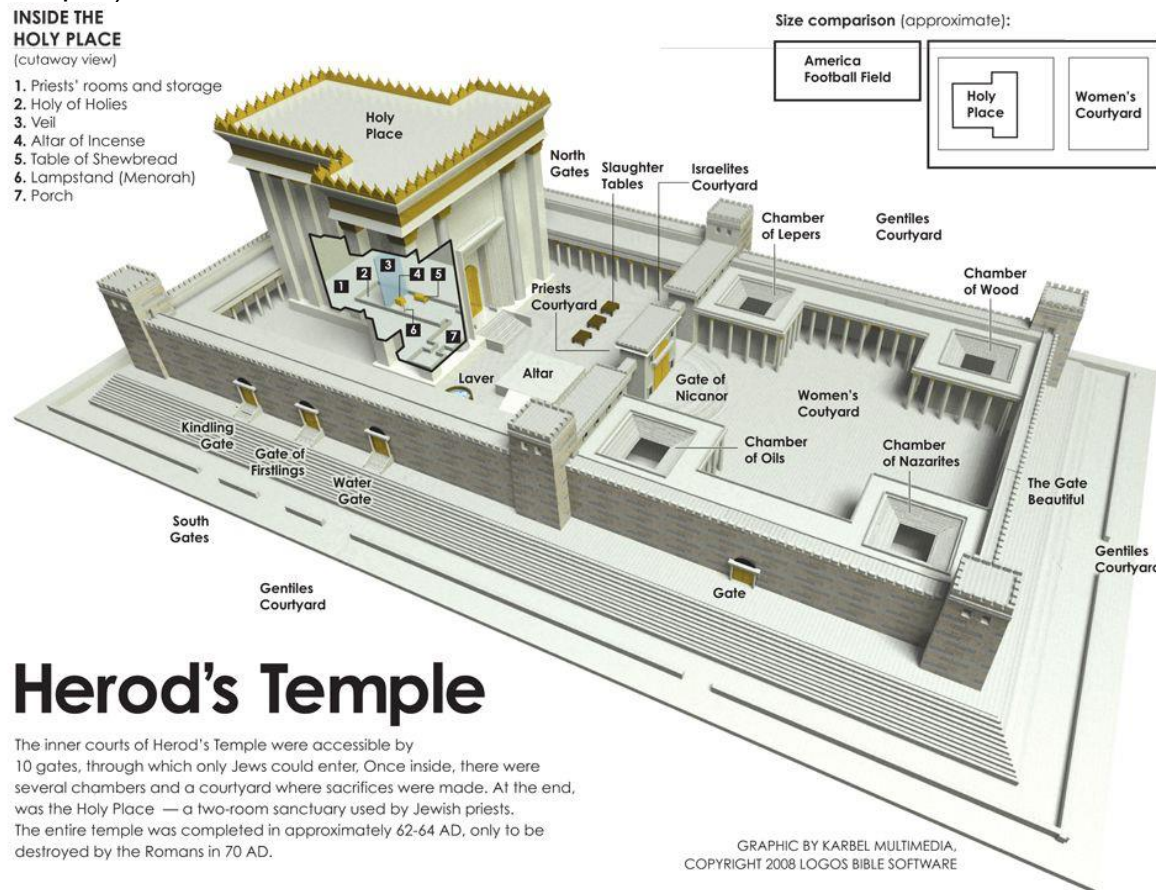


For a month we've been going through the 11th chapter of Hebrews...often described as the "Hall of Faith." We've studied the lives of Abel, Enoch and Noah... Abel brought the acceptable sacrifice, Enoch preached righteousness to a wicked world and Noah built an ark to save his family from the judgment that would befall the wicked world. Without question these men showed tremendous faith under very difficult circumstances. And that's precisely the point!

The Apostle Paul, in writing to these first-century Jews, turned Christians, is trying to encourage them to "keep on keeping on" in very difficult circumstances. The persecution of Christians was relentless in the mid-60's AD and you were literally risking your life to profess faith and trust in Jesus Christ. So, they needed encouragement. But, more than just encouragement, what Paul was helping these first and second generation Christians to realize was the fact that they could have a personal relationship with God.

