

The Faith of Abraham

If there were a Mount Rushmore of Bible characters, Abraham's face would be on it. Abraham is first mentioned in Genesis 11. Four thousand years ago, while living in Haran (and after the death of his father Terah), God spoke to Abraham and made three significant promises to him. In Genesis 12:1-7, God promised to make a great nation from his seed, this nation would take possession of a special land (Canaan), and through someone from this nation, all families of the earth would be blessed (a reference to Jesus). The rest of the Bible's story is about God fulfilling each of these promises.

- God built the Israelites into a great nation while they were slaves for 400 years in Egypt. By the time they made their exodus, they had become the nation He had promised Abraham (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 4:1, 7-9).
- Not much later, God gave the nation the land He had promised in Genesis 12:7. This was the land of Canaan. By the end of the book of Joshua, Israel is a great nation, and they have received all of the land which God had promised (Joshua 21:43-45).
- The rest of the Old Testament is about the people of Israel waiting for the fulfillment of promise #3. This was mentioned in Genesis 12:3, that through someone in Israel, all nations of the earth would be able to become the children of God.
- Jesus is the fulfillment of this final promise. The first verse of the New Testament connects Jesus to the family of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). Also, the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 3:16, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." Through Jesus, every person is now able to be adopted into the family of God. This adoption takes place when one is immersed into Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

Why did God choose Abraham to make these critical promises? There are many possible explanations, but the main reason has to do with Abraham's faith. Abraham's life is an excellent example of faith that pleases God. He is called the father of those that believe (Romans 4:11).

Consider a few lessons about Bible faith we can learn from Abraham.

- Faith requires belief in the promises of God. When it came to the promise of Abraham having a son in his old age, Paul says, "Even so Abraham believed in God, and it was reckoned to Him as righteousness" (Galatians 3:6).
- Faith requires action. Contrary to what many believe, faith is not a mere belief in God. But instead, it is a belief connected with trust and obedience to God. It was by faith that Abraham "obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). It was "by faith he lived as alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land..." (Hebrews 11:9). It was by faith, "when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son" (Hebrews 11:17). Abraham is the prime example of James 2:26, where James says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."
- Faith requires patience. When Abraham was 75 years old, God promised that eventually he and his wife Sarah (who was 65 years old at the time) would have a son. This promise was not fulfilled immediately. Instead, God waited 25 years to fulfill it! Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5).
- Faith always has trials. Despite being a servant of God, Abraham went through many trials. He had to live as a foreigner in Canaan and Egypt (Genesis 12). He had to rescue his nephew Lot and his family when they were kidnapped by kings (Genesis 14). He had to endure sending his son Ishmael away (Genesis 16). He had to face the possibility of God wanting him to offer up Isaac (Genesis 22). He also had to experience losing his wife Sarah (Genesis 23). Abraham went through many rough times, and yet, through it all, he continued to serve God.

Abraham left behind a great legacy of faith. His legacy is so great that he is mentioned by the New Testament writers almost sixty times!

Where are you in your faith? Is it weak? Is it lacking? If so, apply the many great lessons from the faith of Abraham.