

The Faith Of Abraham

Hebrews 11:8-10

Introduction

The chapter begins with a great explanation of faith (vv.1-4) and continues with great examples of faith (vv.4-40).

In Abel we looked at faith and worship (v.4); in Enoch faith and walk (v.5); in Noah faith and warning; and now in Abraham and Sarah we will consider faith and waiting (vv.8-12; and again vv. 17-18).

Abraham is called the Father of all who believe (Rom.4:11). The story of Abraham begins in Genesis 12 and continues through chapter 24. Do you really want to know about faith? Abel's faith involved worship; and Enoch's faith a walk or companionship and fellowship with God. Real faith always includes worship and obedience to God. In worship we see the truth about God.

The Call To Faith And Obedience Of Faith (v.8)

Hebrews 11:8 (NKJV) *8By 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.*

The writer relates the word faith to obedience.

We think Abraham was born in Mesopotamia sometime around 2166 B.C. We know nothing of his early life but all indications are he was raised in a home absent Biblical faith. Various speculations have suggested Abraham came to faith through the testimony of Shem, or Job or Melchizedek. He is mentioned some 308 times in the Bible; 224 times in the OT and 74 times in the NT. This includes mention in 27 books in the Bible (16 OT; 11 NT). He was born Abram and raised in the city of Ur of the Chaldees. Ur was a seaport near the Persian Gulf on the banks of the Euphrates river. Tradition places the Garden of Eden near Ur—and the city was a center of farming, manufacturing and shipping. For centuries critics and skeptics mocked the existence of Ur but in 1922-1934 C.T. Woodley of the British Museum did extensive research in its ruins and discovered evidence of a massive ziggurat modeled after the tower of Babel. The city had two main temples one dedicated to Nannar, the Moon-god and the other to his wife—Ningal (gleaned from Halley's Handbook; pp.88-89).

The calling of Abraham is recorded in Genesis 11:31; 12:1; mentioned in Acts 7:3). Genesis 11:31; And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there." And 12:1-3; "Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 12:4; "So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him. . ."

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The writer of Hebrews reminds the Jews God had spoken to Abraham (He has spoken to us by His own dear Son—Jesus).

There is good reason to believe that Abram’s father was an idolater. If that’s true—Abram grew up in home where the God of the Bible was not honored.

Seven Promises

- 1. I will make you a great nation.**
- 2. I will bless you.**
- 3. I will make your name great.**
- 4. You will be a blessing.**
- 5. I will bless them that bless you.**
- 6. I will curse them that curse you (for example the book of Esther).**
- 7. In You shall all the families of the earth be blessed (a reference to Jesus).**

We should note at least two things about Abraham’s faith. His faith begins with God’s call. Abraham was called by God and then challenged by God to be a witness to the watching world. The Lord God challenged Abraham to separate himself—from his family—and the pagan—idolatry of his world and to follow God—to leave home, friends, employment—and country. Abram would have to forsake—idols! All God substitutes had to go. If Abraham would listen to God and obey God; God promised a child; a seed; God would bless the nations through that seed (singular); God would give him an inheritance; a promised land (Gen. 12:1; Rom. 4:13; Heb. 11:8-10).

Note what the text says; “By faith Abraham obeyed God”.

What kind of faith did Abraham possess? The kind of faith that believes God and obeys God. Abraham’s faith compelled him to go to the place that God was showing or revealing. God called. Abraham responded. We are left with the impression that Abraham’s response was dramatic, unquestioning, complete. Decisive faith. Yet Abraham does not know specifically where he is going. Only that he must go. No wonder; “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Faith involves trust. Faith also involves obedience. The Bible is completely unfamiliar with faith absent obedience. Think for a moment. The person who truly believes God obeys God. There is no such thing as belief absent obedience.

Where will faith lead you? Are you afraid where your journey may take you?

I go on not knowing—
I would not if I might,
I’d rather walk in the dark with God
Then walk alone in the light;
I’d rather walk by faith with Him

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Than to walk alone by sight.

—Helen Annis Casterline

Do your friends and family think you are taking a journey in the darkness?

Abraham in an immediate act of faith believed God and obeyed God. Abraham turns his back on idols (the moon god and the moon god's consort). Again what a lesson for the Hebrews—longing to leave Christ and return to the dead forms of the law.