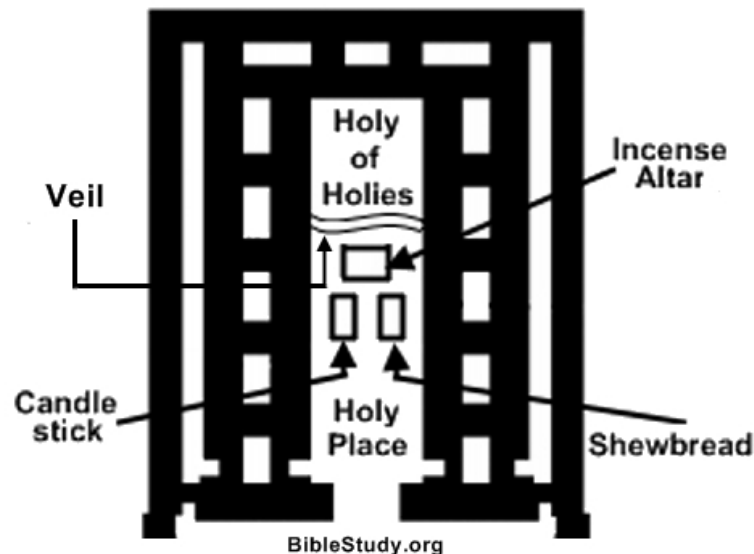
Again, this was mind-blowing to a group of people who had only known a religion that could bring them no closer to God than the outer courts of the Temple...(in the first century it was known as: Herod's Temple.)



Herod's Temple

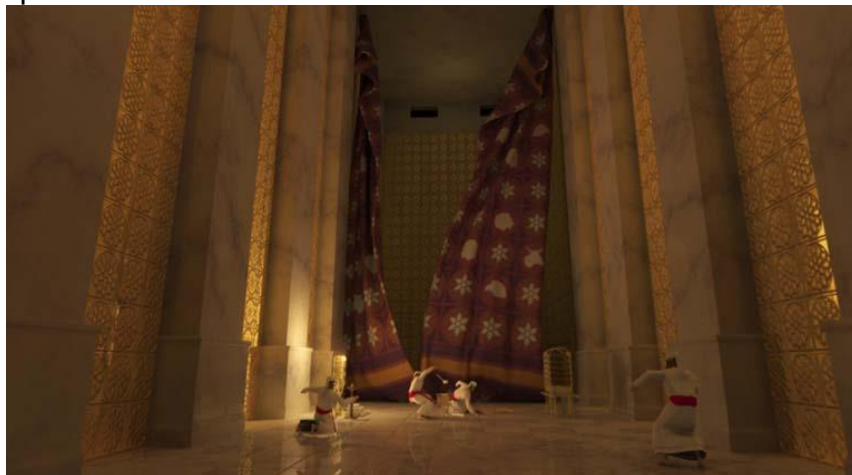
The inner courts of Herod's Temple were accessible by 10 gates, through which only Jews could enter. Once inside, there were several chambers and a courtyard where sacrifices were made. At the end, was the Holy Place — a two-room sanctuary used by Jewish priests. The entire temple was completed in approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

The Court of Women was 233 ft square (54,289 sf), capable of holding up to 6,000 worshippers at a time. Now, its name does not mean that only women could go there...because men and women went there...but, the Court of Women was as far as you could go...from there only the Priests and Levites were allowed to enter into the next area...through the Nicanor Gate into the Priest's Courtyard. See the diagram...



From there, those priests would go into where? The Holy Place and ultimately, on one day of the year, every year...the Day of Atonement, only the High Priest would go through (what) the curtain...the veil...into the Holy of Holies? The curtain that separated mankind from God's presence. And what happened to that curtain when Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross?

There was an earthquake



and that curtain that separated God from humankind was ripped into from top to bottom. And thus, was ushered in the New Covenant...we could once again come to God. No more priests...no more sacrifices...no more Temple. Just you and the Lord! And let me tell you...this was still a shock to many of these folks Paul was writing to in the book of Hebrews because this was so foreign to what they had always known. But, you know what...it shouldn't have been...because even in the Old Testament, God spoke to humanity...one on one. And that's the point of Hebrews 11...examples of people who had a relationship with God! How? BY FAITH!

And that's the key ingredient in the whole matter...FAITH. By faith, Abel believed, by faith Enoch believed, by faith Noah believed...by faith...you believe...and I believe and guess what...when we believe and surrender our lives to Jesus...then we can have a relationship with God. We can even be like Abraham...the man we're going to study today...and be called a Friend of God. Did you know that? Abraham was called "the friend of God." James 2:23 tells us so

James 2:23

²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.

