

Hebrews 11:11 - 16 The remnant who waits for their God

11By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

13All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

We have paused in our book studies for a few weeks this summer to consider the topic of Faith.

And I confess that after 48 years of being a christian I am still discovering new things, different facets of the same diamond that I had never looked at before.

This book is a bottomless mine of treasure. And God has always had a remnant of people on earth who seek Him, and His book, His Word is where He is found. David says; (in Psalm 19)

7The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the

commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

10More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

We have established over the past few weeks that faith is the pivoting point, the fork in the road that leads either to eternity with God in His paradise for the few, or to ultimate perdition, eternity away from God's presence for most of fallen humanity after this short life.

Therefore, there is nothing more important to understand than what faith is; *For by it the men of old gained approval, and without faith it is impossible to please Him, Heb. 11:2, 6a*

The fall in the garden was universal. All men are born into a world which is in rebellion against the God who created it and who still owns it, and them.

They love their sin and they hate the God who has defined good and evil and who has promised to judge evil forever.

Without God reaching into that chaotic mess and redeeming a remnant, judgement would be universal. All men would perish to an eternal hell.

But God intervened. First with a select group of patriarchs to whom He revealed himself. Abel. Enoch. Job. Noah. Abram.

These are all individual patriarchal figures that we have some record of God revealing Himself to and who responded to a God,

outside this fallen world, unseen, by faith.

And beginning with Abraham we see that the promises are for a future world, not this one. Noah traveled beyond a universal judgement of evil mankind by floating on top of the water in a boat that God told him to build, and he obeyed by faith.

But Noah still had Adam's fallen seed on the other side of that judgement, and the promises are for another time another place.

Last week we looked at the promises given to Abram, before God changed his name to Abraham. Genesis 12

*1 Now the LORD said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you;*

*2 And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;*

*3 And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

Somehow, through Abraham, blessing is possible. God, through this single obedient man, will open up an avenue of blessing, first to a great nation, and ultimately to all the families of the earth.

This fallen world is separated by sin and rebellion from God, but an avenue back to blessedness is promised. A great nation, and all

the families of the earth.

Abraham believed God and went to work the next morning and forgot all about it. No, that isn't what happened, and we've been looking at faith and finding it hard to define, but what we can do is look at the results of real actions that faith in a redeeming God brought about.

And that's what the author of Hebrews 11 is doing. Faith is hard to describe, nebulous to define but he'll do it with examples.

Faith is believing what God says, but it's a believing that causes movement out of this fallen world, and into a realm where God owns you instead of the ruler of this world, and because of that new ownership, you live apart from the citizens of this world who are perishing.

Abraham departed and went searching for the blessed city God had promised. But what he realized later is that city is on another shore in a future place where God is gathering all of His elect people to dwell together with Him forever.

But faith caused him to leave the known and travel to a land that God would give a partial fulfillment of the promise. A great nation, Israel, in the land that was formerly Canaan.

The author of this chapter is showing us that faith, the kind of faith that is pleasing to God, is a faith that is obedient to God, and often the result is that God accomplishes something by that faith that is impossible to accomplish alone.

By faith combined with obedience, God does what is impossible.

We pick up our next example in vs. 11. This is a most interesting

example. God promises to make of Abraham a great nation of kindred more numerable than the stars in the heavens or the sand at the seashore when Abraham is 86 years old and his wife is barren.

11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

This is one of those cases where if the author of Hebrews had not had information that we don't seem to have, we might not arrive at this same conclusion by reading the text in Genesis.

The angel of the Lord and two angels have come to destroy Sodom and they rest at Abram's tent, and Sarai is in the door of the tent when the angel of the Lord tells Abraham that they will return this time next year, and the son of promise will have been born . . . by Sarai.

Sarai, as you'll recall laughs when she hears this. A quarter of a century has elapsed since the original promises. Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 90 and the bible doesn't mince words to let us know that the way of women is over with Sarah who was barren even before that milepost occurred.

Abraham is almost a hundred. The whole idea seems rather comical to Sarah. On the surface this doesn't look like faith. But if you re-read that section, the angel of the Lord gently corrects Sarah.

He asks her, why did you laugh? What's so funny when the God who spoke light out of darkness tells you you're going to have a son and it will be a miracle.

Sarah says, no, she didn't laugh, and the angel of the Lord says,

yes, you did.

Somewhere in that gentle but firm correction is this faith that the author of Hebrews tells us of here.

The miracle of two nearly dead bodies conceiving a child was a type of Mary's miraculous conception of Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham, Lord of everything. Isaac was a miracle baby, impossible to Abraham and Sarah, but possible to the Angel of the Lord. Made possible by faith.

12Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

So here's our formula; Faith + Obedient actions = God accomplishing the impossible through His people, for His glory.

Vs. 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises,

The far reaching depth of this verse makes my brain hurt.

God lives in eternity, no time space continuum. I live here in this 5 minute long lifetime that seems like everything to me.

I mean, I wait 5 minutes for the coffee to brew and it seems like a long time. God makes promises and my 65 year life time is not even a wink of an eye. The promises are for eternity. Forever.

Faith is the fork in the road that aims me ultimately towards the promises, away from perdition.

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises

Once God calls me and grants me this gift of faith, life or death on this world in this age is just secondary. The promises are mine, I am His, that transaction is sealed forever.

Are you beginning to see why this thing called faith is so critical. Eternity hangs in the balance on what we do with faith.

Let me help your faith just a little bit though. Let's consider again just the first 3 promises in Genesis 12.

*1 Now the LORD said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you;*

*2 And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;*

*3 And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

God promises Abraham 3 things; Land, real estate. At one place God tells Abraham look north south east and west and everything your eye can see will be yours. It gets better, because we can only see maybe 35 miles. Later God tells Abraham from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates, all of that land will be yours. So, land, on this earth. A place.

Then He tells him I'm going to give you descendents. Like the stars of heaven and the sand at the seashore, and these descendants will become a mighty nation.

And finally, in Abraham, God's blessing will spread to all the nations. All the families in all the earth will receive blessing somehow, in Abraham.

Stick with me now. I'm going to stretch your brain by taking you somewhere that I've not heard another preacher go to.

Consider those promises and then consider . . . the Lord's prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Stop there. Let's phrase it as the original hearers should have understood it. *Your authority to reign on this earth as opposed to Satan who reigns now, come.* That's what Jesus is telling us to pray for. We're asking God to reverse the curse, every time we pray the Lord's prayer.

And as if one statement to that effect were not enough, Jesus restates it in the next sentence. *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*

Since the fall in Genesis 3, God's will has not been done on this planet, this earth that ultimately belongs to God. Jesus is teaching us how to pray, and the prayer is for God to reverse the curse, to depose Satan and every wicked rebel, and to rule and reign on this world.

If I had a nickel for every time on the way driving out to work, I'm listening to NPR on the radio, and in short order, I get so troubled about all the rebellion against God, that I reach over and turn it off and I launch immediately into this prayer.

God, come and depose Satan, take back this world for your own, crush the rebellion, and rule here, so righteousness, your will, would be done here, in this world. I pray the Lords prayer. I listen to the news and the realities of that prayer are the longing of my heart.

Consider then, 3 promises to Abraham, in their ultimate reach.

Land, a place, on this earth. Real estate.
People, a nation, descended from Abraham.
Blessedness for all the families of the earth.

Now the faith building part. Consider Satan's belligerence, his war like actions against those 3 promises. To this day.

Why did we drop out of the so-called Human Rights Council of the United Nations the other day? Because for some reason that no one can figure out, the United Nations wants to stack the deck against one country. Israel. Why?

Why has this little strip of land been the center of the world stage of conflict for centuries? Why are all the nations of the world staging themselves surrounding Israel?

Surrounded by Arabs who hate them. And all the balance of powers, mighty nations in sympathy with the Arab nations who hate Israel.

Remember that part of the promise in Genesis 12. Those who bless you, I will bless, and those who curse you, I will curse.

Think about this. A piece of the puzzle that I had never thought of until Gary Flood mentioned it one day. He said he believed the

entire purpose of God for the United States, was to raise us up and make us a powerful nation so that we could stand by Israel.

Let that settle in for a second. Isreal's friend, America thrives. Israel's enemy, America wanes. Hmmm. Could there be a link to an ancient obscure promise made to one man that God purposed to bless over 4000 years ago?

Satan wants to crush Israel. Why? Because God took Abraham away from Satan and said, he's mine. And God declared Abraham righteous because of his faith. And God promised Abraham some real estate.

That real estate belongs to Abrahams descendents to this day. That's a miracle. Helped by Britain and America in the last century. Now only by America, and that thread seems tenuous.

As the world goes secular and abandon's God, Israel just seems to them to be a problem child that would be better eliminated. America's friendship and partnership with Israel seems to be on a pendulum. We had swung towards the secular worlds view, and now, tenuously fragile, we seem to have swung again towards them. Subject to change. Many people here would cast Israel away.

Now think about the second promise. Descendants, a great nation.

Why is it, even in some of our lifetimes, Satan has tried over and over and over again to obliterate the Jews? Why do you think that is?

Hitler set out to eliminate the so called jewish problem. He murdered 6 million of them. Why? Why have the people of Palestine refused to come to peace talks that would establish a

seperate state for them? Because only one solution is viable to them. Israel must evaporate. There will be no sharing of the real estate. They must be annihilated. Gone.

