

Abraham in the New Testament

Studies to supplement the Sunday preaching on Abraham's life

Study 3 The Faith of Abraham

At home: Read through Nehemiah 9:5-8

Spend a few minutes considering the praise of these strange-named Levites. See how they root their covenant blessings in Abraham's faithful heart. Give thanks to their Lord and ours for Abraham's faith so many thousand years ago, and for the promises that come to us through his faith.

“If only I had Abraham's faith!” Have you ever felt like that? Well—you CAN have Abraham's faith! The Bible shows us his faith not to make us envious, but to make us copy it!

1. Warm-up Question:

Consider the following scenario:

Frank loves God and wants to serve him. On Monday morning he woke up with a strong desire to marry Gwendoline, a girl he met at church the day before. Although Gwendoline turned him down, in no uncertain terms, when he phoned up and popped the question, Frank is still sure he will marry her. “Why?” I asked him. “Because God says so in Psalm 37:4,” he said.

Why is this desire to marry Gwendoline not an act of great faith on Frank's part? What has he got wrong?

2. In the group, read out **Hebrews 11:8-12 & 17-19**

a) In each of the instances below, what is the writer saying, not about Abraham, but about God?

- Heb 11:8 “By faith Abraham, when
- Heb 11:11 “By faith Abraham [or Sarah]... [was able to have a child] because
- Heb 11:17 “By faith Abraham, when

b) Let's look a bit further at these verses:

- In Heb 11:8 what was it that God said that drew out faith from Abraham? (Use Gen 12:1 to help with your answer)

- In Heb 11:9 what was it that God had said that drew out faith from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? (use Gen 12:1 & Gen 13:14-15 & Gen 15:7 to help with your answer)

- In Heb 11:11 what was it that God said that drew out faith from Abraham [or Sarah]? (Use Gen 13:16 & Gen 15:4-5 & Gen 17:15-16, 19, 21 & Gen 18:10, 14 to help you with your answer)

- In Heb 11:17 what was it that God said that drew out faith from Abraham? (Use Gen 22:1-2 to help you with your answer)

Notice in each of the mentions of Abraham in Hebrews 11 that before Abraham (or Sarah) exercised faith, God gave them specific, write-downable words of promise.

3. This helps us to pin down what faith is.

a) From these passages in Hebrews 11, what does God do in order to draw out faith?

b) So to what extent does faith depend on God, and to what extent does it depend on Abraham?

c) What, then, has to be in place before someone can exercise faith?

4. We are now going to go to the controversial passage about faith and works in the letter of James.

Read out **James 2:14-26**.

a) Write down beside each description of 'faith' why it is no good:

2:14 unsaving

2:15-17 dead

2:18-19 deedless

2:20 useless This verse summarizes vv14-19.

b) From James 2:21-26, what is it about Abraham's and Rahab's faith that makes it useful rather than useless?

5. So there are three parts to faith:

1. *A person who is trustworthy (e.g. the Lord)*
 2. *The stated intent or desire of the trustworthy person (i.e. their words)*
 3. *Someone in need who embraces the words of the trustworthy person in the spirit in which they were given.*
- Then there is the result of this faith: Something practical.*

a) From the story about Abraham in James 2:21 note down each of these three steps, and then the practical result:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Practical result:

b) Now think of a situation you know of someone exercising faith. Note down the same steps for that situation:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Practical result:

6. Read **Galatians 3:7-9** and **Hebrews 11:17-19**.

According to Galatians 3:7-9 we who put our faith in Jesus are children of Abraham because we believe just as he did.

a) From the three points in question 5 above, why is Abraham's faith in Hebrews 11:17 not extraordinary but ordinary? Why is it different from Frank's 'faith' in question 1?

b) Each person think of a particular promise from the Lord, in the Bible, that means something to you. Use the three steps above to consider what it might mean to have Abraham's kind of faith in relation to that promise. What practical result will reveal whether or not this is 'useful' faith?