

## The Lens of Faith: Abraham & Sarah

*(Heb. 11:8-12) <sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;<sup>10</sup> for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.<sup>11</sup> By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants **AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.***

Since the time of Jesus, Christians have suffered persecution and punishment for their faith from time to time.

Beatings, imprisonment, loss of employment ... and even death has been the fate of countless Christians.

This is probably hard to imagine for those of us who live in peace and safety.

But imagine if you knew you were going to lose your job, your reputation, your property or even your family if people found out that you were a follower of Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine the temptations that such persecution would bring?

What would you be willing to compromise, to give up, to do, in order to ensure that your kids would have food to eat ... that your family would be safe ...?

This was the challenge that was facing the Jewish Christians of this day ...

The author of Hebrews was writing to a group of Christians who had suffered in the past and were now in danger of suffering again ... maybe even worse than before.

Now what are they going to do.

One of civilizations greatest tricks is to convince us that general normalcy means that things are ok.

You wake up in the morning, your coffee still tastes largely the same

... the water runs, the lights come on. Everything feels pretty much ordinary.

Sure, the news is pretty horrific, and things are happening out there, or over there ... but not to me.

Justin and I were having lunch on Thursday and we were talking about how much society has changed in just the last few years.

I remember hearing just a few years ago that gay marriage would never be a way of life in America ... today we are on the verge of the church being charged with hate crimes if they preach against same sex relationships.

I sure that most of society felt the same way about legalized abortion in 1969.

The shootings and riots that we have seen in the streets of America this summer would have been unthinkable to me 10 years ago ... but here we are.

But you need to understand that these things did not happen overnight in a vacuum.

This idea of intense change coming in sharp, traumatic, explosive moments is largely an illusion.

The signs are there long before the moments that make the history books happened.

If there is one thing, I've learned in my study of world history it is that human civilization does not lean toward certainty, stability, and strength ...

... civilization leans toward uncertainty, instability, and decay.

Christianity has not endured because it flourished in stable, strong, healthy, societies.

Christianity has endured because it rests in our immutable, unchanging, infinite God!

... uncertainty has always been the order of the day

... and this was no less true during the life of Abraham.

These Jews were beginning to sense a rising hatred (political and societal) against them because they were followers of Christ ...

These Jews were concerned for themselves and their families ...

And this was the question facing them: **How can I live my life in the face of an uncertain future.**

The writer of Hebrews is saying, “Look at Abraham, no one’s future was more uncertain than his ... and yet he remained faithful to God.”

## **1. Abraham Obeyed Without Fully Understanding**

*By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going*

When he **was called** Abraham **obeyed** even though **he did not know** where **he was going**.

One moment Abraham was a pagan moon worshiper like all the other inhabitants of his hometown ...

... and the next moment he is believing God and turning his back on his old way of life ...

And I want to point out that Abraham’s new life was a lot less comfortable than the old way.

He left the comforts of city and home and became a wandering nomad.

For the rest of his life (even in the promised land of Canaan) Abraham lived like an alien ...

... like an immigrant just passing through

... the text says that he lived in tents

You see, when Abraham arrived in the promised land of Canaan, he did not find an uninhabited paradise.

... Abraham found a country already occupied ...

And Abraham didn't pout, fret, manipulate, conquer or attempt to use his wealth to buy up land or broker deals to secure property.

... Abraham chose to trust that God would make good on his promise in time ...

... so, Abraham waited on God.

In fact, in Abraham's lifetime God never made good on His promise ... not to Abraham, not to Isaac, Jacob, or even Joseph.

And it gets even more shocking ...

... God even made it clear to Abraham that neither Abraham or his children would own or possess the land.

*(Gen. 15:13)<sup>13</sup> God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.*

... and yet Abraham patiently waited... **HOW!**

**Now here is the heart of this text...**

... look at verse 10 ...

ἐξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν τοῦ θεμελίου ἔχουσαν πόλιν ἥς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός.  
(Heb. 11:10)

- **exe-deck-eto [to wait or look expectantly]**
- **gar [for]**

- **tain [the]**
- tous [the]
- **tha-melious [foundations]**
- exou-san [that has]
- **polin [city]**
- es[who's]
- **tex-nitees [craftsman/architect]**
- kai [and]
- **dami-orgos[builder/maker]**
- ha theos [God]

Abraham went out in spite of not knowing ... AND HE WENT OUT IN OBEDIENCE because he was fully expecting this city.

... he did not know WHERE ... and he did not care ...

He simply believed and trusted God.

Abraham's life and his obedience was not dominated by the land of Canaan or earthly things.

### **Abraham saw the thing behind the things.**

Abraham knew and placed more value in the ultimate promise of the heavenly country than anything else.

This is one of the things the writer of Hebrews is trying to get to ...

... he wants these Jewish Christians to have faith like Abraham and look beyond the earthly temple and Jewish priesthood ...

... to look beyond the uncertainty of the moment...

People ask, "Will Christianity work for me?"

- Will it do what I need it to do?
- Will it help me get ahead?
- Will it give me strength?

- Will my prayers be answered the way I want and when I want?"

