

The Faith of Abraham and Sarah

Hebrews 11:8-16

Hebrews 11:8-16 - *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”*

Background Notes

Hebrews 11 is like Westminster Abbey, filled with Old Testament heroes of faith. Or maybe a better analogy would be a Hall of Fame of faith. We have halls of fame for all the major sports. The best players of that sport are inducted into the Hall of Fame when their excellence proves that they're champions. Hebrews 11 is a Hall of Fame - not for champions of football or baseball - but for champions of faith!

The first “champion of faith” listed in Hebrews 11 was Abel. Abel pictured saving faith. Abel approached God by way of a blood sacrifice, because this was the way of approach that God Himself had revealed to mankind. In Abel we certainly have a picture of the way of salvation, and even though Abel is now dead, he still speaks in Hebrews 11:2. There Scripture revealed Abel's faith and the way he was made righteous before God. His example was recorded for all of us to read and follow.

What is noteworthy about all the heroes of faith who followed Abel was that their faith looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promises. *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off” (v13).* Abel was a model of **saving faith**, but the rest of the Hebrews 11 heroes of faith are models for us of **living by faith**.

For us, saving faith is looking back and believing what God has said about the Person of Christ, and the work of Christ when He died on the cross for us. Living by faith is looking forward, and living our lives based on what God has revealed about the future. As evidence of their faith, true believers will persevere, and endure, and live by faith.

The rest of the Hebrews 11 heroes of faith emphasize what it means to live by faith – in other words, **enduring** in faith. Hebrews 10:38 says, *“The just shall live by faith.”* In Hebrews 11, the champions of faith following Abel are all what it means to live by faith.

Do you see the divine pattern? Saving faith, modeled by Abel, must always come first. Living by faith follows saving faith, as seen in the models like Enoch, Noah, and now Abraham and Sarah, who also lived by faith.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should follow the faith of Abraham.

Genesis 15:6 says, *“Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”* This great text is quoted in Romans 4:3 - referring to Abraham’s **saving faith**. In Hebrews 11 we see Abraham’s **enduring faith**. Abraham lived by faith - and we should follow his example.

Notice two characteristics of Abraham’s enduring faith: **obedience** (v8) and **patience** (v9-10).

- **Obedience**

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Archaeological excavations have revealed that Abraham’s home city of Ur was not a dinky little “one-horse town”! Ur was an up-to-date and civilized city of the ancient world - a very nice place to live. If God were to ask us to leave a comfortable home in a modern city, would we obey? Or would we question God’s calling, and draw back in our commitment to Him?

Abraham obeyed. He left all of the comforts of Ur, and “went out” - not even knowing where he was going. But leaving Ur was not a blind leap of faith. It was a reasonable, step-by-step act of faith, because God was guiding Abraham, and Abraham was trusting God. The faith of a child is not blind when the child, in obedience, follows a parent to places that the parent does not reveal to the child ahead of time. Step by step, God led Abraham about 1000 miles to the land of Canaan.

We should follow Abraham’s obedient faith. Are you letting God plan your future? Are you willing to obey the Lord, even if He wants to lead you out of security in your “Ur” – your present comfort zone? You may not know all that the future holds - but it’s not a blind faith because you know who holds the future.

When I took a step of faith and left secular employment to go into full-time youth ministry, I had no idea where the Lord would eventually lead me. But I knew that He knew - and I knew that He knew what was best for me. That’s really the secret of obedient faith - knowing that He knows what is best for us. When you believe that, then you can, without any qualms or doubts, be prepared to let the Lord lead you and confidently follow Him.

- *Patience*

“By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; [by faith] he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

By faith Abraham patiently waited for his entire lifetime, not receiving the promises (v13). Eventually, however, Abraham will receive his “permanent dwelling” when Christ returns to this earth, and in the heavenly Jerusalem. What a model for us to follow!

How patient is our faith? Is it as patient as Abraham’s faith? It’s not wrong to live in a house on this earth, but we should treat our home like a tent! Our present home is a **temporary** dwelling place. Too many Christians settle down and treat their houses as permanent dwellings - and they’d be very unwilling to leave, even if called by God! They are unwilling to live by faith.

Many believers are unwilling to patiently wait for the permanent home that the Lord is preparing for us in Heaven. In John 14 the Lord said, *“I am going to prepare a place for you.”* Believers should follow the faith of Abraham.

2. Believers should follow the faith of Sarah.

Verse 11: *“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”*

Human biology and human reasoning would say that Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children. After all, Abraham was 100, and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born! Reproductively speaking, they were “as good as dead” (v12) when it came to having a child! But Abraham and Sarah had placed their faith in an omnipotent God, so they believed God’s promise about a son. And the promised son arrived - right on God’s time!

Sarah’s faith was commended in Hebrews 11. Not only was Sarah past the age of bearing children, but she also knew that she was sterile. Until the birth of Ishmael by Abraham’s concubine, Hagar, Sarah may have thought the lack of children was Abraham’s problem. But the birth of Ishmael proved that it was Sarah who was unable to conceive. So Sarah showed great faith in believing that God could overcome natural impossibilities.

Furthermore, early on Sarah did not have a strong faith. In Genesis 18:10-15, Sarah even laughed when God said that they would have a son. Do you ever have doubts, as Sarah did? If so, here’s the good news. Sarah changed! She believed God - and God saw Sarah’s faith, not her doubts.

How encouraging! At times we all have doubts about God’s abilities to do what is humanly impossible. Sometimes our faith is weak. But *God looks at the overall pattern of our lives!* He sees our faith - even though we have some doubts at

times. Like Sarah, let's believe God. As He works in our lives, our faith will grow stronger. Believers should follow the faith of Sarah.

Practical Application

Do we have 20/20 spiritual vision?

Verse 13: *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, they embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."*

The patriarchs may not have had 20/20 eyesight with their physical vision, but they had 20/20 spiritual vision - and **they proved it by their lifestyle**. They openly confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in this world (v13). When you say you're a stranger, or a pilgrim, that means you have not yet found your permanent home (v14).

And even though Abraham and Sarah had not found their permanent home, they weren't homesick, or they would have returned to Mesopotamia (v15). They were looking for something better. They were looking forward, for the city prepared for them by God Himself! *"But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them"* (v16). They had 20/20 spiritual vision.

Do we have 20/20 spiritual vision? ? We may think we do, and we may say we do - but does our lifestyle show it? Have we left the comfort and security of "Ur" behind, and are traveling and looking ahead to "a better city"? When unbelievers observe the way we live our lives, is it obvious to them that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth"? Or have we made ourselves so comfortable on earth that unbelievers would say, "You're a stranger or a pilgrim? You sure could have fooled me!"

God was not ashamed to be called the God of the faithful patriarchs (v16). As God looks at our faith, and our lifestyle, and our priorities - is He ashamed to be called our God?

We all need to think seriously about this, don't we? Do we have 20/20 spiritual vision?