

Bethel Christian Fellowship

Fair Lawn, NJ

Hebrews (34): The Book Of Better Things

“The Faith of Abraham and Sarah”

Hebrews 11:8-12

February 9, 2025

As we saw last week, the purpose of Hebrews 11 is to encourage us to persevere in our faith. One way we know this because of the immediate context. Before the passage begins, our author has said, “*You have need of endurance*” (10:36, ESV). After the passage ends, he says yet again, “*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*” (12:1, ESV). If we are going to endure pressure, persecution, and suffering, we will need the *kind of faith* that is modeled for us in the lives of these Old Testament saints.

There are only two kinds of people our author envisions in the church (10:38-39); those who “*shrink back and are destroyed*” (professing Christians) and those who “*live by faith and are saved*” (genuine believers). There is *no* third alternative. As we have seen throughout this letter, continuance in the faith is the test of reality (Cf. 3:6, 14; 4:14).

Q. What, then, is faith? **A.** True faith is not wishful thinking or a blind leap in the dark. It is the “assurance” and “conviction” that God will do what He said He will do; it’s the “confidence” that He will deliver what He has promised (vv. 1-3).

We saw this, most notably, in the example of Noah’s faith (v. 7). When he was “*warned about things not seen,*” he believed those events would eventually come to pass. Those events, of course, included the flood and the destruction of all the inhabitants of the earth. Once he believed God’s Word, he acted upon that faith and built the ark. That’s

the reason Noah was declared “*righteous*” and is numbered among those who were “*commended*” for their faith.

However, there is always a *measure of perplexity* in genuine faith. Noah must have been just a bit perplexed by the promised warning of the coming flood. It would have been understandable if had said to God, “A flood? I’ll believe it when I see it.” As we shall see, the same will be true for Abraham and Sarah (vv. 8-12).

We know Abraham was perplexed because of what we read in the first verse of today’s text; “*he obeyed and went, even though he didn’t know where he was going*” (v. 8). Then, when he arrived in the land which had been promised to him, he never inherited any of it (vv. 9-10). Finally, when Abraham and Sarah were given the promise of *countless* descendants – when they were well past the age of having *any* descendants, they were *surely* perplexed (vv. 11-12). In spite of misguided alternatives (Gen. 16:1-4) and bewildering doubts (Gen. 17:15-17; 18:13), in the end they trusted God to be faithful to His word. Their faith enabled them to look past seemingly insurmountable circumstances to the One who had given them the promise.

This brief, but packed paragraph in Hebrews 11 covers three timeframes in Abraham’s life, each beginning with the all-important words, “*By faith*” (vv. 8, 9-10, 11-12).

A. By Faith Abraham Journeyed to the Promised Land (v. 8): “*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*”

When God called Abraham to leave his home, he was in “Ur of the Chaldeans” (Gen. 11:31; Acts 7:2-3). At that time, the Lord told him to go “*to the land that I will show you*” (Gen. 12:1). So, Abraham left Ur (southern Iraq) and settled in Haran (northern Turkey). From there God sent him on the next stage of his journey to the land of Canaan. It wasn’t until sometime after he had reached Canaan that the Lord informed him that this was the land that He would give to him and his descendants (Gen. 12:7). In the words of Leon Morris, “To leave the certainties one knows and go out into what is quite unknown – *relying on nothing than the Word of God* – is the essence of faith.”

No doubt this was a perplexing time in Abraham's life. Most people want to know where they are going, and they like to choose their own way of getting there. But Abraham would go out, *knowing* it was the right thing to do, but *not* knowing where it would lead.

Like Abraham, there are times when God leads us unexpectedly, moving us out of our comfort zones. When He does, all of us must answer the question that Abraham must have surely asked: Do I believe that God is good and wise and can be trusted with my life? Do I believe that following His will is worth more than all the creature comforts that I am currently enjoying?

B. By Faith Abraham Lived As an Alien in the Promised Land (vv. 9-10): *“By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”*

When Abraham lived in the land that had been promised to him and his innumerable offspring, he pitched his portable tent among the Canaanites, moving from place to place. *They* were the settled residents of the land; he was the resident alien in the land. Yes, he did receive some visible tokens of God's promise, as in the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:1-5) – and even in Isaac's son, Jacob (Gen. 21:5; 25:2, 26). But even Isaac and Jacob did not live to see the fulfillment of the promise that the land would be theirs; they remained *“foreigners and strangers,”* like Abraham himself (Cf. Gen. 23:3).

So, what was the secret of Abraham's patience? Our author tells us in verse 10; *“for he was looking forward to the city with foundations,”* later described as *“a better country – a heavenly one”* 11:16), which is further described in Revelation as *“the holy city, the new Jerusalem”* (21:2) that will come down to the new earth when Christ returns (21:9-11). Therefore, it was Abraham's expectation of a permanent blessing in a better, heavenly country that enabled him to *patiently endure* the inconvenience and disappointments during his earthly pilgrimage in Canaan. *That's* “confidence” in what we hope for, and “assurance” about what we do not see! (Cf. v.1)

C. By Faith Abraham and Sarah Fulfilled God's Promise (vv. 11-12): *“And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand of the seashore”* (NIV, 2020).

It's important to note that our author is *not* denying the presence of a certain degree of perplexity in both Abraham's and Sarah's hearts. Rather, he's focusing on *their settled, final attitude of trust in what God had promised*. For after all, the Bible says that when God told Abraham that he would have a child with Sarah, he *“fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’* (Gen. 17:17)

The same was true for Sarah. According to Genesis 18:12, her response to the Lord's promise was less than commendable: *“So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, ‘After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?’* Then comes the Lord's response; *“Then the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.’* (18:13-14)

That's the point our author wants to drive home. In the end, despite their perplexity and bewildering doubt, both Abraham and Sarah believed God's promise. According to Paul, Abraham *“was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised”* (Rom. 4:21). And when Sarah conceived and gave birth to God's promised son (Isaac), her laughter of disbelief became laughter of joy: *“God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”* (Gen. 21:6)

In the end, Sarah and Abraham *both* *“considered him faithful who had made the promise.”* As a result, they were blessed with a *host* of descendants, in fulfillment of God's promises that Abraham's offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5; 22:17) and *“as the sand which is upon the seashore”* (Gen. 22:17). Both he

and Sarah came to realize that the certainty of God's word far outweighed their human limitations. They both came to believe that there *isn't anything too hard for the Lord!*

There is an important lesson for us here. There is a *huge* difference between *denying* our circumstances and *defying* them. In the words of an old friend, "Faith is not convincing yourself that things don't exist when they do, or that things do exist when they don't. The Bible never calls us to ignore reality. Rather, it calls us on us to put our faith in the Lord of reality. In other words, faith doesn't declare the circumstances and natural barriers to be non-existent. Faith simply declares that God is not shackled by them as we are" (Sam Storms).

For that, we can praise His holy name, and trust in Him to do the impossible in us! That's what we learn from the faith of Abraham and Sarah, and that's how we keep on enduring in faith, each and every day!