



Lesson 4 – Abraham: A Life That Doesn't Live by Sight (Teacher's Edition)

Hebrews 11:8-11

Review (v. 1-6)

The author of Hebrews has been pleading with Jewish Christians not to go back to Judaism. He has argued that they must be strong in faith, believing who God is, what God says, and what God does even and especially when life doesn't make sense. In the first few verses he has described the effect of faith. Faith makes the unseen and hoped for things real for us in the present, so that we can grab onto and claim the promises of God. Faith is also necessary to live a life that pleases God, as was demonstrated by the lives of Abel and Enoch. Finally, we saw that faith stands against the corrupt culture around us as Noah demonstrated.

Did anyone have any opportunities since the last message to take a stand for their faith in the world?

Why would God do this?

Have you ever been in a confusing situation and wondered, “Why is God doing this?” Examples of people who were no doubt asking this question fill the pages of Scripture. Think of Joseph, rotting for two years in an Egyptian prison because he did the right thing. Think of Elijah, who watched a national revival brought to a grinding halt because of a king who didn’t have the courage to stand up to his wicked queen. Think of Paul, arrested and stuck in a corrupt judicial system for years preventing him from missionary endeavors.

What are some confusing situations believers face today in their walk with God, perhaps even confusing situations that you yourself have faced?

Today we are going to see three challenges to our faith. Sometimes our faith is challenged because **God asks us to do something that seems impossibly hard**, like forgiving someone who hurt us deeply. Sometimes **God keeps us in situations longer than we think is right**, like someone struggling with chronic illness. Other times it seems like **God would have to do the impossible to fulfill his promises to us**. Abraham and Sarah faced all of these situations, and in each one they responded in faith. We are going t

Abraham’s Initial Obedience (v. 8)

Abel’s faith demonstrated itself in acceptable worship. Enoch’s faith showed itself when he walked with God. Noah’s faith

meant that he built a boat and stood against the world. Abraham's faith meant he obeyed God and did something that seemed really irrational at the time: he left everything behind to go into the unknown.

The importance of Abraham's faith

Abraham is presented in the New Testament as the premier example of faith (see Romans 4, Galatians 3:6-9, James 2:21-24). He is held up as the model for faith at least in part because he is the first person the Old Testament specifically mentions as having faith (Genesis 15:4-6). While it is true that Abel, Enoch, and Noah must have had faith to please God, the word faith isn't actually used (though it is certainly demonstrated). With Abraham, we are specifically told that his faith resulted in God considering him righteous.

The immediacy of Abraham's faith

The passage is very clear that it was *while* Abraham was being called that he obeyed. In other words, he didn't hang around and deliberate to decide if this was something he should do or not, he obeyed God no questions asked (cf. a similar response on the part of Abraham in Genesis 22:1-3).

Why does immediate faith and obedience make a difference? What is the danger of taking too long to obey? How do we resolve this with the command of Christ to "count the cost" (Luke 14:25-33)?

"Delayed obedience is disobedience" many of us were taught while growing up. When we know what God wants us to do, we should do it immediately. Obeying God doesn't get easier as we wait, often it gets harder.

The ignorance of Abraham's faith

Two crucial words in this verse are the words “not knowing.” God didn't make clear to Abraham where he was going to end up exactly. God expected Abraham to trust God even though he didn't fully understand all the details, and Abraham responded in faith and went! As one preacher has said “Understanding God is not a prerequisite for trusting God.”

We must be careful in applying this passage, because God does not lead us directly as he did Abraham.

How does God lead us today? How should we make decisions? What dangers can result if we try to follow God as Abraham did?

There will, however, be times in our lives when God's ways will not make sense, and it is then that we must choose to live by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). We too must follow when we don't understand everything.

What are some instances where believers today may struggle to understand but must still choose to show faith?

Abraham's Continuing Obedience (v. 9-10)

There are few things that feel as good as coming home. In fact, few things feel as good as coming home, whether after a long day at work or from an out of town trip. Yet Abraham never had a home, at least not really. He was described as a foreigner everywhere he went. And yet despite the fact that God had promised him a home, Abraham continued to trust God until the

day he died. There is much for us to learn from this example of faith.

Abraham's delayed gratification

By the time Abraham died, he only had one piece of property (Genesis 23). God had promised Abraham that he would eventually receive the land he was going to as an inheritance, but it became clear that inheritance would belong to his children. Abraham himself never came close to receiving the land that God had promised would one day belong to his family. The author of Hebrews points out this uncomfortable truth to us in three ways:

- **Abraham is described as sojourning/living as an alien**
Although the ESV and the NIV fail to bring this out, the KJV, NASB, and CSB all point out that the main verb of the sentence often meant to “live in a place without holding citizenship.”¹
- **The promised land is described as a foreign land**
The very place God had promised Abraham never became his home. If you've ever been to another country, no doubt you were excited to come back home when it was over. Abraham never went home, he spent his entire life in a land that was like a foreign country, but ironically this was the very land God had promised him!

