

Read Genesis 12:9-10.

The transition from v.9 to v.10 doesn't indicate if the land was already in the grip of a famine when Abram and Sarai arrived in Canaan, or if it began later.

But here's what we do know to be true about the God who had led them there.

- He is good... not sometimes, but always.
- He is a trustworthy Guide – he is a Shepherd who knows where he is going and what he's doing and who he is leading.
- We also know from the Scriptures that God is sovereign over heaven and earth, over the seen and unseen realms... and his sovereignty extends to the things that happen to those who walk with him.

These truth statements leave us in awe of God's wisdom and grace.

We need to ask... what was God purposing to do in Abram and Sarai's lives in the midst of a famine and then while they were in Egypt?

God included this part of their story in the book of Genesis for a reason. So it is important for us to ask... what would the LORD have us learn from this incident?

There were unforeseen consequences which happened because of Abram's decision; but there were also unforeseen consequences that happened because of God's direct intervention.

The LORD our God is incredible.

What we are going to see is that his grace far exceeds the mistakes, mis-steps and sin of those who walk with him.

Regarding the famine.

God was not caught off guard because it happened.

As the Creator... God has revealed in the Scripture that he is actively involved in his creation.

Look at what God said to Job.... 38:22-30

Job 38:22-30

"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle?"

What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?"

Job 38:22-30

"Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass?

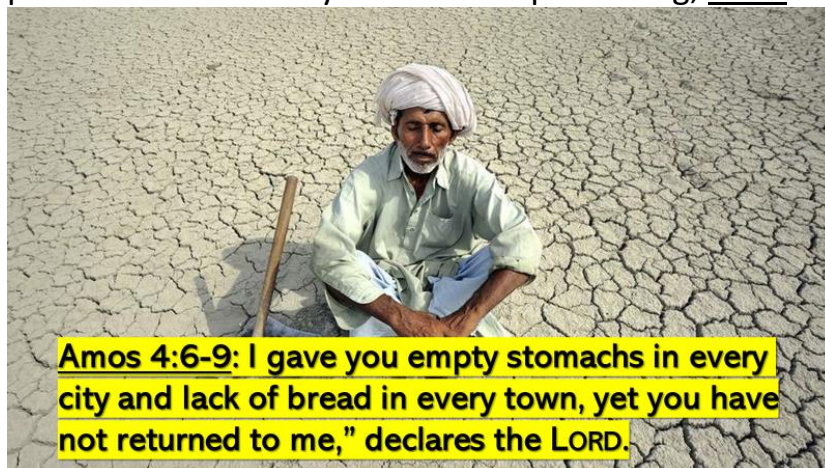
Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew? From whose womb comes the ice? Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen?

These questions which God asked of Job... are purposefully rhetorical.

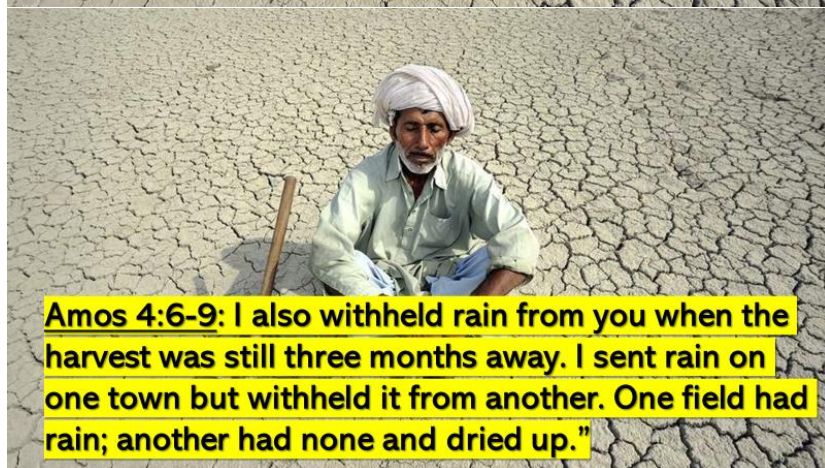
There is but one answer to all of them.

What God revealed to Job is that he is in control of... that he directs the weather.

