



(3) "Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac"

HIGHLIGHT: *Heb 11:8-20; Gen 12:1-8; 17:15-22; 18:9-15; 21:1-7; 22:1-18*

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Hebrews 11:8-20 NLT

8 It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. **9** And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. **10** Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

11 It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. **12** And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

13 All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. **14** Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. **15** If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. **16** But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

17 It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, **18** even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted." **19** Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.

20 It was by faith that Isaac promised blessings for the future to his sons, Jacob and Esau.

Genesis 12:1-8 NLT

1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. **2** I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. **3** I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. **5** He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, **6** Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the Lord, who had appeared to him. **8** After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the Lord, and he worshiped the Lord.

Genesis 17:15-22 NLT

15 Then God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah. **16** And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants."

17 Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. "How could I become a father at the age of 100?" he thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?" **18** So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!"

19 But God replied, "No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant. **20** As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. **21** But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year." **22** When God had finished speaking, he left Abraham.

Genesis 18:9-15 NLT

9 "Where is Sarah, your wife?" the visitors asked.
"She's inside the tent," Abraham replied.

10 Then one of them said, "I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!"

Sarah was listening to this conversation from the tent. **11** Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children. **12** So she laughed silently to herself and said, "How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?"

13 Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, 'Can an old woman like me have a baby?'" **14** Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

15 Sarah was afraid, so she denied it, saying, "I didn't laugh."
But the Lord said, "No, you did laugh."

Genesis 21:1-7 NLT

1 The Lord kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. **2** She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. **3** And Abraham named their son Isaac. **4** Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. **5** Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

6 And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. **7** Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!"

Genesis 22:1-18 NLT

1 Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called.
"Yes," he replied. "Here I am."

2 "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."

3 The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. **4** On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. **5** "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back."

6 So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, **7** Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

8 "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

9 When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. **10** And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. **11** At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!"

12 “Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”

13 Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. **14** Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means “the Lord will provide”). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

15 Then the angel of the Lord called again to Abraham from heaven. **16** “This is what the Lord says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that **17** I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. **18** And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me.”

EXPLAIN

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone’s understanding of the Word.

For those who have been on the “church scene” for quite a while the idea of faith quite naturally brings Abraham to mind. Besides the passages in Genesis that we are looking at, Abraham figures heavily in the New Testament writings. He is referenced 30 times in the Gospels and about 40 times throughout the rest of the NT writings. William Barclay writes, “If faith does not involve risk it is not faith” (*The Letter to the Hebrews*). Anyone can “walk by sight” but only the “walk by faith” demonstrates our loyalty to Jesus (see Matthew 25:30 where the fearful servant is called “useless”). God’s ways are not our ways, but they are the right ways (see Romans 11:33). And our faith is expressed when we follow Him—even when we don’t understand (see 11:34—12:1).

Hebrews 11:8-10 and Genesis 12:1-8

All indications point to Abraham’s homeland as idolatrous and immoral. In spite of all this, God chose to use Abraham as the one through whom the Messiah would be born (Genesis 12:1-3). **He went without knowing where he was going** (Hebrews 11:8). We don’t like that kind uncertainty, so we continue to *follow our own plans* even though even though that has been disastrous (see Proverbs 14:12). Abraham was willing to take the step that God’s light revealed believing that that would provide enough light to take the next step (Genesis 12:4-6). Is God calling you to a new adventure (tithing, helping the homeless, listening to understand, doing the right thing—though it is unpopular), but you are waffling because you can’t see enough of the picture to feel comfortable? It was C. S. Lewis who reminded us that while we could have a great vacation at the beach we content ourselves with playing in the mud holes in the back yard. Faith is not a one-and-done deal—it is a life-style of walking with God. Abraham didn’t just get to the land and then settle down. **When he reached the land that God promised him, he lived there by faith** (Hebrews 11:9)

Hebrews 11:11-12 and Genesis 17:15-22; 18:9-15; 21:1-7

God’s message that **Sarah would have a child, though she was barren and too old...and Abraham was as good as dead** as far as procreation was concerned (Hebrews 11:11-12 [though he was able to have a

child by Hagar 13 or 14 years earlier - Gen. 16:16) brought a **laugh of disbelief** from them both (Genesis 17:17; 18:12,13,15). While some tasks are difficult and *stretch* our faith, some of God's declarations are inconceivable and *quench* our faith. When God speaks, we need to listen because He doesn't lie (see Numbers 23:19 and Titus 1:2). **Is anything too hard for the Lord** (Genesis 18:14; see Luke 1:37)? He turns graves into gardens (see John 20:11-18), bones into armies (see Ezekiel 37:1-10) , seas into highways (see Exodus 14:21,22) ("Graves into Gardens"). And a baby into a shriveled uterus (Genesis 21:1,2). And He can put the glow back into flickering faith (see Matthew 12:20).

Hebrews 11:17-19 and Genesis 22:1-18

God asked Abraham to do the unreasonable—**sacrifice his only son, Isaac** (Hebrews 11:17) and to do the irrational—**Isaac [was] the son through whom [Abraham's] descendants would be counted** (Heb. 11:18). We have moved from the difficult, to the inconceivable, and now to the *ridiculous*. But faith responds to what cannot be understood. Abraham moved forward in the midst of this paradox and contradiction, believing that **God would provide** the answer (Genesis 22:8)—even if it meant **that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again** (Heb. 11:19). Faith believes that "God never stops working. Even when I don't see it, He's working. Even when I can't feel it, He is working. That's who He is" (from "Waymaker" by Michael W. Smith). See Genesis 22:10-13.

"If faith does not involve risk it is not faith." "And it is impossible to please God without faith" (Hebrews 11:6).

APPLY

A

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. What is faith? How did Abraham demonstrate it?
3. Are you usually willing to move forward not knowing what the future holds, or do you tend to not take risks with the unknown?
4. What allowed Sarah to believe "God would keep his promise"? (Hebrews 11:11)
5. How can we have faith/trust in God today? How can you find satisfaction in God through the unknown?

RESPOND

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. Our world is often in turmoil, and seemingly never more than right now. How can having the understanding we as followers of Christ are "looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland" (Hebrews 11:16) help us share God's love and the good news of the Gospel with our fellow humans?
2. The opposite of faith is doubt or disbelief. In what ways have you doubted God? What doubt(s) or disbelief do you need to surrender? This week, how will you move forward in faith trusting in God as Abraham did?