

Who Are You Going to Believe?

The question is not “**What** do you believe in?” but “**Who** do you believe in?”. Faith is a matter of believing and trusting someone. Does this person tell you what is true? Does he do what he says he will do? Would you trust him with your life? The Bible, through centuries of historical record, gives us histories of people who trusted, had faith in, believed in the God of the Bible. They believed God so much that they did what he told them to do. They obeyed him. When you truly believe someone and place your trust in him, you will do what he tells you to do. In the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews, there is a rollcall of these people in the Old Testament who believed God, that is had faith in God so much that they obeyed him in the most difficult and dangerous situations. They believed and obeyed even though they did not understand what God told them to do. They believed his promises even though they did not receive them before they died.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. Hebrews 11:13

In the last newsletter we studied

the life of Abel who through faith offered an acceptable sacrifice to God and we also studied the life of the man Noah who obeyed God in building a large boat on dry ground and thereby saved himself and his family from a flood. In this newsletter we will continue following the rollcall in Hebrews 11. Abraham, Isaac his son, and Jacob his grandson, are all listed in the “faith chapter”. In fact, Abraham is considered the “father of the faithful”. Because of Abraham’s faith and obedience, he and his children received “precious promises” from God.

Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
2 Peter 1:4

What were these promises and what do they mean to us who live 4,000 years after the time of Abraham? These are important questions but there’s another important question in our continuing study of the people of faith. How can we have the same kind of faith that Abraham did? In the history of Abraham, it is very clear that there is a relationship between God and Abraham. In fact, God calls Abraham his friend.

"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend..." Isaiah 41:8

God worked with his friend Abraham to strengthen and develop his faith. This was done through testing. As with so many good things, exercise strengthens. Exercising faith strengthens it. There are three tests that Abraham was exercised with that we will look at in this Newsletter. Then we'll look at the promises that Abraham received and why they are important to us.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead --since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."
Romans 4:18-22



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Ps 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. KJV

TEST ONE: LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR PEOPLE

About 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus, there was a man named Abram with his wife Sarai who lived in Mesopotamia in Ur in the land of the Chaldeans. Although the Chaldeans in this area were worshippers of the moon god, Nanna, Abraham worshipped the God of his ancestor, Noah.

God appeared to Abram and told him to leave Ur and his family and go to a land that he would show him. God also made several promises to Abram at this time even though Abram had not yet obeyed:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:1-3 NIV

In faith, Abram with his wife obeyed God. In following the "Fertile Crescent" they first went to Haran, and then when Terah, Abram's father, died they went on

to the land of Canaan. Abram's nephew, Lot, was also with them and from other history it appears that Lot also was a faithful believer in the God of Abram. Since the land could not sustain the flocks of both Abram and Lot, Lot separated from Abram and settled in a city called Sodom. After Lot separated from Abram, God appeared to Abram again:

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." Genesis 13:14-17 NIV

Notice that God promises to give Abram and his offspring the land that Abram saw. In fact, God tells Abram to walk the land because he is giving it to him. Acts chapter 7 records Stephen's testimony concerning this:

"So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now liv-

ing. He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. Acts 7:4-5 NIV

Note that Stephen underscores that Abram (Abraham) had no child when this promise was made. Stephen also notes that throughout his life Abraham never received even one foot of ground as his inheritance. Yet he believed God that one day he would have a child and one day he would receive the land as his inheritance. He is still waiting for the inheritance of the land. Notice what Jesus says about the resurrection:

But about the resurrection of the dead — have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Matthew 22:31-32

Abram (Abraham) believed God. He also believed that he would be resurrected from the dead—he had to be raised from the dead in order to receive his inheritance in the land forever.

TEST TWO: ABRAM BECOMES ABRAHAM AND SARAI BECOMES SARAH

When Abram left Haran he was 75 years old. Sarai was 10 years younger and never had been able to conceive a child. Yet God promised them a child. As the years went by both Abram and Sarai wondered how this could be. Abram finally said to God that his servant Eliezer would be his heir but God assured him and

repeated his promises. Year after year there had been no child yet when God assured him, Abram believed him:

And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will

not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir. "He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

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Abram believed the Lord,
and he credited it to him as
righteousness. Genesis 15:3
-6 NIV

Abram's faith in God was firm and because of his faith, God considered him righteous. Yet God also gave him confirmation through an oath to his covenant, that is he ratified his covenant. Genesis 15 gives a description of that ratification process. No documents were signed but God sent a blazing fire to pass between the covenantal sacrifice that Abram had prepared so that the promise was ratified:

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. Hebrews 6:16-19 NIV

Sarai continued to be barren. After 10 years of waiting for the promised child, she finally told Abram that Hagar her servant could bear him a child. Neither Abram nor Sarai consulted God concerning this. Hagar did bear Abram a child and by the command of God named him Ishmael. Ishmael, however, was not the child of promise.