¹ BDAG “*paroikeo*,” 779.

- **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all lived in tents**

Until Jacob's family went down to Egypt to escape famine, the patriarchs were foreigners. They were never fully accepted or integrated, and they never had full possession of the land.

All three of these points hit the same message from different angles, and all three of them are emphasizing that Abraham continued to obey God even though his circumstances seemed to be screaming God's inability to fulfill his promises. Abraham's faith was so great precisely because everything seemed stacked against it, yet he continued to trust God! It is one thing to respond in faith immediately, it is another thing to continue to respond in faith when things drag on. Abraham went his entire life without seeing God fully answer His promise, yet Abraham died believing that God was faithful.

What are some things God has promised Christians that they may have to wait until after their death for him to ultimately fulfill?

Abraham's ultimate hope

Ultimately, Abraham's was able to persevere because Abraham's hope was in another city. We read later on in the New Testament about the city that God is preparing those who faithfully serve Him (Revelation 21:9-27). We will not spend much time on this theme, since the author will later expand on it (vv. 13-16) and it will serve as the topic for our next lesson.

Sarah's Eventual Obedience (v 11-12)

God's Word is clear that not just Abraham, but Sarah too must have had great faith in God. The Old Testament doesn't specifically mention Sarah's faith, but the writer of Hebrews acknowledges Sarah as also believing God.

The difficulty of Sarah's faith

The passage is abundantly clear about the problems facing Sarah and Abraham. God had literally promised the impossible. God had said that two people would have children who were too old to have children. This was not something that was really hard, this was something that could not take place without a divine miracle, and it was something that God had kept delaying!

God often tells us that he can and will do things that seem to us to be downright impossible. Things we must wait and wait and wait to see. Again, God doesn't speak to us audibly to tell us what he is up to, but he does speak to us in his Word and make bold promises that sometimes seem a little bit too good to be true.

Take, for example, Romans 8:28 "all things work together for good." Have you ever struggled to believe that everything in your life is working together for good? What about Philippians 4:19 "My God will supply every need of yours"? Ever wondered how he would come through on that one?

What are some other ways in which believers will struggle to believe that God is faithful and will fulfill all of his promises?

What should believers do when they find themselves struggling with believing God?

The faltering of Sarah's faith

We are informed from our reading of Genesis that Sarah actually responded initially with doubt (Genesis 18:9-15). Apparently, however, she came to a point of faith, and God recognized her for that. What an encouraging thought, that God gives us second (and third, and fourth, etc.) chances to believe and that he doesn't require perfect faith to honor us (more on that later).

How do we reconcile this truth with our previous statement that God desires immediate obedience and faith?

The foundation for Sarah's faith

The answer to how Sarah was able to have the faith she did, and Abraham's and every other person who has ever had faith ultimately comes down to the same answer – they trusted the character of God. It is said of Sarah specifically “since she considered him faithful who had promised.” The men and women in these chapters were able to walk by faith because they believed that if God promised it, they could count on it, and nothing around them could shake that confidence. Our faith is not in our ability to figure out what God is up to, or agreement with his plan as we see it, but our trust in a father who is in heaven.

If you struggle to believe God, how do you fix that?

Walk by Faith

Imagine Joseph, sitting in his prison cell, one week away from being second in command of the most powerful nation of his day, but having no clue. How hard must it have been for him to have faith? How easy if he just knew what God was about to do. When God confronted Elijah, he told him that he didn't have all

the pieces. He didn't know that God had preserved a remnant who worshipped him alone, or that he already appointed several men to wipe out wicked Ahab and his entire family (1 Kings 19:15-18). Paul didn't know when he was first sent to prison that he would have the opportunity to infiltrate even Caesar's palace with the gospel and become a motivation to many others to preach the gospel more boldly (Philippians 1:12-14). But God knew all those things.

You may not understand what God is up to in your life, but you must believe that He is up to something, and that it is good. And you must believe His promises even when you don't see how He could fulfill them because you know His character is one of faithfulness. You must, like Job, realize that when we are tempted to ask "Why," we are really asking the wrong question. The question is not, "Why is this happening to me," but rather "Who is doing this?" Once we know the answer to that question, we will be ready to respond to the perplexities and difficulties of life with faith.

*"God is too wise to be mistaken
God is too good to be unkind
So when you don't understand
When don't see His plan
When you can't trace His hand
Trust His Heart"²*

² "Trust His Heart" by Babbie Mason