his own eye. We believe by the testimony of those who had the opportunity to experience what we can't.

F. Ananias - Don't Use That Guy!

Acts 9:10-17 "Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, *here am* I, Lord."

11 And the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,

12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."

13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem;

14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

17 And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Thought the Lord must be mistaken, he should be stoned, not baptized!"

Didn't the Lord know what he did?

Lord revealed His will, and he went.

He went and followed instructions - fully and courteously.

G. Ps. 73 Asaph - This Is Not How I Want World to Be

vss. **1-2** Asaph nearly fell away

1 (A Psalm of Asaph.) Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!

2 But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; My steps had almost slipped.

vss. 3-12 He saw the wicked prosper

- 3 For I was envious of the arrogant, As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
 4 For there are no pains in their death; And their body is fat.
 5 They are not in trouble *as other* men; Nor are they plagued like mankind.
 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them.
 7 Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of *their* heart run riot.
 8 They mock, and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high.
 9 They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth.
 10 Therefore his people return to this place; And waters of abundance are drunk by them.
 11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?"
 12 Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth.

vss. 13-14 Asaph decided the he had been foolish for being faithful

- 13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And washed my hands in innocence
 14 For I have been stricken all day long, And chastened every morning.

vs. 15 Had he voiced all his doubts he would have betrayed and discouraged others

- 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children.

vss. 16-20 He finally, with difficulty understood.

- 16 When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight
 17 Until I came into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I perceived their end.
 18 Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction.
 19 How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!
 20 Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, Thou wilt despise their form.

He recognized that God would punish them appropriately.

He could not reconcile what he thought was right with what God seemed to be allowing.

Retribution never comes soon enough for the oppresses (or late enough for the wicked).

In realized, in the long run, the justice of God.

II. How To Overcome Doubt

A. Faith

these great hero's of faith faltered, but did not fail in the end. God told them to buck up and they did.

Heb. 10:36-39 "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."

We must live by faith and now shrink back.

None of the faithful let the doubts overthrow their faith.

They had their weak moments, but they did not let their weak moments become their defining moment.

B. Realize God is Near

He is near at all times.

Acts 17:25-28 "neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;

26 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation,

27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His

offspring.”

God instructs us to be patient and assures us of His closeness.

Jas. 5:7-11 “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.

8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

11 Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.”

C. Keep Perspective

Ps. 73 Asaph got his perspective back

vss. **21-24** He had a time of doubt, but was not fully convinced of God's goodness and faithfulness

21 When my heart was embittered, And I was pierced within,

22 Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was *like* a beast before Thee.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand.

24 With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, And afterward receive me to glory.

vss. **25-28** Asaph recognized the justice and goodness of God.

25 Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; Thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee.

28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works.”