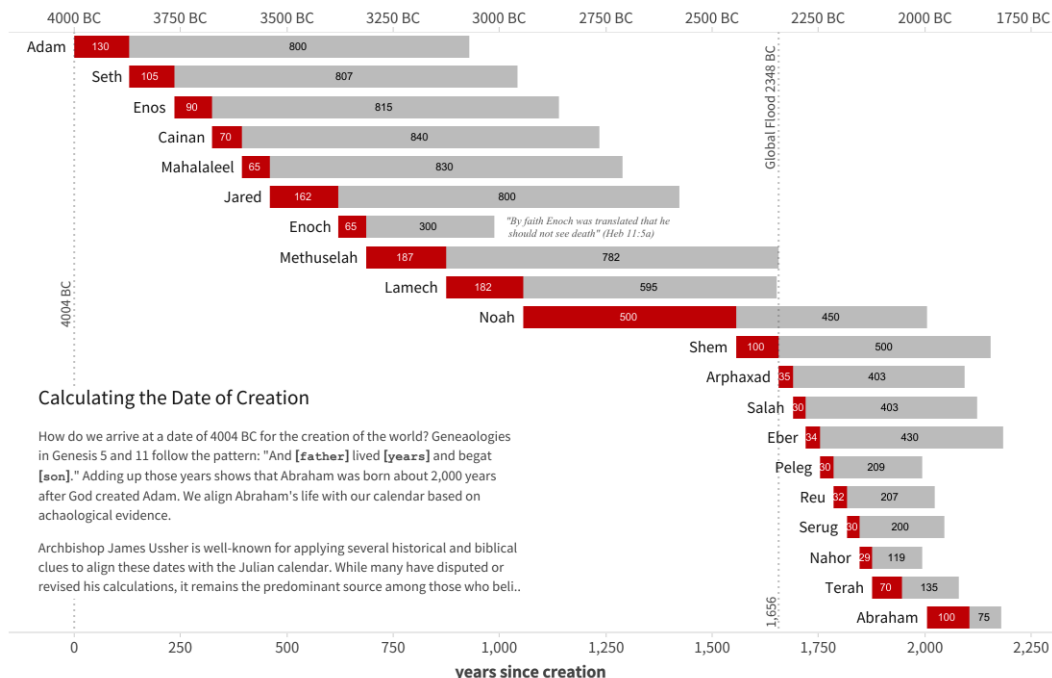
A friend of God? Really? YES...that's what God has always desired...is that we have a relationship that's so close and so personal that we can literally be called His Friend. And that's the entire reason the book of Hebrews was written. It was written to Jews to encourage those still on the fence to surrender their lives to a relationship with Jesus which leads to a friendship with Almighty God. You see, it's all about a relationship...not rules...No! A restored relationship with God...a fantastic restoration of what was lost in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve blew and could no longer walk with God in the cool of the day. **Today...we'll see through the life of Abraham...that we can: "Have Faith in God's Promises."**

Hebrews 11:8-16

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² 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. ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone 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 for them a city.

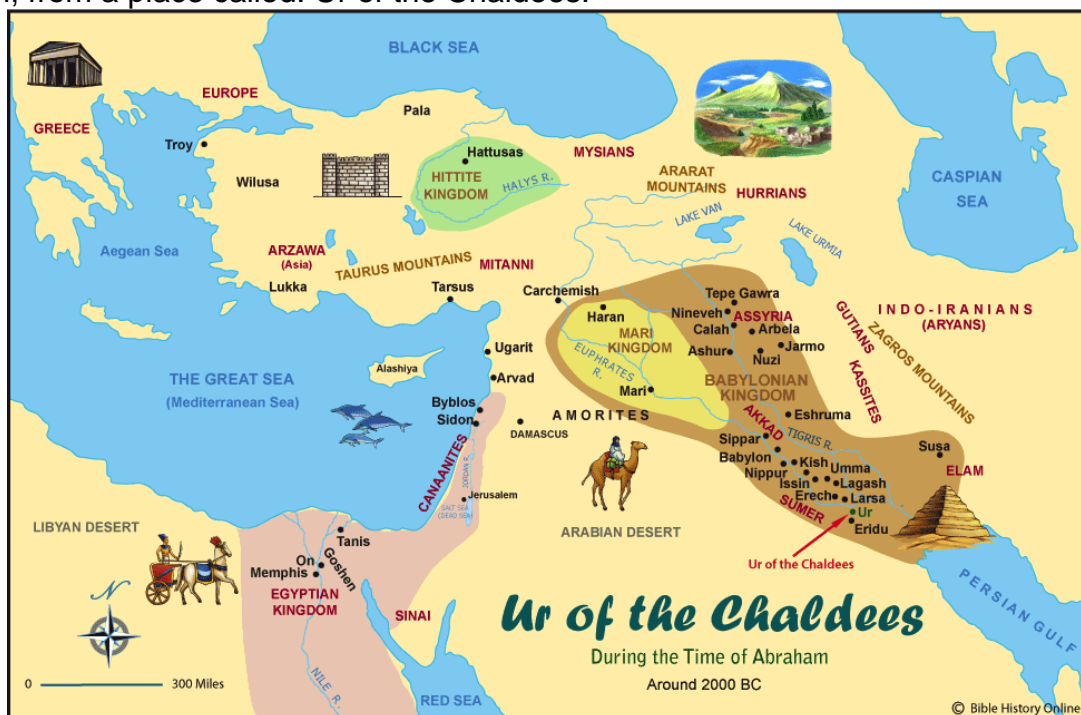
Up to this point in our study of the Book of Hebrews, we're now almost 2,000 years past creation...almost 400 years since Noah's flood. See the chart...look at Abraham at the bottom:

Genesis Timeline from Adam to Abraham



Now you'll remember there has been a great dispersion of the people after the Flood because of the confusion caused by the building of the Tower of Babel and so the people have spread out...but, yet again...the world has become pagan, few following God. And it happens doesn't it. It happens to us! It's so easy to allow the things of this world to begin to infiltrate our minds and we start thinking more like the world and less like God. Think of that...just 500 years removed from the flood and they're going off the rails again.

And this rebellion...following after other gods included Abraham's father...a man named Terah, a pagan man, from a place called: Ur of the Chaldees.



Ur was located in the Mesopotamian Valley in what is present-day Iraq, just to the south of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, over 1,000 miles from the Land of Canaan (what we know of today as Israel). Joshua tells us that Terah worshipped other gods.

Joshua 24:2-3

² And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.' ³ Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.

What's the point? The point is that Terah and his family were idol-worshippers, and get this...are you holding on to your seats...that means that when God spoke to Abraham, He called him out of a pagan family...and so, when you read the Biblical account of God's calling Abraham in Genesis...you find nothing said about Abraham being a godly man. Nothing is said about his character or that he was good. All that we see in the Biblical accounts is the fact that when God came to Abraham and revealed Himself to Abraham...Abraham obeyed...how? BY FAITH!!! Do you know what this means? Abraham could take no credit in this deal...Abraham couldn't say, "Well, I was a great man and that's why God chose me." No! God chose Abraham when Abraham had done nothing to warrant God choosing Him. It was all God! God chose Abraham...and then Abraham responded in FAITH...and that's verse 8.

Hebrews 11:8

⁸ 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.

Listen, to these former Jews...these former Hebrews...to them...they believed Abraham was chosen by God because he was (as taught by the Priests) the best, the most moral, the most devout. But, that's not what the Bible teaches. We see that he was justified by FAITH...faith alone! Abraham had done nothing to earn favor with God of his own accord.

And Church family, do you know what's amazing?!! Think of this! The ultimate plan of God to save the world, to redeem humankind back to Himself, after Adam and Eve blew it for all of us...that plan would flow through a man who was pagan at the time God called him. **What a picture of God's grace and mercy that He can call anyone to Himself**, just like Abraham (raised in a pagan environment)...Praise be to God that He can reach down to anyone...to any of us...regardless of our past, our family history, our former way of life...no matter how badly we've messed it up...we're never too far from God! Oh, I'm so grateful that the grace of God saves the worst of the worst...because that includes me, and I bet you would say, that it also includes YOU! What a powerful reminder that God can use anybody and He can change anyone.

That's what God does! He changes people!! Isn't that what He did with Peter, the old rough and tough, loud-mouthed fisherman, whom God used to lead the first church. God did it with Paul, who was originally Saul...persecuting and killing Christians in the first church... And we'll see in a few weeks...God did it with a prostitute named Rahab...in that **she believed Joshua and Caleb and she protected** them from the enemy. God can change anyone and that includes you! You just have to make up your mind to let Him! I hope you'll do that today...right now...right where you sit!

So, Abraham believed and then what did he do? He put legs to belief. Faith has legs!