Did Abraham hear from God? The answer is yes. But what have you heard from Jesus? What promises has Jesus given you? Your light far exceeds what was given to Abraham. Jesus had turned on the lights!

The Journey Of Faith And Heritage Of Faith (v.9)

9By 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 Abraham believes, obeys; and then dwells “in the land of promise”.

Why did Abraham dwell in the land of promise as in a foreign country? Why tents? Why not build a castle or a city?

Abraham knew the promised land was still only a temporary stop. The promised land was still only a type and a picture of a more permanent land.

And like their father Abraham; Isaac and Jacob also dwelt in tents. Tents are the symbol of pilgrimage. Abraham makes the journey with his son and grandson! His godly life will leave a mark on children and his children's children. They were heirs with him—his land—their land—his promises—their promises. Abraham is a partner with the people of God. God's promises did not end with Abraham! God's promise included Abraham's seed. God did not bring all of his promises to fruition in a single generation. The Lord even told Abraham that his seed would leave the land; and return to the land in the future (Jacob will leave the land and Jacob's seed will return to the land).

On my list trip to Israel I was able to visit the Tomb of Abraham an Isaac and Jacob. It was the only piece of property that Abraham actually purchased; the cave of Macpelah. He purchased land in the area now known as Hebron. Abraham journeyed in the land. Everywhere he went he build altars.

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Herod built a temple, ports, fortresses; palaces—but real worship was absent in his life. Abraham worshiped by faith; built altars by faith; obeyed God by faith; and waited on the Lord by faith.

Abraham lived life as a pilgrim. The Old King James uses the term “strange” land; unfamiliar land. Not my home.

What did Abraham find in this promised land? People in rebellion. Abraham made no attempt to acquire the land through alliances or multiple marriages to local leader’s daughters. Abraham lived by faith; and as John Phillips writes; “. . .daring to believe that, in His own good time, God would make good His promise” (p. 156).

The Hope Of Faith And Inheritance Of Faith (v.10)

10for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

What exactly did Abraham believe?

He believed God would create a nation through his seed (see Genesis 12:2-5; Romans 4:17-18). He believed God would give him a child in what looked like impossible circumstances (Gen. 15:1-6).

He believed in the eternal city (Heb. 11:8-10; 13-16).

He believed in God’s power to raise the dead (Genesis 22: 1-14;Heb. 11:17-19).

Once again think of the context. Abraham did not simply live by faith—he looked by faith—into the future. In the Old King James the text reads; “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” The word looked (translated waited NKJV) means “expected eagerly”. Abraham’s vision was not limited to his immediate surroundings.

What does it mean; “for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”? Does this city refer to the New Jerusalem? Does this city include a new body and new beginning?

The noun translated builder is *technites*—which we get the word technician. it means “craftsman, artisan, designer” (AG, 814). Arndt and Gingrich suggest for this passage the translation “architect” (NASB; NIV). The second noun translated maker is *demiourgos*—*demos*—*people*—*ergon*—*work*—so literally “one who works for the people”. It came to mean builder.

God has designed a city! Without slums—absent pollution. God’s city will never experience riots. In God’s city God’s citizens will experience peace and justice. The Bible is filled with information about this city!

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The Bible mentions city builders; Cain built a city called Enoch east of Eden (Genesis 4:17). Nimrod built Babylon (Gen.10:8-11). Enslaved Jews built the treasure cities of Pithom and Raamses (Exodus 1:11). Even the city of Jerusalem was first called Jebus—and then Salem—and then Jerusalem—and then would be called the city of David, the holy city, the city of God.

The heavenly city cannot be found here on the earth. Craig Kenner in his IVP Bible Background Commentary of the New Testament—relates how Philo (Alexandria first century) “saw heaven (or virtue or the Logos, the divine Word) as “the mother city” designed and constructed by God” (p.675). He also relates that Diaspora Judaism often described God as architect and builder of the world (ibid).

Abraham knew God was speaking about Heaven—the coming age—when material realities would find their ultimate fulfillment in spiritual realities.

Abraham does not simply focus on the present—but sets his sight on the future. Abraham opts for the eternal over the temporal. In the original language there is a definite article before city—and foundation—the city—the foundations—there is only one city worthy of the name—and that with eternal foundations!

