

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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FAITH

When describing the faith of Abraham the Apostle Paul states: "In hope he believed in hope, to the end that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, 'So shall thy seed be.' And without being weak in faith, he considered his own body as good as dead, he being about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb, yet looking to the promise of God, he wavered not in unbelief, but waxed strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being full assured that what God had promised He was able to perform. Wherefore it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be accounted, who believe on Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who as delivered for our transgressions and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:18-25).

Millenniums had passed since God gave the first promise and prophesy of Messiahs coming into the world (Gen. 3:15), and it was ten generations after the flood, before God laid the basis for the fulfillment of the Genesis prophecy. The summons to Abram is recorded in these words: "And the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country and your relatives and from your father's house, to the land I shall show you, and I you will make of you a great nation and your name great; and you will be a blessing, and will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And all the families of the earth will be blessed.' So Abram went forth as God had spoken to him...And Abram was seventy years old when he departed from Haran" (Gen. 12:1-4). Later God sealed the promise to Abram with a covenant (Gen. 15:1-21). And when he was ninety-nine years old, God renewed the covenant with him and promised after you throughout generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your seed after you" (Gen. 17:7).

There is a commentary on these verses in the New Testament that is conveniently not used many times as sermon subjects, Sunday School lessons and discussion groups, neither is it dealt with in any real substance by most Christian writers. These verses are explained by the Apostle Paul in these words: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say and to 'seeds' as referring to many, rather to one, 'And to your seed that is, Christ'" (Gal. 3:16). Paul goes on and identifies the "seed of Abraham:" "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus and *if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise*" (Gal. 3:26-29). Notice he says, "*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.*" We

are therefore joint heirs with Christ to the promises God made to Abraham. The promise made to Abraham was not just the land of Canaan. Although descendants of Abraham settled the land, that was not the promise fulfilled because: "He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised he would give it to him as a possession and to his seed after him." (Acts 7:5). It is in Romans 4:13 we are told what the promise made to Abraham to be "heir to the world," was not through the law but through the righteousness of faith. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5), he was speaking of those who belong to Christ, Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

"Life in all the fullness of the term," comments G. Campbell Morgan, "is maintained by faith." All of Abraham's life and actions were based on faith in God. He obeyed as he turned his back on an ancient civilization, then offering his son. In the whole of this very illustrative passage, we see the principal faith at work, that faith, which is the substance, the underlying reality of all things. We are aware it is not necessary to argue at length the importance generally of faith, indeed, we assume that most of us know the Scriptural emphasis of faith. But as we get into life with its various activities and aspirations it is easy to forget the basic nature of our faith in Christ and to neglect its nature. The result is our efforts have exhausted what faith we initially possessed. Consequently, we begin to experience a waning of enthusiasm and effectiveness in the work of the Lord. Such failing of faith, because of its neglect, is responsible for most of the derelicts in the church today. Thus, any endeavor is worthwhile that reminds us of the inescapable fact that, spiritually we both live and walk by faith, and neither our inward lives nor out outward service can be more robust or enduring than our faith.

Perhaps at this point we should define faith. But then we are facing an impossible task. Spiritual things cannot be defined and explained in terms of the physical. The Hebrew writer says that "faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). But he continues in the following verses to give many examples of great men and women of faith. Faith, then, can only be defined by being experienced. This is why Paul in Romans four deals with what Abraham did and how he lived. His faith is defined by his life. This is why James tells us "Faith without works is dead being alone" (James 2:26). Faith is the whole person...emotion, will, thought and deed. Faith can be used as a synonym for our Christian response to God in its entirety. We read in Colossians 1:21-23: "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet he has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and

blameless, beyond reproach if indeed you continue in faith, firmly established and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel you have heard." Faith is not works, but it is the quality of a person and the quality of their works, and no works are Christian outside faith.

Faith begins in the life of a person when God becomes a reality to them. This is the greatest moment in any person's life. This is the moment of beginning. This kind of faith came to Abraham when he stood beneath a brilliantly starlit sky and found God in a new way. God told Abraham to look at the stars. They were uncountable. Then God said, "So shall thy seed be." He was to be the father of the world. That night Abraham accepted the challenge of God. He "believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. It was then at the door of his tent, as his God-directed gaze swept the innumerable sky that Abraham was justified by faith. He had heard the word of God, and faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word" (Rom.10:17). He was not kneeling in the temple, he was not bowing before an idol, he was not on a pilgrim to some holy shrine. He was believing God. Here is the secret of life, not just believing, but believing in God.