Thirteen years after the birth of

Ishmael, God again spoke to Abram. He confirmed the promises that had been given. It was at this time that God changed the names of Abram and Sarai:

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." Genesis 17:3-8 NIV

God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"

Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear

you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. Genesis 17:15-20 NIV

Abram means "exalted father". Abraham means "father of nations". Not only would Abraham be a father to the nation of Israel. He would be a father of many nations. Notice that Abraham laughed when told that Sarah would bear a child. He would be 100 and Sarah 90 by the time that the child was to be born. In chapter 18 we learn that Sarah also laughed when she heard the promise repeated. But God assured them that within the year Sarah would hold a child in her arms. We are told they believed God's promised:

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 11:8-13 ESV

* * *

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God:

"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."
Matthew 22:29-32 (ESV)

TEST THREE: THE PROMISED SON AND THE ULTIMATE TEST

As God had promised, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. What joy there must have been at the birth of this child:

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. Genesis 21:1-9 NIV

Abraham had obeyed God's command and left his family and homeland and went where he knew not where. He trusted that God would guide him on his journeys. Through their faith Abraham and Sarah received strength to have a child when Sarah was many years past the time of her natural ability to conceive and bear a child. But there was one more test. God commanded Abraham to take his beloved son and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on the top of Mount Moriah. This was the ultimate test. No one could ask more of a person. But Abraham obeyed. He took Isaac, along with wood for the sacrifice, and traveled 3 days to Mount Moriah. What was he thinking on those 3 days of travel? Why would God ask him to kill the promised son? What kind of God is this?

When they finally arrived, Abraham built the altar, arranged the wood, and bound his son on top of the altar. He raised a knife above Isaac and was about to kill him when God's angel called out to him:

But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heav-

en, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Genesis 22:11-12 NIV

Abraham had passed the final test. He withheld nothing from God. His faith in God called for complete and total obedience even to the point of giving up his only son, the promised son. The writer to the Hebrews describes Abraham's faith in this way:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. Hebrews 11:17-19 NIV

GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

Over and over again God repeated his promises to his faithful friend Abraham. These promises are the foundation of God's plan and purpose with his people:

Abraham would be blessed and become a great nation.

His offspring would number more than the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

All peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham. Abraham and his children

would inherit the land forever that God had showed him.

Abraham would be the father of many nations. Sarah would be the mother of many nations.

Abraham and Sarah would have a son who would receive these same promises.

Abraham's descendants would possess the gates of their enemies.

Those who bless Abraham and his children will be

blessed. Those who curse Abraham and his children will be cursed.

During their lifetime, Abraham and Sarah did receive the promise of the son. They saw the land that God had promised but never possessed it. They did not see the many nations that were promised as their children. They did not see the working out of the blessings for their children. And they

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GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

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did not see the fulfillment of the promise that all nations would be blessed through their offspring. It is only following the history in the Old Testament and the commentary in the New Testament concerning Jesus that we see the start of these promises being fulfilled. Yet there are still some parts of the promises to be completed in the future. It is this hope of the fulfillment of these promises that is the hope for all those who believe in God and believe in his son, Jesus.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:26-29 NIV

ABRAHAM – FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL

Over and over in the history of Abraham we see him acting on his faith and belief in God. It was his faith that pleased God and the testimony is given: Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6) Abraham was not righteous in his own self but because he trusted God, God saw him as righteous. This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament. This is the gospel message. Those who believe as Abraham believed are his children. They are considered righteous by God:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was

as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:18-25 NIV

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Galatians 3:6-9 NIV

Notice the gospel was given to Abraham through these promises. From the very beginning God has been bringing about his ultimate purpose. It is through Abraham and his descendant, the promised son, Jesus, that the gospel has been given. The very first verse of the New Testament makes this connection for us: A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham...(Matthew 1:1)

All the promises given to Abraham are also given to his children. This includes the promises of blessings and the promise of the land.

