

Prayer

Thank You, Holy and merciful Lord, for giving us the gift of knowing that our sins are forgiven. May we receive this gift from You but also practice the precious art of forgiveness in every area of our lives and with everyone who has offended us; may we put love into practice even in our own lives, to Your praise and glory: AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Humility

This week we will use the theme of humility to guide our prayers of intercession. During the season of Advent we are reminded of God's humility in sending His Son so that we could be saved. Pray that the quality of humility will be valued within our world, and the service of those who do things with modesty and without aggression will be recognised and respected.

Meditation

Let us find the strength and courage, this Advent,

To get ourselves ready

for the coming of Christ in our homes

To prepare the way of the Lord

within this sinful and corrupt world

To fight the evil which we see before us

and proclaim the truth of the Gospel

To feed the hungry, release the captive,

and minister to whoever is needy

To heal the sick, to cast out demons,

and dare to declare the truth we know

To glory in the coming of Your Kingdom, Lord

through our worship of You this Christmas .

Come again, Lord Jesus, come again!

Bible Study - Hebrews 11:8-16

⁸ By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place he would later receive as his inheritance; he set out not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith, he lived as a nomad in the land he had been promised, as if in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ He was looking forward to the city whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith, Sarah who was barren received the ability to conceive, even though she was past the age of childbearing, since she considered the one who had made the promise to be reliable. ¹² Therefore to one man, and he as good as dead, were born descendants 'as many as the stars of the heavens and as the countless grains of sand on the seashore.'

¹³ All of these died in faith without receiving what was promised, but having seen them and greeted them from a distance, and having accepted that they were like strangers and foreigners on earth. ¹⁴ People who speak like this are demonstrably seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ However, they were looking for a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one. So God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has certainly prepared a city for them.

Review

Abraham was probably the most important figure in the book of Genesis because he had the faith to respond to God's call to leave his home and travel to Canaan (Gen 12:1f.). As all Jews and Christians have known from the earliest days, He was the man God chose to be the forefather of Israel, and the reason God was able to work with Abraham was because of his faith. Hebrews 11 lists the important figures of the Old Testament, explains the nature of their faith and holds them up as examples for us, with Abraham as the next great character after Abel, Enoch and Noah (11:4-7). Hebrews is the second letter of the New Testament to

describe the importance of Abraham's faith, the first being Romans (chapter 4), and both explain that Abraham's faith was an essential foundation stone for God's work of salvation.

Hebrews spends more time explaining Abraham's faith than that of anyone else in chapter 11, and we can learn a great deal from examining this. Firstly, Abraham's initial faith was blind faith. He set out 'not knowing where he was going' (11:8). God gave him a promise that if he was obedient, he would be given many descendants (Gen 12:2), be a blessing to others (Gen 12:3), and receive a land in which his descendants would live (Gen 13:14-18). These three great promises were all intertwined, and little is made in this passage of the promise of being a blessing to others, but the story of the other two promises and how one of them was fulfilled in Abraham's life provides us with powerful examples of faith.

In the middle of our reading, the writer explains the faith which accompanied the first of these promises, but it is not just the faith of Abraham, it is shared with his wife Sarah (11:11,12). The story of how these two elderly people were able to conceive a child in their old age is one of the best known and most beautiful stories of the Old Testament. In some translations of the Bible there is confusion about who is being described in verse 11, Abraham or Sarah; but it does not matter because the two were man and wife, and one before God. The crucial sentence about faith is 'she considered the one who had made the promise to be reliable' (11:11), which tells us that true faith accepts that God is to be completely trusted. It sounds simple, but faced with earthly impossibilities such as that faced by Abraham and Sarah in their old age, many of us would stand back and prevaricate. We say 'if it be Your will ...' in our prayers to the Lord, when our hearts are bursting to call on Him for healing, for example, or when praying for renewal amongst God's people. The faith of Abraham and Sarah blindly accepted that God had told them the impossible would be done, and after some initial hilarity at the thought (Gen 17:17; 18:12), they trusted that God would do what He had said. They remain an inspiration to us.

The main feature of Abraham's faith according to this passage, however, is his acceptance of the promise of land. Abraham never saw this promise of God fulfilled in his own life, and had to leave the fulfilment of it to future generations (11:9,13). He lived a life which was less than ideal and without stability, but he and Sarah passed on to their children the covenant promise of God that they would one day have a homeland. It is a special kind of faith which looks beyond one's own life for fulfilment, and this is the essential component of faith here. For many Christian people, their complete healing may well come in heaven, and the renewal of God's people for which they long may only come when the Lord returns in glory. However, they do not give up on faith just because it is not always rewarded in the present. Indeed, the anticipation of a glorious future in Christ can often be sufficient healing, renewal and hope in itself.

There is a great deal more to be found in this passage about faith, and even more if we read through the whole story of Abraham in Genesis (chapters 12 to 22). Hebrews is content to make these key points and encourage us to have faith like Abraham, for this is our heritage.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How would you feel if the Lord asked you to leave everything you possessed and seek a new life under His direction?
2. To what extent do Christians look forward to a future when God's promises are fulfilled, or expect them now? What is the difference?
3. How does this passage of Scripture assist the faith of present day Christians?

Discipleship

Faith is trusting God, because we have a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. It is therefore like trusting someone you know to be faithful to their promises. Faith is therefore something which grows with time and something that needs to be nurtured. Too often we presume our faith will hold in all circumstances, but when difficulties come, we realise that we have not fostered it and it is not strong enough to support us at times of trial. We can best nurture our faith by talking about it, by praying to the Lord and by seeking to put it into practice.

Final Prayer

God of glory, speak to us about the wonders of heaven, and inspire us to want the glories of Your Kingdom and the heritage of Your new Creation which are promised to us in Scripture. Open our hearts to all the possibilities of the future, both within this life and beyond it: AMEN