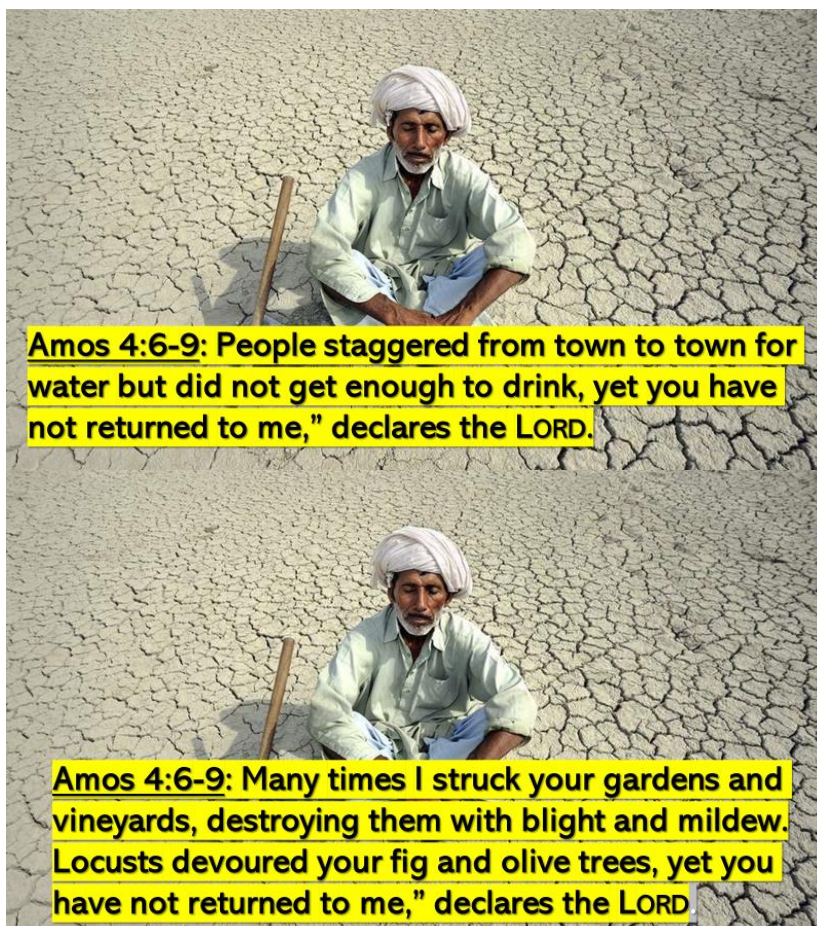
Through the prophet Amos, God explained to the people of that day the weather phenomena that they had been experiencing, 4:6-9



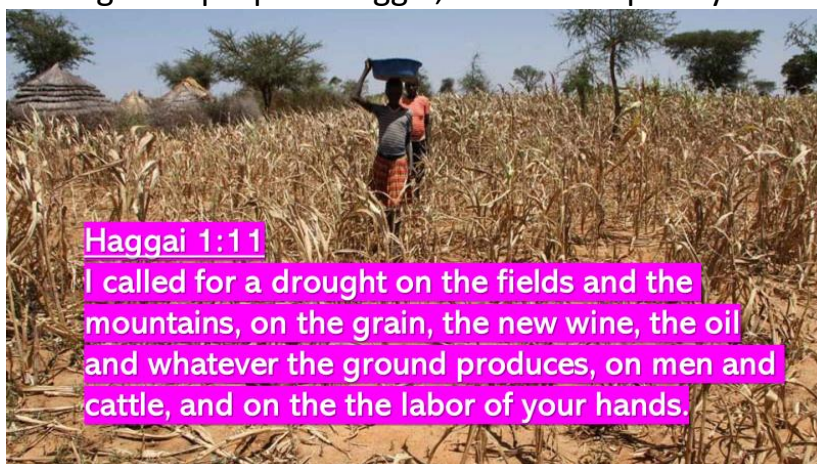
Amos 4:6-9: I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.



Amos 4:6-9: I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up."



Through the prophet Haggai, God was explicitly clear...



God revealed that it was He who caused these things to happen.
And for what purpose?
That people might return to him!

What was true in Amos and Haggai's day was also true in the time of Abram and Sarai and remains true for the times in which we live.

God is in charge of the earth.

