

25. Understanding the Faith of Abraham

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the meaning of faith from the lives of several individuals in the first few chapters of Genesis. However, those are not the only individuals in Genesis that give us examples of true faith. In our topic today, we are going to see how to help our children learn how to explain faith to others from the life of Abraham.

In Hebrews 11:8-10, we read, “By 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. By 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; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham demonstrated his faith in many different ways.

In the first three verses of Genesis 12, God told Abraham to leave his family and go to a land that God would show him. Then, Genesis 12:4 says, “So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” Abraham did not know where God was taking him but he demonstrated his faith by obeying God and going.

When he reached the land that God had promised him, he lived in that land as a person would live in a foreign country. For the next one-hundred-and-ten years, Abraham lived in tents instead of building himself a house. In fact, his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob also lived in tents because they received the same promise. Here, we see the reason why Abraham and his family chose to live in tents as foreigners or strangers. We see that Abraham was waiting for a city which had foundations whose builder and maker is God. Here, we see that Abraham was not looking for a permanent home on this earth. Instead, he was looking forward to the eternal inheritance God had promised to him.

In Hebrews 13:13-14, the writer of Hebrews encouraged the Hebrew Christians to follow the example of Abraham. Those verses say, “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” In the same way, as Christians we need to be reminded daily that this earth is not our permanent home. Peter reminded us as Christians, in 1 Peter 2:11, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Here, we see that we want to live a godly life, and teach our children to do the same, because of the fact that we are just like sojourners and pilgrims during this short period of time that we have on this earth. Our true home is with the Lord forever.

Hebrews 11:11-12 goes on to talk about the faith of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Those verses say, “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude--innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.” Sarah showed her faith when God promised that she would

have a child when she was too old to bear children. Genesis 18:10-12 says, “And He said, ‘I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.’ (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?’” We read that Sarah expected God to be faithful and do exactly as He had promised.

The Lord greatly blessed the faith of Abraham and Sarah. We see that their descendants cannot be numbered. They are compared to the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. God had promised Abraham, in Genesis 15:5, “Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’” God reminded Abraham of that promise immediately after he placed his son Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice. Genesis 22:16-18 says, “And said: ‘By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son-- blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.’” God promised Abraham that the whole earth would be blessed through his descendants, because he had demonstrated his faith by his obedience.

Hebrews 11:13-16 goes on to say, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all received these promises. Although they had not seen these promises fulfilled, they had the assurance in their hearts that God would fulfill them. In fact, they were so confident of these promises that they freely spoke of the fact that they were like foreigners on this earth. They looked forward to their eternal home with the Lord.

That eternal home was the home that they were really seeking. Abraham had come from the land of Ur because God had called him to leave that country and go to a country that God would show him. Abraham had no desire to return to the country of his birth. Although Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived in Canaan, and God had promised that land would belong to their descendants, these men were actually looking forward to their heavenly home where they would be with the Lord. Their real desire was that future heavenly country that God has promised to those who have their faith in Him.

God was very happy to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That was the name that He used when He called Moses at the burning bush. Christ used that same name when He answered the Sadducees as they tried to deny the resurrection. In Matthew 22:32, Christ said, “‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’”? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” These uses showed the pleasure that God had in the faith of Abraham, Isaac

and Jacob. Christ made it very clear to the Sadducees that there is a resurrection and that these men were living at that very moment. Truly, God is blessed by such faith.

We also see that God has prepared a city for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as for all others that have true faith. The writer of Hebrews gives a further description of that city in the next chapter. Hebrews 12:22-24 says, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” Here, we see that this eternal city is called the heavenly Jerusalem. This city has been prepared for all those whose names are registered in heaven. Christ said, in John 14:2-3, “In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” We can show the same faith as Abraham showed as we look forward to that heavenly city.

One of the greatest ways Abraham showed his faith is described in Hebrew 11:17-19, where we read, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” God chose to show the faith of Abraham to all generations by asking Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. God asked Abraham to do this even though God had told Abraham that Isaac would be the one that God was going to bless.

Abraham acted in faith and offered his son as a sacrifice. Genesis 22:8-10 says, “And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” At that point, the angel of the Lord spoke and told Abraham, in Genesis 22:12, “And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.’” Then, God revealed a ram that He had prepared to be the sacrifice instead.

Abraham was obedient to God because he had faith that God could even raise Isaac from the dead. As a result, the faith of Abraham is an example for us to help our physical and spiritual children understand the meaning of faith. His faith makes it clear that Abraham knew that God is able to raise the dead. It is that faith in the fact that God raises the dead that makes it possible for our children to be bold in sharing the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the faith of Abraham.