

Studies in Faith: Abraham

By Faith Abraham ...

This Lord's Day we examine the faith of Abraham. Please open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 11. It has been a while since we explored the faith of Abel, Enoch and Noah, so we begin by reading the first three verses of chapter 11 where the writer defines faith, **"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."**² For by it the people of old received their commendation.³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." A key concept about faith is found in the opening of chapter 11, **"faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph and Moses never received all the promises of God during their lifetimes. They believed in the coming Messiah and lived by faith believing the promises of God would be fulfilled. None of the people mentioned in Hebrews 11 actually received what they believed while alive. By this fact and by other verses in Scripture, we should not think that God's promises will be fulfilled while we are alive either. As Peter later wrote,⁸ **"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."**⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.¹⁰ **"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."** (2 Peter

3:8-10) If you believe God's promises, are you living by faith in Him? Are you ready for Christ's return?

Here is what I mean. The thrust of this text is that Abraham believed and obeyed what God told him. He left his home not knowing where he was going. He sojourned on earth as a foreigner his whole life. Abraham died believing the promises of God but never actually saw God's promises come to pass. Abraham lived by faith and lived out his faith. Abraham died before God's promises were fulfilled. You may die before Christ returns but that does not mean God's promise of Christ's return will not be fulfilled. We have seen some of God's promises fulfilled; for example, believers in God the Father and Son over the millennium number beyond count or as the sands of the sea shore. Abraham also clearly understood a truth that we too need to understand; as we read beginning in verse 9, "By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ... dropping down to verse 16, But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one." Abraham understood he was but a sojourner on his way to heaven. How about you, like Abraham, do you understand this is not your home and this life is only temporary.

Journeyed Into The Unknown (v. 8-10)

Immediately two important points in understanding the relationship between God and Abraham are made clear. Reading at verse 8, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs

with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” First it is revealed Abraham was called by God and second, Abraham obeyed. It is God who takes the initiative and it is God who begins His plan of salvation for mankind and in this case Abraham called by God acts in faith. God gave Paul an understanding of this process, as Paul wrote, ²⁸ **“we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”** ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30) Abraham heard God’s call and obeyed. God’s ultimate purpose for Abraham was to be conformed to the image of Christ. The calling to leave his home was the beginning of the calling to be conformed to the image of Christ. We have spoken about the Fruit of the Spirit as an outward sign of being transformed by believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior another sign is recorded in the Gospel According to John. Jesus said, ²⁷ **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”** ²⁸ **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.** ²⁹ **My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.** ³⁰ **I and the Father are one.”** (John 10:27-30) Abraham saw Christ from afar and loved Him and spent his life obeying God’s calling. Are you and I like Abraham? If we say we believe in Christ, are we living life in obedience to the Word of God and the calling of God to live for Christ’s glory?

The world has always been a difficult place. Abraham was challenged and sometimes stood firm and at other times make mistakes and sinned. But his heart was always desiring to be obedient to God because by faith he believed in the

coming of Christ. Obedience is critical, when confronted by the Jews who wanted to live as they desired, Jesus spoke of His authority because before Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, Jesus always was. ⁵³ “Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, “He is our God.”’ ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but **I do know him and I keep his word.** ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” (John 8:52-59) The Jews trusted their future in that they were descendants of Abraham, but he was just a man who lived and died. Jesus on the other hand is eternal and yet, they had not faith.

Abraham believed God and acted on what he knew to be true. Faith is what connects us to God. When God told Abraham to leave his home, He did not tell him anything else about his new home, perhaps that is because Abraham would never have a permanent home while on earth. God may not lay everything out for you in detail, but we are to have faith and follow His commands. We may only see the next step and not the journey’s end, but faith tells us the journey will be worth the effort because it is a journey with God.

Abraham believed by faith the journey God called him to was worth it. Reading verse 9, “By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.” Abraham believed and went forth by faith. We all recognize that Abraham fell short of the mark; for example, twice he posed as Sarah’s brother out of fear. At

the same time, we also recognize Abraham never turned back. He was a man of faith even though he stumbled at times. Our lives of faith are also marked by weakness and sin at times, but we are to continue the journey by faith. It is kind of like on a dark night you can see the glow from the lights over the top of the Sandias of Albuquerque. Abraham saw the glow of the heavenly city far off and desired to be faithful and he kept journeying towards it. This is what verse 10 is saying, “For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” Like Abraham we are to say faithful to God and know we are sojourners in this world and our true home is heaven; the city designed by God.

Abraham’s life was lived in faith and trust in God as Paul wrote, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 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? ‘**Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.**’ (Genesis 15:6) ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: (Quoting Psalm 32:1-2) ⁷ ‘**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.**’” (Romans 4:1-5) Abraham left his home not to earn salvation. He left his home because God had already worked and chosen Abraham to inherit His great promises and God would be the Father of all who, like Abraham believed by faith. Out of all the pagans in Ur for reasons we do not really know, God chose Abraham. Why did God choose you or me? We

certainly did not earn it or deserve it. Praise God for His love for us and gift of salvation through His Son.

As Abraham's faith began to operate, he saw the city of his inheritance. He saw the lights from his tent opening to the lights of heaven and longed for the city of God more than he ever wanted to be back home. There is a big difference between Abraham longing for the new city designed by God and the Hebrews whom God brought out of Egypt and slavery and in their unbelief, for they later longed again for slavery and Egypt as one can read about in Exodus 17 and Numbers 14. All they could do is look back in unbelief and all Abraham could do is look forward in faith

So, let me ask, "Are you longing for that same city? Do you see yourself as a foreigner and a sojourner on earth?" God may not be calling us to leave our homes, although for some He may. Some are called onto the mission field in a foreign country. Some are called to go there and live as foreigners. Others are called to remain home and serve the Lord there. But all of us are called to live as foreigners on this earth because heaven is our real home. By faith do you see the city whose builder is God? Do you long to be there? I pray that the Lord would continue working in us and being patient with us as He weans us off our dependence on this world and we learn how to share the gospel of Christ with the lost.