He uses weather events to get the attention of humanity... to impress upon all people... not only his existence, but his justice and his settled opposition to evil, his wisdom, his power, his good purposes, his commitment to rescue, his patience, his mercy, his love.

It may very well be that the primary purpose of the famine in Canaan was to get the attention of the Canaanite people... to persuade them to return to the LORD.

However, simultaneously, this event was used by God in the lives of Abram and Sarai. But in what way?

Let's read what happened.

Read Genesis 12:11-20.

It is really important to say this - God does not tempt anyone with evil.

Look at **James 1:13**



James 1:13-14 (ESV)

Let no one say when he is tempted,
"I am being tempted by God,"
for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself
tempts no one. But each person is tempted when
he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

God can turn things intended for evil into good.

God can redeem our failures.

God can make a way out of dead-ends.

But God never... will tempt you or I... to sin.

However... God does test his people.

James spoke of this in the opening verses of his letter.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy,
my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that
the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Based on the truth stated in this verse, we then need to ask... why would God use trials to test the faith of his followers?

And a second question that goes along with the first... is why are God's people told to consider it pure joy... when they encounter trials that test their faith?

Look at the answer James provided for his readers.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy,
my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that
the testing of your faith produces perseverance.
**Let perseverance finish its work
so that you may be mature and complete,
not lacking anything.**

Trials that test one's faith... force... the people of God... to hold tightly to God... to purposefully focus on him.

And as they do so, over time, perseverance is cultivated... and with perseverance... comes spiritual maturity.

Through Moses, God provided a second explanation regarding his purpose for testing.

Deuteronomy 8:2

Remember how
the LORD your God led you all the way
in the desert these forty years,
to humble you and to test you
in order to know what was in your heart,
whether or not
you would keep his commands.

Is this verse saying that God had to test the generation of Hebrews he had rescued from Egypt... because he didn't know what was in their hearts?

And is the implication of this... that in every generation, God tests his people because he doesn't know... whether they will obey him or not?

This is not the testimony of scripture.

Psalms 139:1-4

O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.

Scripture teaches us that God doesn't test his people because he is ignorant or uncertain about what is in us.

God tests his followers to bring into the light, any residual sins that remain in their hearts... that they might lay hold of God's grace and cooperate with him as he replaces sin with righteousness.

God knew exactly what was in Abram's heart.
But Abram didn't.

There were sinful tendencies in Abram that needed to die... tendencies that Abram had depended upon in his past, but which now, as a follower of God... had no place in his life.

The pressing issue within Abram... at that moment in time... was his fear.
He feared dying of starvation.

And in the decision to go to Egypt, he feared that the Egyptians would kill him... in order to take his wife.

When Abram set out from Ur, he began to learn to walk with God and to live by faith in God and his promises.

God had said to him...

“ I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

Genesis 12:2-3

God had proven his faithfulness to Abram and Sarai as they journeyed to Canaan.
It was no accident that upon their arrival there was a famine.

Through the circumstances he encountered, God uncovered within Abram a crippling fear that caused him to doubt God; that caused him to question God's capability.

As he and Sarai had set out from Ur and then Haran... to follow God this fear was not immediately confronted.

But the time had now come for it to be dealt with.

We need to pause here a moment.

When we come to Jesus, when we turn from our sin and turn to him, believing in him and receiving him into our lives to be the One in charge... he doesn't immediately address every single sin issue in us that is needing to be transformed. Rather he wisely chooses the order of the issues to be addressed and brought under his Lordship.



Story in St. Thomas – a man came to faith in Jesus.
As he would exit the building after church, he would light up a smoke.
I was advised to tell him he needed to stop ... because Christians didn't smoke.
The Spirit of God at that moment gave me words that were not my own...
I said it was not my place to lay out the roadmap of this man's transformation.
Of course, smoking is a health issue... and for that matter alone, it would need to be addressed.
But there may very well have been other issues that the Lord considered to be more pressing; areas of his life that need to come under Jesus' Lordship first before his smoking was dealt with.

As the Lord transforms our lives, he determines the order of issues needing to be addressed and when.



How good and patient is the LORD... with those who walk with him.
How wise is he in the way and the pace in which he renovates our characters!

