

# “Advent with Abraham, Part 1: The Famine and the Feast”

## Galatians 3:5-9, Genesis 12:1-10

### Introduction

Try this. Go without food for 24 hours. Then sit down and read the book of Genesis. Or read Luke’s Gospel.

When there’s a little miniature famine in your belly, you won’t be able to miss this one fact: the Bible story is all about food.

My Italian family says “food is love.” They’re not wrong.

Everything in the Bible is about God’s love. And everything in the Bible is about food. Enjoyed together. *Feasting*. Everything bad that happens, is really about missing out on the feast. About a famine.

Think about it. Adam and Eve are in a garden with plenty to eat. They rebel by eating the one thing they’re told not to eat. The consequence is that getting food is *hard*.

David’s famous 23rd Psalm celebrates a *feast* right in the middle of the valley of the shadow of death.

Jesus, especially in Luke’s Gospel, is always at a meal, on his way to a meal, or leaving a meal.

My wife and I agree that the day *after* American Thanksgiving is better than Thanksgiving Day itself. Why? Because of turkey *sandwiches*. So let’s have ourselves a post-Thanksgiving sandwich with our sermon this morning. Our outline will be

The Promised Feast  
The Present Famine  
The Promised Feast

### 1. The Promised Feast

God makes his promises to Abraham (2-3):

I’ll make you a great nation  
I’ll bless you

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I'll make your name great

I'll make you a blessing

I'll bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you

I'll bless every family on earth through your family

Abraham has not done anything to deserve this. He's been worshipping false gods like everyone else in his country. But God says, I'm starting something new with you. It's going to be a gift— not just to you, but to every nation through you.

The word here, over and over, is “blessing.” I've called this “the promised feast.” Why?

Why not “God's promised grace”?

God *is* promising grace. But grace is *God's unearned kindness*. And, very often in the Bible, God's kindness means that he provides a feast when there could easily be a famine. When we've *earned* a famine.

Blessing from God is more than food. But it's not *less* than food. Jesus said that people cannot live on bread *alone*. People *also* need to feed on the words that come from God's mouth. They need to eat his flesh, he says.

So when we come with Abraham to this crucial moment in human history, we should also be thinking about food. When we think of *land*—another major Bible promise—we are talking about food—lots of it, enjoyed together. You need land to make food. God's promised grace is a promised feast: for Abraham. For his family. For all nations. By grace.

### **2. The Present Famine**

In between the promise of a feast and the feast that is promised is what? The present famine.

Isn't it stunning? God calls Abram to leave home. To *go*. Ultimately, to go to the Promised Land—a land that will be flowing with milk and honey. He responds in faith. He *goes*. He believes that God will bless him; and his descendants; and the entire world, through him and his family.

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Abram built two different altars (7-8) as he went. He worshipped God for his promised feast. He praised God for inviting every nation to the feast through his family.

Then what? (10) Then there's a *famine*. A *severe* famine. No food right in the middle of the Promised Land. He has to leave. *Again*.

How could this be happening?

I am sure that many of you have experienced something similar. The Lord came into your life. Called you *out* of your former life. Asked you to believe almost unbelievable promises. You believed. You obeyed. You followed Jesus, no matter the cost.

And then awful things happened in your life. The Lord promised a feast. You experienced a famine.

If that's your story, I want to encourage you.

Because Abraham, the father of our family of faith, was promised a feast, and experienced a present famine. And he had to leave twice: his original homeland. Then his promised homeland.

His grandson Jacob, aka “Israel,” had to leave the Promised Land and go to Egypt, too, because of a severe famine.

And what eventually happened to this family in Egypt? They were made slaves in Egypt for 400 years.

Promised feast; present famine.

God delivers the people out of slavery through Moses. They are heading to the Promised Land! And ... they have so little to eat in the desert that they start to wish they could go back to slavery in Egypt.

Promised feast; present famine.

Hebrews 11 talks about lots of people in our Bible who heard of God's promised feast; believed; and faced a present famine:

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*They were “tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.”*

But think about this: The Christmas story is a lot like Abraham’s story. The story of Jesus *is* the story of Abraham. The story of Israel. The story of Jesus *is* the story of all these people who trust in God’s promised feast, and then experience present famine.

The Lord Jesus, as soon as he is born, is forced to flee his home as a refugee to Egypt. Because king Herod wants him dead.

Sam and Ellie and I were in Egypt together with other international pastors for a retreat in February. And you know what? Egyptian Christians are *really proud* of the fact that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph came and lived there for two years. Just about every little village claims that Jesus stayed there for a few nights at least.

But for Jesus and his parents, this wasn’t a royal tour. This was a famine.

Jesus’ experience was not that different than Abraham’s.

Didn’t the Father promise to make Jesus into a great nation, a new people?

Didn’t the Father promise to make Jesus’ name great?

Didn’t the Father promise to make Jesus a blessing to all nations?

Doesn’t the Father promise to bless anyone who blesses his Son Jesus?

Didn’t the Father ask his Son to *go*?

Didn’t the Father promise, once he gathered a people from all nations, that Jesus would enjoy a great feast with them?

And didn’t the Father watch as his Son trusted and obeyed?

He did! And as soon as he came into the world, trusting, obeying—born right in the middle of Judea—he had to flee to Egypt.

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Promised Feast. Present Famine.

Have you believed God’s promised feast, only to experience a present famine?

I can’t tell you why your story is shaped like this. But I *can* tell you that *if* your story is shaped like Abraham’s; if it’s shaped like the stories of these heroes in Hebrews 11—then it’s also shaped like the story of Jesus.

God doesn’t always tell us why we have to experience a famine in the present. But he says to us, in Jesus: “I know, personally, what it’s like to go through the famine on the way to the feast.”

And Jesus, the Bread of Life, experienced the ultimate famine. His cupboard was empty: empty of advocates, empty of friends, empty of strength, empty of the presence of his Father, empty of life. All on the way to the promised feast. He went through this famine. Why? So he could feast *with you*; with us.

### 3. The Promised Feast

This brings us back to the promised feast again.

The goal of human history is called “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19) when God and people eat, drink, and are joyful together—with the Lord Jesus sitting at the head of the table.

God is calling the nations to come and feast with him; with Abraham’s family. He calls each of our nations to move away from the places of our famine and to come to the table and eat. To come to the feast, even if the famine gets *more* severe along the way.

Jesus says (Matt 8:11): “Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”.

And right after that, he gives a warning. Don’t miss the feast. He especially says this to churchgoers like us. Don’t miss the feast.

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**Conclusion**

Even now, this Advent, the table is being extended. Here, to us. Out, to every nation. This Advent, the invitations are being sent. This Advent, the places are being set. Jesus has gone home ahead of us and has begun to prepare the places. And he says, I will “Advent” again, so that you can be with me. So that we can feast together.

Friends, don’t miss the feast. No matter what sort of famine comes along, the message of the entire Bible, from Abraham to Jesus, is this: it’s absolutely worth enduring the present famine in order to enjoy the promised feast. Jesus has endured the worst famine of all, in order to feast with us, with our family from every nation at the table with us.

Feasting isn't stuffing your face with food.  
Famine isn't not having food with which to stuff your face.

Feasting is celebration in communion with others over food.  
Famine is the awful hunger for such communion.

No matter the famine, don’t miss the feast.