["By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance."](#) By faith we should live obedient to whatever God calls us to and keep our vision on the city designed by God.

Believed God's Promises (v. 11-12)

God's promises are for both men and women. Both men and women are spiritually God's children with different roles. Let me read of God's amazing gift to Sarah in Hebrews 11, "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore." (Hebrews 11:11-12) Let's travel back in time reading from Genesis chapter 18, where Abraham and Sarah experienced a theophany, ⁹"They said to Abraham, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' And he said, 'She is in the tent.'¹⁰ The LORD said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?'¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?"'¹⁴ **Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.**" The important concept to grasp here "**Is anything too hard for the LORD?**" It does not matter if we are observing God's miracle of an old woman conceiving or any other miracle. God will control every detail of history and human life so that His plan of salvation, the return of Christ and the defeat of Satan happens exactly as He has determined.

We read of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah fulfilled a few chapters later in Genesis chapter 21, "The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised.² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.³ Abraham

called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac (yits·**khawk**, meaning “he laughs”).⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.⁶ And Sarah said, ‘God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.’⁷ And she said, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’” A lot happened in that year. Sarah went from disbelief and laughing at the truth to actually conceiving and then later giving birth to Isaac, the son of promise.

Sarah and Abraham had tried to take matters into their own hands first believing Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, would be his heir and then with Hagar, but God’s plan cannot be controlled or changed by mankind. Their efforts created Ismael which has created problems, not for God, but for the chosen of God for thousands of years. God made a promise in chapter 15 of Genesis and it would be.⁴ “Behold, the word of the LORD came to *Abraham*: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’⁵ And *the LORD* brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then *the LORD* said to *Abraham*, ‘So shall your offspring be.’⁶ And ***Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.***” If left to themselves, Isaac would never have been born. However, “**Is anything too hard for the LORD?**” Absolutely not! With God orchestrating everything and about a year later infant cries were heard from the nursery of old Abraham and Sarah.

God’s promises are always fulfilled. The question is do we live by faith and obedience to God or cause problems for ourselves trying to take matters into our own hands? As Paul instructed concerning Abraham,¹⁸ “**In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told,**

‘So shall your offspring be.’¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.²² That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’²³ **But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone,²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”** (Romans 4:18-25) God is the God of promises kept even as Sarah observed, ‘After I am worn out, and my lord is old.’ (Genesis 18:12) yet, Isaac came, for nothing is impossible for God!

Was An Example To All Generations (v. 13-16)

Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob all died in faith, not having received the things promised by God. This is important for us to consider. While alive, they acknowledged that they were waiting on a better city. How does this impact us? Reading at verse 13, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.¹⁶ **But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”** God promised Abraham that he would be the father of nations, and that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and that

all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. Yet while alive Abraham did not receive the promise.

God promised Abraham a land yet all his life he dwelt in tents. God promised a multitude of descendants and yet at his death Abraham only had two sons; one of disobedience and one of promise. Abraham also had grandsons, but this was not a nation or nations. He died not having received what God had promised. The promise concerning the land was then repeated by God to Isaac and then to Jacob. Neither received the promise while alive.

They knew that in time God would fulfill all that He promised so they lived as aliens and wanderers by faith until their deaths. Abraham was much happier wandering as a nomad waiting on God than going back to Ur and putting down roots. They lived in tents while looking at the Promised Land. These verses are present so that we, you and me, my beloved, will read them and study them and imitate the faith of Abraham.

There is also a sequel to the Abraham story. Here is the rest of the story. Jesus refers to it when He encountered the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a branch of Judaism who were in effect lawyers. Like lawyers today they were always looking for loopholes and trying to manipulate the situation to their advantage. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. But, as educated as they were, they were no match for Jesus. Reading from Matthew chapter 22, ²³ “The same day Sadducees came to Jesus, the Sadducees who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, ‘Teacher, Moses said, “If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.” ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third,

down to the seventh.²⁷ After them all, the woman died.²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.’²⁹ But Jesus answered them, ‘You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.’³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God:³² “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? **He is not God of the dead, but of the living.**’³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.”

(Matthew 22:23-33) What Jesus was in effect saying was that you teachers and lawyers of the Jewish law say there is no resurrection from the dead. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob not 1000 years ago but right now. They are alive and well in their land of promise. Their eternal inheritance is currently being enjoyed by them because God is the God of the living. Remember if Christ does not come back while you are alive, when you take your last breath, you will open your eyes and be with God living forever with Him.

John Calvin said of the life of a Christian in a letter to encourage a woman suffering from physical problems, “We are hence to conclude, that there is no place for us among God’s children, except we renounce the world, and that there will be for us no inheritance in heaven, except we become pilgrims on earth ...” Keep in mind that the Lord cares for His children and we experience His goodness while on earth as well as the results of the collective sin of mankind. But His ultimate love and promises are to be experienced in the life to come. Do not expect heaven on earth. Do not expect your best life now... but by faith expect it later. There is a city waiting for us. It is one God has prepared for those who love Him. Live by faith now as you anticipate great blessings later. Know death does not strip Christians of God promises but brings them into full effect.

My beloved, like Abraham, let us live by faith traveling this world as sojourners with our hope and faith for the glory to come – eternity with God.
Amen!