

Why Was Abraham's Faith So Exemplary?

[Hebrews 11:8-12](#)

Hebrews, Day 40

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

- Hebrews 11:8-12, ESV

When I got engaged to Beth, I bought her a nice engagement ring, the best I could afford at the time. It was beautiful and costly and was an appropriate symbol of our love and my promise to her. In fact, before I gave her an engagement ring, I also gave her a Claddagh promise ring. Beth was thankful for and appreciated both the promise ring and the engagement ring. But if her focus had been fixated on the preciousness, beauty or value of either of those rings rather than on our relationship, we would have been in trouble.

In Genesis 12:7, God promised Abram the land of Canaan. God had called Abram to leave his family and his homeland and to set out to the land of Canaan. When Abram pitched his tent in the land at the Oak of Moreh at Shechem, God said, "To your offspring, I will give this land." Abram responded to God's promise by building an altar to the LORD, demonstrating his faith in the LORD's promise.

We need to be careful to interpret this passage in Genesis properly. Hebrews 11 gives us the key to understanding Abraham's faith rightly. Abraham's faith was commendable not because He was focused on the land God had promised him but on the God who had promised him the land. In fact, Hebrews explicitly tells us that Abraham was looking to the heavenly city, not to any earthly possession.

Sarah, like Abraham, is commended for her faith in Hebrews 11. Her faith is commendable because "she considered Him faithful who had promised." She was longing for a child and she was thankful to receive a child, but the focus of her faith was on the LORD. And through the LORD's faithfulness, Sarah became the mother of the faithful, just as Abraham became the father of the faithful, the patriarch and matriarch of the household of faith. They trusted God and, through them, God blessed all the nations of the earth with Christ and gave them as many descendants as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore.

Here's what God wants us to understand through this passage in Hebrews: Our faith should be focused on Him more so than on the promises or benefits He gives us. We should love the Giver more than His gifts. Was Abraham thankful for the promise of land? Yes, but that was not his focus. In fact, he would never inherit the land himself, and it would be almost 500 years before his descendants would. Was Sarah thankful for Isaac? Absolutely! But her faith was in the Faithful One more than in the good gift of the Faithful One.

What about us? Surely the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life are precious gifts, wonderful beyond any possible earthly value. But what is the point of having our sins forgiven and being given eternal life? Is it just so we can live forever in paradise? What if God said He would let you live forever in paradise without Him? Would that still be heaven? No!

Saving faith is focused on God Himself. In the Gospel, God gives us Himself. He is the precious gift, just as surely as the promise ring and the engagement ring I gave Beth symbolized the true gift of myself, my promise of a lifelong commitment to be hers. Abraham and Sarah had exemplary faith not because of a strip of land on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but because of their love for and trust in the Lord God of the whole earth! Is He the true object of our faith, too?