

**Old Testament Examples of Saving Faith
Hebrews 11:8-22**

When we by faith embrace Jesus as our Lord and savior and choose to walk with Him by faith our lives will be blessed. But our lives of faith, though blessed, will not be without difficulty. In fact at times, our lives of faith will be the very source of our difficulties. But be of good cheer, I have good news for you, for if we by God's grace are able by faith to remain focused on the heavenly city that God has prepared for us and on the blessings of that city, where God the Father abides and God the Son is waiting for us, **and not on the things of the earth**, we will endure and we will enter that heavenly city!! And for a child of God is there any better news than that? Of course not for that is the ultimate goal of our salvation.

And hopefully this will come alive for us this morning, as we once again return to our study of the Book of Hebrews. **And what have we learned so far about this book?**

We have learned that it was written to a group of Hebrew believers, living in Rome, who under a great persecution were actually considering leaving Christ and the gospel of Christ, so that they might return back to Judaism or to some form of it, knowing that if they did so, that they would no longer have to suffer the things that they were suffering as a result of their identification with Christ and His gospel.

So how did the author respond to this threat in the Book of Hebrews? He emphasized various superiorities of Christ in **Hebrews 1:1-10:18**. And then based on those superiorities, he proceeded to exhort them in **Hebrews 10:19-25**, to warn them in **Hebrews 10:26-31** and to encourage them in **Hebrews 10:32-39**.

And again what was the one singular purpose for all of this? The one singular purpose for all this was to protect them from the danger of falling away from Christ and His gospel. So was this author optimistic about their chances? Yes! He stated this very clearly in **Hebrews 10:39** when he told his readers,

"But we (in other words "both you and I") are not of those who shrink back to destruction but of those who have faith to the preservation of

the soul." So based on this verse was this author optimistic that his readers would continue to endure in their faith and not fall away from Christ and His gospel, even in spite of the persecution that they were at that time experiencing? Yes! He was optimistic.

And why was he so optimistic? He believed, based on **Hebrews 10:39** that they possessed genuine, living, saving faith. The kind of faith that only God can give, which when possessed, will not only prevent an individual from shrinking back to destruction but will also propel that individual forward "**to the preservation of their soul**" in spite of whatever might be happening to them or around them.

So did he believe that they were the only ones who possessed this kind of faith? No! In fact... The author after confidently stating that he believed that both he and his readers possessed faith he then went on, using Old Testament **examples** of faith, to challenge his readers to continue to walk by faith (Hebrews 11:1-40).

And it is this portion of Hebrews we are presently examining. So what have we seen so far? In **Hebrews 11:1** this author provided a working definition of faith. In **Hebrews 11:2** he made the point, that it was through this kind of faith, that he had just defined, that the "**men of old**" had gained approval from God. In **Hebrews 11:3** he then, in essence linked the faith that he believed they possessed to the faith of these "**men of old.**"

So after having done this, the author was very much ready, using Old Testament examples of faith, to challenge his readers to continue to walk by faith, so that they through their faith might continue to endure. So who were the first Old Testament examples of faith that this author highlighted?

The author began by highlighting examples of faith from the time period that preceded the **flood** (Hebrews 11:4-7). And who were those examples? They were Abel, Enoch, and Noah. And these are the examples that we considered the last time we were together. So after these Old Testament examples of faith, who were the next Old Testament examples of faith that this author chose to highlight?

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The author then highlighted examples of faith from the time period of the patriarchs (Hebrews 11:8-22) or in other words, the author then highlighted examples from the time period when God, working through various men, was laying the foundation for the nation of Israel.

So who was the first of those examples? The first Old Testament example of faith from the time period of the patriarchs was Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-19). And doesn't this make perfect sense. No person in the scriptures is a better example of faith than he was.

So how did this author go about highlighting his faith? The author highlighted the faith of Abraham by pointing his readers to four different expressions of faith from his life. So what was the first of those expressions?

The first expression of faith from Abraham's life was his obedient response to God's call to leave his home without knowing exactly where he was going (Hebrews 11:8 Cf., Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-15).

So now let me read **Hebrews 11:8** and see if this is not so, "**By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place, which he was to receive for an inheritance ... not knowing where he was going.**" So, based on this verse, was Abraham's obedient response to God's call to leave his home without knowing where he was going the first expression of Abraham's faith that this author chose to highlight. Yes! It was.