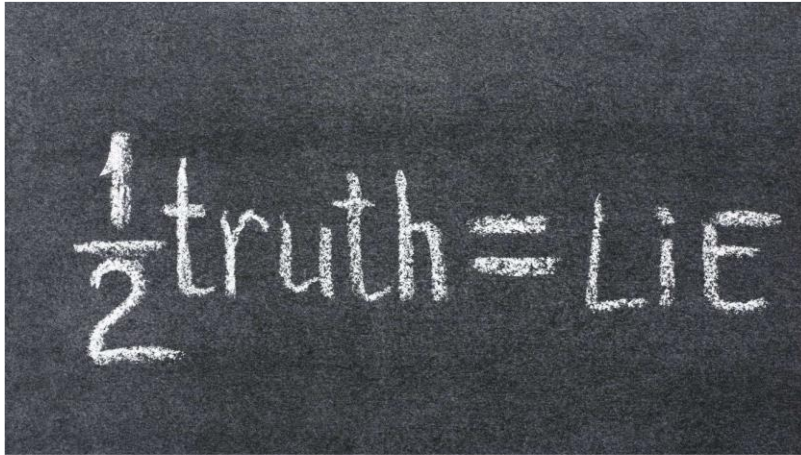
When the LORD tests us and uncovers things within us...so that we see ourselves as he sees us... he does so, that we might welcome him to bring his grace to bear on that particular area of our life that needs to come under his control.

Abram's fear was a serious issue.

We know this because it convinced him to fabricate a lie... a lie that required Sarai to also lie, in order to protect his life.

There is no way to airbrush this.

It was wrong for Abram to do what he did.



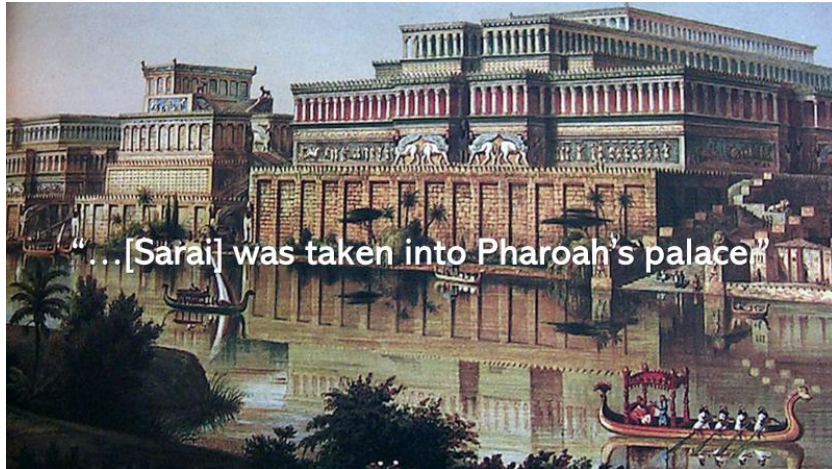
I don't think Abram ever intended for Sarai to be harmed.

Nor do I think he ever envisioned that Pharaoh would want to marry her.

That was an unforeseen consequence.

I wonder if the whole fiasco didn't happen so quickly that Abram couldn't find a way to save Sarai, without it not resulting in him being killed, and quite possibly her as well.

Abram was helpless as v.15 says...



... to stop Sarai being “taken into Pharaoh’s palace.”

If you only measure it by the possessions Pharaoh gave him, Abram’s lie financially paid off quite well.
Or did it?

Abram received as a bride price... sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

But in chapter 13 it was the abundance of his possessions that caused a separation between him and his nephew Lot.

And then in chapter 16, Sarai came up with a plan to get a child through her Egyptian maid servant named Hagar.

Choices shaped by sin never bring life.

But in this story, we see the wisdom and grace of God to rescue his people.
Thanks be to God... the story of Abram and Sarai was not over.



In a situation that seemed quite hopeless, God intervened... to protect Sarai.
This was an unforeseen consequence of his grace.

What the LORD did was inflict serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household. Similar to weather events, these diseases were intended by God to get the attention of Pharaoh and to stop him from violating Sarai.

And it worked.

We know this because of what Pharaoh said to Abram in v.19 – “Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!”

Pharaoh didn't say, “Here is my wife. Take her and go.”

But Abram's lie was exposed, and the truth was uncovered.

Pharaoh angrily summoned Abram to come to him and said to him, v.18 – “What have you done to me?”