When this is your primary question Christianity will not WORK for you because those are selfish questions

... and one's self is just as uncertain as human civilization.

The question is not "will Christianity work" ...

The questions you need to ask are: "Is it true? Is God real? Is God there for me?"

Abraham concluded that **God's promises were true, God was real, and God was his God.**

... when you come to that conclusions all these other questions aren't really important at all.

Enduring faith isn't a leap into the dark ...

**... but enduring faith means trusting God without full understanding.**

Even when it comes to the Bible you are going to have to accept that there is a mystery and infinite nature in scripture that surpasses our finite mental capacity.

## **2. Abraham Kept Obeying Even When He Could've Easily Went Home**

*(Hebrews 11:13-16)<sup>13</sup> All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> 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 a city for them.*

"**all these**" certainly includes Abraham and Sarah

They always saw themselves as strangers and exiles because they wanted to be clear that their eyes were not on the cul-de-sac down on river road... but something far greater.

The uses of “gar” in verse 14, like back in verse 10 indicates that “faith” in God’s promises was the overarching principle in their obedience.

If Abraham had thought about leaving his pilgrim alien life in Canaan and returned to his former life in his hometown he could’ve done that...

... but apparently Abraham didn’t even think about it!

Why?

*If you traveled back from the future where you knew the final outcome of the next world series, NBA championship, Superbowl .... and if with that knowledge you bet every penny you had on that game ...*

*... Even if the team you bet on was losing by a large margin in the last minutes or the final ending ... you wouldn’t be stressed at all.*

***BECAUSE YOU ARE CERTAIN OF THE FINAL OUTCOME!***

**Principle:** Nothing equips you for earthly living better than eternal certainty.

What will give you the emotional and mental strength to bear losses? Certainty of future gain.

But look at that last verse:

*Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.*

The writer says that God is NOT ASHAMED to be called their God... I desperately want God to say that about me.

But exactly what is it that would make God proud to be called my God?

... well, you have to look at the whole sentence.

God is not ashamed because he has prepared a city ...

God is not ashamed to be called their God BECAUSE HE HAS DONE SOMETHING FOR THEM!

... He has done a work for them ...

.... He's made them a city.

SEE IT! God did not make them a city because he was unashamed to be their God ... He was unashamed to be their God BECAUSE He has made them a city...

... God's love for us is rooted in something He has done for us.

But the text actually goes one step further.

*...they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. **Therefore,** God is not ashamed*

This word "therefore" signals God's motivation ...

Because they desired a better country, God made them a city therefore He is not ashamed...

**God's motivation is their desire!**

You see ... their desire (for his country that God has promised over their hometown) indicates that they KNOW ...

... they know that what God offers them is infinitely of greater worth than anything the world could offer.

Please hear me today ...

... the reason God is proud to be our God is not because we have accomplished something so great.

... the reason God is proud to be called our God is because **He has accomplished** something so great ... and we desire it.



There is nothing to brag about in desiring.

Our desire is instigated/prompted because we see what God has offered ...

When we desire this city more than we desire all that this world can give, God is not ashamed to be called our God.

### **3. Sarah Had Faith in Him Who Had Promised**

*By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.*

The use of the word “**herself**” [αὐτῆ] implies that there is something remarkable about the fact that Sarah would manifest faith.

If you’ll remember the first time Sarah heard she was going to have a child when she and Abraham were so old that she was very skeptical.

... she even laughed at the idea and the Lord had to call her out.

But she changed and BY FAITH she received the ability to conceive.

... in the fact author describes her faith “because she considered/judged Him faithful who had promised.

Notice it was **by faith in HIM who promised**

This great miracle in Sarah and Abraham’s life didn’t come because they were trusting in their faith...

They didn’t have faith in faith ... that’s a mistake that is often made.

People say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe about this or that as long as you have faith.”

... That’s just faith in faith

...This is the opposite of what the book of Hebrews is teaching us here.

*To have faith in faith is like saying, "it doesn't matter if the windshield is clear or not, just look at the windshield."*

**Faith is not what you look at, it is what you look through.**

"We are saved by grace THROUGH faith."

Faith was the lens through which Abraham and Sarah viewed the promises of God.

The same is true for us.

**We are told** by these false TV preachers that **if we just had more faith**, then God could do amazing things through us.

... that is simply not true.

The issue IS NOT whether we are **full of faith** BUT **whether we have any faith**.

We need to beware that we don't fall into the trap of worrying about whether or not we have enough faith.

The amount of size of faith is not what matters ...

... what matters is the OBJECT of our faith!

If our faith is in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then our faith has great power ...

It is not faith that is great ... it is God that is great!

**Let me end with this**

**At the first of today's scripture** we are told that Abraham went out not knowing where he was going.

**Isaiah it says something similar about Jesus Christ.**

... Isaiah says that Jesus was cut off from the land of the living...

... Now if Jesus was really suffering what we suffer and in the way that we suffer ...

... then that means that Jesus was **“cut off” from the Father not knowing** that he would come back ...

**NOW ... In the same way that Jesus obeyed the Father and came for you ... Jesus is asking you to follow Him, believe in HIM, and become HIS forever!**