And where in the scriptures do we find this specific call? We find it in **Genesis 12:1**. So now let me read this verse for you, and this is what it says, "**Now the Lord said to Abraham, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you..."**"

And where was Abraham living when he received this call? According to **Acts 7:2-3** he was living in Ur of the Chaldeans, which would be located today in the southern most portion of Iraq near the tip of the Persian Gulf.

So would this have been difficult for Abraham to leave his home and everything that he had known behind in response to this call from God?

Absolutely! How could it not have been? But what made it even harder was that God expected Abraham to leave his home and to go out from his home without knowing exactly where he would be going.

But even so Abraham was willing to do exactly what God had asked him to do! And why was he willing to do it? He was willing to do it because of His faith in God and in God's word. This is why **Hebrews 11:8** begins with the words, "**by faith.**"

So what exactly did his faith in God and in God's word entail? When God, in **Genesis 12:1**, called Abraham to leave his home to go to a land that He would show him, God also gave Abraham certain other promises.

And what were those promises? Let me now read for you **Genesis 12:2-3** "**(2) I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; (3) And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.**" These are the promises that God made to Abraham when he called Abraham to leave his home and go to the land that He would show him. And collectively these promises to Abraham are known as the Abrahamic Covenant.

So knowing this, why was Abraham so willing to obediently leave his home without knowing where he was going? It was because of his faith in God and His word or in other words Abraham believed that God would in fact honor the promises that he had made to him in **Genesis 12:2-3**.

So what happened after Abraham, as an expression of his faith in God and His word, left his home to go the land that God had promised to show him? God brought him to the land and He showed him the land. This is what God did.

But God did more than just bring him to the land and show him the land. He also gave Abraham and his descendants the land as an inheritance; the boundaries of which He described for Abraham in great detail in **Genesis 13:14-15** which not only includes the present nation of Israel but also a great deal of the land that presently surrounds the nation of Israel. All this has been given to Abraham and to his descendants as an inheritance and this is the inheritance that the author of Hebrews referred to in **Hebrews 11:8**.

So after God had brought him to the land and had showed Abraham the land that He and his descendants had been promised, did Abraham immediately take possession of the land? No! But even so His faith in God and His promise to him concerning the land did not waver.

So now let me read for you **Hebrews 11:9** and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, "**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.**" So based on this verse what was the second expression of faith from Abraham's life?

The second expression of faith from Abraham's life was that though he lived his life in the land of promise in a tent as an alien, he never stopped **trusting** in God's promise to Him concerning the land (Hebrews 11:9 Cf. Genesis 13:8-18).

So would this have been difficult for Abraham to do or in other words to continue to trust in God and His promise to him concerning the land when, year after year and decade after decade, he wandered about the land of promise in a tent, without ever owning or in other words without ever possessing any part of the land, other than a small field he had bought from a Hittite, as a grave plot for his wife?

Of course it would have been difficult. How could it not have been!! But even in spite of the difficulty of this very thing, his faith in God and God's promise to him never wavered, as he patiently waited for God to give him possession of the land that God had promised to him and to his descendants.

But this certainly was not the last expression of Abraham's faith nor the most difficult as we will soon see. So now let us move on to the third expression of Abraham's faith.

The third expression of faith from Abraham's life was when Abraham chose to believe that God, according to His promise, would give him and his wife a son, when such a thing seemed humanly **impossible** (Hebrews 11:11-12 cf. Genesis 18:1-15). So now let us look at **Hebrews 11:11-12** and see if this is not so.

And we will begin with **Hebrews 11:11**. And what does it say? It says this, **"By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised."**

So whose faith is being referred to here? Is it Abraham's faith or Sarah's? In order to answer this question we need to consider the backdrop of this verse.

So what is the backdrop? God had promised Abraham that he would make him a great nation and that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth in **Genesis 13:16** and the sand of the sea in **Genesis 15:5**. But as he and his wife got older and older, without having yet one single descendant, that promise, at least from a human standpoint, seemed impossible.

So what did God do? When Abraham was nearly 100 years old and his wife Sarah was nearly 90 years old, after many, many years of having already waited for the son that had been promised, God came to Abraham, according to **Genesis 18:1-15** and told Abraham that he and his wife Sarah would be blessed with a son within the year.