Why does Iran continually say that the Jews must be eradicated from the earth. It's like a derangement. A craziness that has infected all of the peoples who surround that piece of real estate with Abrahams descendents living there.

The whole world is deranged. Madness. It's like, well, it's like God put a hook in their mouth and drug the nations there to surround little fragile Israel, and they're all foaming at the mouth mad, deranged. Israel must vanish from the earth.

Right now, America and her atomic weapons are the only deterrance. I'm actually proud to work in the industry of the deterrance that God is using, as we speak, to sustain Abraham's descendents in a little strip of desert at the crossroads of the world. Satan wants Israel annihilated. He wants that real estate. The tension of that is awesome.

And finally, the blessing of the nations. All the nations, all the families of the nations will be blessed in Abraham.

That comes about when the Lord's prayer is ultimately answered. Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Will be Done. On earth, just like it is in heaven.

Satan will be deposed. Locked up for a thousand years. And Jesus will return to this world. Rebellion against God will be crushed. The rebellors will be sent to the lake of fire.

Jesus will set up His rule on this earth. Where? In that little strip of land everyone is fighting over. On David's throne. In

Jerusalem. With the descendants of Abraham. And with all the saints from all the nations, chosen by God in every place. We'll all be there too.

All of the promises will be YES, and AMEN! In that day.

But right now, just like the strip of desert land and the descendants of Abraham, this blessing to all the families of the earth is under continual attack.

Satan is trying to obliterate the church. He's trying to make the gospel dis-appear in a myriad of schemes. Watered down, confused, false gospels and false teaching lead myriads of people, to hell.

He has a thousand different schemes to do that. Why is that true? Can it go all the way back to a promise given to Abraham over 4000 years ago?

Can the luke-warm church that isn't really the church at all, but thinks it is OK, that Jesus said He would spew out of His mouth, the false church that we see everywhere in our day, can that phenomenon be traced back to Satan's war against these promises to Abraham?

I say yes. And I say, considering all of those facts so near to us in our world today, before our very eyes, and in the headlines daily and weekly, the madness of the war against these 3 promises to Abraham ought to build up our faith.

The fact that Satan has relentlessly warred against those 3 promises of blessing builds my faith. I see with my own eyes the war against God and His provenance in this world promised to Abraham almost 5000 years ago and it increases my faith.

There's no logical reason that the stage is set so perfectly for the ultimate battle. Satan has his armies arrayed against these three obscure promises to a man over 4000 years ago? Why?

Listen to the lines in Martin Luther's song, itself nearly 500 years old. He saw the same thing then that I hope you are getting a glimpse of today. Satan is at war against God, and God's people, and specifically these promises to Abraham of a world where the curse is reversed.

*1 A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.*

*2 Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own
choosing.
You ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.*

*3 And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo
us,
we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through
us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.*

*4 That Word above all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth.*

*Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!*

Martin Luther understood. The promises go beyond this world. In this world a battle rages against those promises. But through faith, we transcend this world.

This life is 5 minutes long. Satan can throw everything he's got at us. But ultimately, we win. Those promises are ours, if we like Abraham, believe God. Our faith transcends this world, this time.

That was the introduction. With all that in place, listen again carefully to vss. 13 - 16 of Hebrews 11. We understand completely what the author is telling us.

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Beloved, we are exiles here, on this earth that Satan still rules in. We are a people who wait for promises that we know belong to us, if indeed we are heirs of the promises to Abraham.

Jesus, our Lord, descendant of David, descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has died for our sins, in our place and risen from the dead victorious in eternity.

He has adopted us. He has made us His brothers, and in Him, all of the promises to Abraham, belong to us.

We are a waiting people. Listen to 1 Thess. 1:9,10 ...9 For they themselves report what kind of welcome you gave us, and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God 10 and to await His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead — Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath.

Abraham died without the promises being completed, and 4000 years later, we are a people waiting for those same promises just like the saints at Thessalonica.

We see backwards, all of the mileposts in the long war of Satan against those promises. We see his fury in the news headlines, daily. And we are expectant that his doom may be very very soon. Meanwhile we watch, and wait, just like Abraham the believer.

Faith is the first step into a world that transcends this one. We step into eternity when we believe in the promises for blessing. And 4000 plus years after those first promises were made, we have this completed book that tells us how God, through His risen Son, Jesus Christ, is going to bring all of those promises to pass.

It's an exciting time to be alive. Satan rages as never before. The entire world is raging with him. We believe the stage for final things is set. We are waiting for God to come and fulfill completely His promises to Abraham. It's going to be quite a show.