Note that Paul states: "Abraham in hope believed against hope, according to that which had been spoken." His faith was based upon what God had said. The measure of a person's faith is the measure of their faith in the word of God. Outside the Scripture faith is presumption and conviction are only conjecture. Abraham had God's word of promise. "And being fully assured that what God had promised He was able to perform." Since Abraham had the divine promise, he could not be made to doubt when humanly speaking it was impossible. Someone may say that faith is simply to believe the impossible. That is not faith. Faith is to believe the promises of God even though they seem impossible. Faith is to hold to God's promise even if human calculations contradict it. We are not to believe anything God has not promised. Many Christians are full of blind optimism calling it faith. Faith is based upon what God has promised in His word. It was utterly hopeless circumstances that Abraham hopefully believed. But whatever hope he exercised in the midst of hopelessness was because his faith had as its foundation the word of God. Paul quotes Genesis 17:5: "As it is written, 'a father of many nations I have made you.'" Kegan A. Chandler in his book *The God of Jesus* comments on this passage: "When Abraham and his wife were still barren, God had already designated him as the father of many in His preexisting plan. Biblically speaking, God and those who put their faith in the promises of the future have always been permitted to speak not only with confidence concerning things to come, but as if God's vision for the future had already arrived." He then gives the following explanation in a footnote: "This figure of speech is known as a 'prolepsis,' a term of Greek origin (from 'proclamation'), meaning 'to take beforehand' a word which Merriam Webster's defined as the 'representation or assumption of a future act or development as if presently existing or accomplished.'" Verse 19, 20: "Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body,

now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in nonbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God." Faith considers. It doesn't close its eyes to reality. It does not seek to evaporate difficulties by piously ignoring them or wishing them away. Faith does not minimize the difficulties; it rather magnifies God. It does not close its eyes to the facts. Abraham saw the situation as it really was, he knew he was nearly a hundred years old; he knew the deadness of Sarah's womb. They both knew they were well past the age of bearing children. This is why in the Old Testament account we read that Sarah laughed when she first heard of a child. They both knew there was not a solitary chance for the fulfillment of the promise, humanly speaking, but in the midst of this consideration faith 'staggered not' but was strong. So, then, faith does see the doubts, faith sees the difficulties, faith sees the mountains and obstacles, but sees the promises of God and upon these promises' faith lays hold upon God and the impossible becomes possible, the mortal becomes immortal and the ordinary becomes extra ordinary.

Hebrews 11:17-22 records another test of Abraham's faith; "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises was offering his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called.' He considered that God was able to raise even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type." Abraham not only believed God could give life to Sarah's womb, but he also believed God would bring Isaac back after he had sacrificed him. So Abraham believed in a God who could give life to the dead; whether it was the deadness of Sarah's womb or the dead body of Isaac that he was about to sacrifice on the altar. He believed in a God who could give life to the dead by resurrecting them from the dead. This then is the basis of faith. This faith is found in the belief of the resurrection of Christ. Our faith has the same basis as Abraham's faith. By faith in Christ we are included among the heirs of Abraham (Gal. 3:29) the children of the resurrection. We have passed from death into life.

Romans 10:9 "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The basis of saving faith is the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. That's the only faith that will save. So, our faith has to do with life and that life is resurrection life. If the Scriptures teach anything about the Christian life, it is the fact of the close connection between confidence in the resurrection and the way we live our lives. We live in the light of the resurrection not in the light of the cross. Most Christians live in the light of the cross; and they live with a burden of guilt of sin upon them because that is what the cross is all about, Jesus bearing our guilt of sin. It was on the cross our sins were paid for in full. We need to realize the cross gives forgiveness, but the resurrection gives life. We are to live in the light of the resurrection of Christ, the fact that he lives. And there is a great deal of difference in the kind of life we live as to whether or not we are basing our lives on the cross of Christ or his resurrection. SELAH