So did he believe God for that promised son, even after all those years he and his wife had already waited? Yes! And did Sarah? Not so much, in fact **Genesis 18:12** tells us that she laughed. And it is this story, that is the backdrop for **Hebrews 11:11**.

Therefore when it says in **Hebrews 11:11**, **"By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive..."** whose faith was being referred to by this author? It was Abraham's faith. And therefore it was Abraham's faith that made it possible for Sarah to conceive. What an amazing thing! What an extraordinary expression of faith! But his faith in God's promise did not go unrewarded.

So what was the result of Abraham's faith? Let me read for you **verse 12**, **"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."** This was the result of Abraham's faith. Amazing!! What a great story but this story would never have taken place if Abraham had not been willing to believe in God and His

promise to him concerning something that humanly speaking would have seemed impossible.

So was this expression of faith a more difficult expression than the first two expressions of faith? Absolutely! But even this expression of faith pales in comparison to the fourth expression of faith that this author chose to highlight.

And what was this fourth expression? The fourth expression of faith from Abraham's life was when he, in obedience to God, was willing to offer up his son as a **sacrifice** to God even though it was through his son that the promises of God were to be fulfilled (Hebrews 11:17-19 cf. Genesis 22:1-10).

So now let me read for you **Hebrews 11:17-19** and see if this is not so. And what do these verses say? They say this, "**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; (18) it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac, your descendants will be called." (19)** (So how could Abraham have done this? It was because as the verse goes on to say...) "**He considered that God is able to raise people from the dead.**" What an amazing expression of faith!

But why would God even ask Abraham to do such a thing? It was not just a further testing of Abraham's faith, it was also designed as type or in other words a picture of a future event when God the Father like Abraham would be offering up His son, His only begotten Son, up on the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice for sin. And how do we know this? We know this because the author of Hebrews told his readers this at the end of **verse 19**.

So who was the first example of faith that this author chose to highlight from the time period of the patriarchs? It was Abraham!

So who were the next examples? The next examples of faith from the time period of the patriarchs were Isaac, Jacob and **Joseph** (Hebrews 11:19-22). Let me now read for you **Hebrews 11:20-22** and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, "**(20) By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau,**

even regarding things to come. (21) By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. (22) By faith Joseph when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones."

Each of these various expressions of faith from these descendants of Abraham were not only all rooted in God's earlier promises to Abraham but they were also all taken from the last days of their lives when they, like Abraham had not yet seen any of the original promises that God fulfilled, but even so, their faith in God and his promises to Abraham had endured.

So how did Abraham's faith in God and His promises endure such severe tests? And how did the faith of these other patriarchs endure to the very end of their lives without failing? It was for the very same reason.

The faith of the patriarchs of Israel was able to endure because they primarily focused on the **heavenly city** and the blessings of that city and not on the things of this earth (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

We see this emphasis in **Hebrews 11:10** when this author explained how Abraham endured. So now let me read this verse for you. And what does it say? It says this, "**For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**"

So why was Abraham's faith able to endure according to this verse? It was because Abraham's primary focus was on things above and not on things of earth or in other words his primary focus was the eternal city that has been prepared for him by God rather than on the land that he was patiently waiting for.

But this was not just the reason why Abraham's faith in God and His promises was able to endure, it was also the stated reason for why the faith of the other patriarch's of Israel was also able to endure.

So now let me read for you **Hebrews 11:13-16**. And what does it say, "**All these...**" (Or in other words the patriarchs of Israel) **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. (14) For those who say such things**

make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own, (15) And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) 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."

So based on these verses how was the faith of the patriarchs also able to endure? Their faith also was able to endure because the primary focus of their faith, like with Abraham, was not on things of earth but rather on things above.

Conclusion

When by faith we embrace Jesus as our Lord and savior and choose to walk with Him by faith, our lives will be blessed. But our lives of faith, though blessed, will not be without difficulty. In fact, at times our lives of faith will be the very source of our difficulties. But be of good cheer for if we by God's grace, like the patriarchs of Israel, are able to remain focused, not on the things of earth but on the things above, or in other words on the heavenly city that God has prepared for us and on the blessings of that city where God the Father abides and where God the Son is awaiting us, we can be confident of this: that we will one day enter that heavenly and claim the prize that is awaiting us.

May we, by the grace of God, like the patriarchs, continue to focus on the heavenly city and the blessings of that city so that we while **enduring** in our faith might be assured that we will one day enter that city and the blessings of it.