The statement becomes a burning indictment against the Hebrew Christians who long for the temporary, the earthly, the present Temple. The Jews had their eyes on Jerusalem. But could the Christian Jews—see beyond the Temple—beyond the Levitical Priesthood—beyond the visible rituals—to Jesus—the author and finisher of faith. Jesus is the supreme author of faith!

By faith Abraham obeys (v.8); by faith he dwells in the land (v.9); but do you think he waits absent faith? I don't think so. I think he waits by faith. In Psalm 27:14 we read “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord”.

John Piper said; “God aims to exalt himself by working for those who wait for him.”

We wait on God. God is glorified in keeping His promises.

The Hebrew word ‘wait’ sometimes included the ideas of “rest” or “cease” or “be still”. We might think of waiting—as resting—in the Lord’s will; ceasing from self-effort. Wait—can mean to forbear—or stand strong—in the face of adversity. It means waiting—to be empowered to be still in quiet submission; it means to remain calm in the storm; it means waiting for the Lord’s instruction and direction.

It doesn't mean waiting around—(loitering). Abraham waits. How does the Bible describe waiting? “On You do I wait all the day” (Psalm 25:5). We wait patiently. We wait continually. We wait courageously; “Wait on the Lord, be of good courage” (Psalm 27:14). We wait consistently; “Wait on the Lord, and keep His way” (Psalm 37:34). We wait confidently; “I will

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praise You forever, Because You have done it; and in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for it is good” (Psalm 52:9). We wait calmly; “Because of His strength, I will wait upon You; for God is my defense” (Psalm 59:9).

Waiting in the Bible involves concentration and communication; “My soul, wait On the Lord” (Psalm 52:5); “As the eyes of a maiden wait upon the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God” (Psalm 123:2). We wait continually, courageously, consistently, confidently, calmly, with concentration and communication.

Abraham waits—not passively—but actively. Abraham is not waiting around to go to heaven! Again Warren Wiersbe writes; Abraham believed God when did not know where (vv.8-10), when he did not how (vv.11-12), when he did not know when (vv.13-16), and when he did not know why (vv.17-19). It was faith in God’s Word that made him leave his home, live as a pilgrim, and follow wherever God led” (Wiersbe’s Outlines of the New Testament; p.707).

The city is mentioned again in verses 16; 12:22; 13:14.

Socrates was once asked; about his citizenship. He answered; “I am a citizen of the whole world.” What do you say when you are asked about your citizenship? Are you a citizen of the New Jerusalem?

Conclusion

Abraham is called in faith; believes by faith; walks by faith; worships by faith; and waits in faith. The Lord speaks to Abraham; and teaches Abraham what it means to live by faith; Abraham will live as a pilgrim—in this world—a stranger in a strange land; a partner with the people of God; and a partaker in the promises of God! Is that you? Do you have a firm grip—on this world—or a firm faith in the undiscovered country?

Are you dominated and captivated by this world’s attractions and distractions; or are you living in such a way that you will pass on your faith to the next generation?

Is your faith a confident assurance (v.1); approved by God (v.3); pleasing to God (v.6)? Abel gave an acceptable offering (v.4); Enoch left the earth without dying (v.5); Noah’s faith made it possible to survive a great judgment (v.7) and Abraham inherited a land (v.8). Faith is way more than simply believing a set of facts. It involves worship, and a walk; it involves heeding warnings; and yes—waiting on the Lord. Jesus described Heaven as His Father’s House. Jesus indicated that Heaven is being prepared by Jesus (I go to prepare a place for you John 14:3). Entrance requires being born again (John 3:3). The name of this new city is the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). In Revelation we are given its shape size and dimensions; resting on 12 foundational stones; each layer—layered with different precious gems. Names are written on the foundation stones. There are walls and gates; 12 gates; three on each side of its four sides; and each gate is made of solid pearl (Rev. 21:21). An angel stands guard at each gate (Rev. 21:12);

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and inside the City flows a river of life—making sure eternal life is available to all. The tree of life is there making sure there is abundant life (Rev. 2:7). The main street of the City is paved with transparent gold (Rev. 21:21). It is a place of holiness, beauty, unity, perfection, joy! And of course no temple—no sea—no tears—no sickness—no pain—no death. And that’s why it can’t be here—and it must be—somewhere. The Father is there, the Son, is there, the Holy Spirit is there—and perhaps you—if you are in the Son by faith.