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

Romans 15:8-9 NIV

As Abraham believed God and was fully persuaded that God could and would do what he had promised, we too can reach out in faith knowing that our God will be faithful. As Abraham believed that through the resurrection from the dead he would receive the eternal inheritance of land and blessings, we too must believe that God can and will raise the dead. This is our hope.

It is written: "I believed; therefore, I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.

All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:13-18



Daily Bible Readings for April, May and June

Day	APRIL		MAY		JUNE	
	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa
1	Deut 13,14	Mark 6	Judges 3,4	1 Corinth 11	Job 38,39	Psalm 59
2	Deut 15,16	Psalm 33,34	Judges 5,6	1 Corinth 12	Job 40-42	Luke 17
3	Deut 17,18	Mark 7	Judges 7,8	1 Corinth 13	I Sam 1. 2	Luke 18
4	Deut 19,20	Mark 8	Judges 9,10	Psalm 48	I Sam 3. 4	Psalm 60. 61
5	Deut 21,22	Mark 9	Judges 11,12	I Corinth 14	I Sam 5. 6	Luke 19
6	Deut 23,24	Psalm 35	Judges 13,14	I Carinth 15	I Sam 7. 8	Luke 20
7	Deut 25,26	Mark 10	Judges 15,16	Psalm 49	I Sam 9.10	Luke 21
8	Deut 27,28	Mark 11	Judges 17,18	I Corinth 16	I Sam 11. 12	Psalm 62. 63
9	Deut 29,30	Psalm 36,37	Judges 19,20	Psalm 50	I Sam 13. 14	Luke 22
10	Deut 31,32	Psalm 38,39	Judge 21 Ruth 1	Psalm 51. 52	I Sam 15. 16	Luke 23
11	Deut 33,34	Mark 12	Ruth 2-4	Luke 1	I Sam 17. 18	Luke 24
12	Provb 17,18	Mark 13	Provb 29,30	Luke 2	I Sam 19. 20	Psalm 64. 65
13	Provb 19,20	Mark 14	Provb 31	Luke 3	I Sam 21. 22	Psalm 66. 67
14	Provb 21,22	Mark 15	Job 1-3	Psalm 53	I Sam 23. 24	II Corinth 1
15	Joshua 1,2	Mark 16	Job 4,5	Luke 4	I Sam 25. 26	II Corinth 2
16	Joshua 3,4	Psalm 40,41	Job 6,7	Luke 5	I Sam 27. 28	II Corinth 3
17	Joshua 5,6	1 Corinth 1	Job 8,9	Luke 6	i Sam 29-31	Psalm 68
18	Joshua 7. 8	1 Corinth 2	Job 10,11	Psalm 54,55	Eccles 1. 2	Psalm 69
19	Joshua 9,10	1 Corinth 3	Job 12,13	Luke 7	Eccles 3. 4	II Corinth 4
20	Joshua 11,12	Psalm 42,43	Job 14,15	Luke 8	Eccles 5. 6	II Corinth 5
21	Joshua 13,14	1 Corinth 4	Job 16,17	Psalm 56	Eccles 7. 8	II Corinth 6
22	Joshua 15,16	1 Corinth 5	Job 18,19	Luke 9	Eccles 9.10	Psalm 70. 71
23	Joshua 17,18	Psalm 44	Job 20,21	Luke 10	Eccles 11. 12	II Corinth 7
24	Joshua 19,20	1 Corinth 6	Job 22,23	Luke 11	II Sam 1. 2	II Corinth 8
25	Joshua 21,22	1 Corinth 7	Job 24,25	Psalm 57	II Sam 3. 4	II Corinth 9
26	Joshua 23,24	1 Corinth 8	Job 26,27	Luke 12	II Sam 5. 6	II Corinth 10
27	Provb 23,24	Psalm 45	Job 28,29	Luke 13	II Sam 7. 8	Psalm 72
28	Provb 25,26	1 Corinth 9	Job 30,31	Psalm 58	II Sam 9. 10	Psalm 73
29	Provb 27,28	1 Corinth 10	Job 32,33	Luke 14	II Sam 11.12	II Corinth 11
30	Judges 1,2	Psalm 46. 47	Job 34,35	Luke 15	II Sam 13.14	II Corinth 12
31			Job 36,37	Luke 16		

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