Through the voice of Pharaoh, Abram's fear that had persuaded him it was necessary to lie ... was confronted... and his sin in all its ugliness was exposed in the presence of all who were in Pharaoh's court.

I'm certain it was a humbling experience for Abram.

Standing before Pharaoh and facing his anger... impressed upon Abram the unforeseen consequences of his sin.

But then, miraculously, Abram and Sarai's lives were spared.

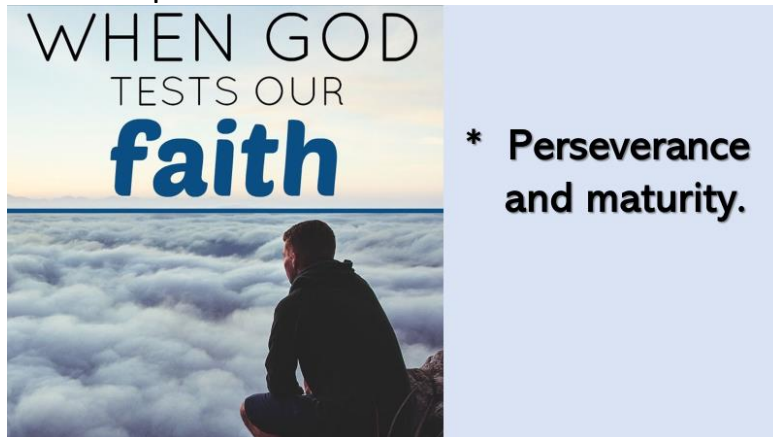
Unexpectedly, instead of spending the rest of their lives in an Egyptian prison, they were set free, and expelled from Egypt

The God who had called them into relationship with himself, worked in this situation for his glory in spite of Abram's foolishness... and lack of faith.

But that is what the grace of God does.

Over the next 24 years the LORD would make Abram and Sari ready to be the parents of the child who would be born to them in their old age... the child through whom his Rescuer would come... the child through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Let's recap where this truth connects to our lives.

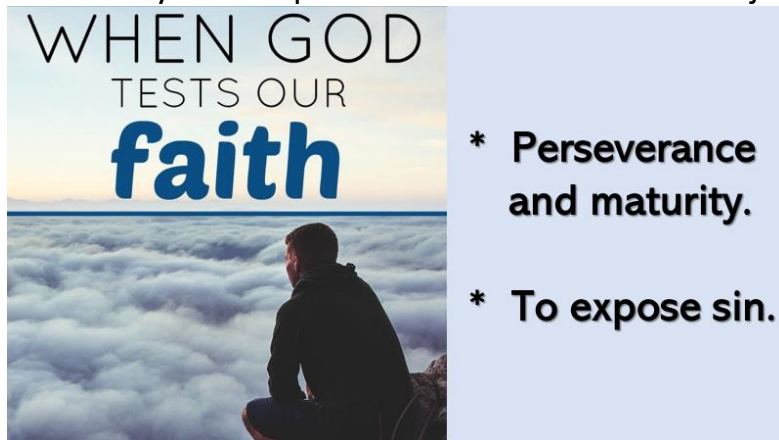


If you are a follower of Jesus, God will test you.

He will test you in order to build perseverance within you... in order to mature you spiritually.

Tests are a means of God's grace.

This is why the Scripture tells us to consider it all joy when they come.



If you are a follower of Jesus, God will test you when necessary to bring to your awareness areas in your life that are in need of his transformation; areas that need to come under his control; areas where he has determined... sin's power yet within you... must be broken.

It is and will be painful when God exposes sin within.

But the fact that he does so, is the proof that you are his child.

So when God does so, be quick to agree with him; be quick to lay down your sin, be quick to ask for his forgiveness... and welcome him to cleanse your heart... and to renew your devotion.



3. In this world, the sins of others can impact us, whether knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally.

But be encouraged.

The same God who came to the rescue of Sarai, comes to the rescue of all who call on his name.

The things that touch our lives... pass first... through our Father's hands... even those unwelcome things that seem to come upon us through the hands of others.

If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, He who rules from heaven over the earth, never takes his eyes off of you.

He will faithfully finish in you what he by grace has begun.

His grace is greater than... you fill in the blanks.