Hebrews 11:9-10

⁹By 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. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

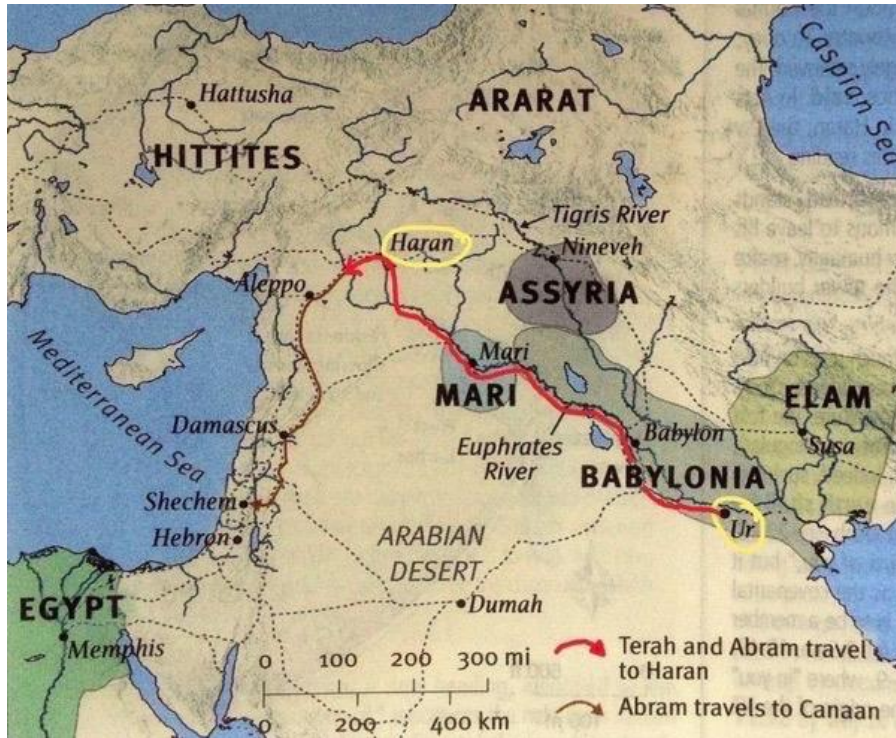
Can I ask you a strange question? What are you looking forward to right now? You say, "Lunch!!" No...beyond that... What are you looking forward to right now? Is it a vacation, promotion, retirement? Marriage? A baby? A new job? What are you looking forward to? Listen, isn't the anticipation of that event almost as wonderful as the event itself! Just thinking about it. Let's say it's a vacation...for me...half the fun of a vacation is just thinking about it...planning it...looking forward to it... **And you know what...that is true of our future in heaven.** Do you think about heaven much...being at peace...no more sickness...no more sadness...no more pain...being in the presence Jesus...walking streets of gold! Yes, the older I get...the more I long for heaven... You know Abraham looked forward to that heavenly city too!

Abraham never got to see the CITY we are longing to see. What city is that? The New Jerusalem. The place Jesus has gone away to prepare for us! You see it has **foundations**...12 of them to be exact...but Abraham lived in tents all of his life. No foundations for tents. And you know what...we're not to put down foundations here on this earth...in this life...because we are just travelers passing through! This is not our home! And we must never forget that!

Yes, we're a lot like Abraham...he left the land of his birth. He left the only home he'd ever known, he severed many family ties, leaving many loved ones behind. He abandoned the comfortable things, the familiar things to embrace what? **Absolute and total uncertainty.** And God did more than that...He called Abraham to break from his idolatrous past and follow Him, the Lord God wholeheartedly. And listen...that's what the Lord asks us to do when He's moving in our lives. He wants us to live our pilgrimage of faith wholeheartedly trusting Him...and that often means we must make a break from the familiar and the comfortable...and launch out BY FAITH...into the unknown of where He is calling us!

And that's what we did that here 13 years ago with \$12...it was scary...but we launched out... And let me tell you something...LISTEN CAREFULLY...let me tell you who showed the greatest faith...it's the people in this church who now over the age of 75 and older who were willing to move...to change the way we did our music...our messages (with screens)...the style...so we could reach people... Our young at heart folks are the Abrahams that have brought us to this place! Thank you!

So, Abraham would leave Ur and go live the life of a nomad, a wanderer, as he obeyed God. Abraham would spend five years in a town called Haran.



Abraham would stay there until his father, Terah, died and the Lord would tell Abraham to go south into the Land of Canaan...to Shechem...modern-day Israel, the Promised Land. Abraham did...in great faith...trusting God he left his homeland and journeyed to a place he'd never seen...just like us...we're journeying to a place we've never seen. Where is that? **Heaven!** Watch this... Jump down to verse 13...

Hebrews 11:13-16

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Abraham never saw the heavenly city...nor have we...but, we don't live by SIGHT...we live by FAITH! And so, even now, we're storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Abraham trusted God for that which he had never seen and he trusted God as the Bible says: **"He was waiting for a people."** God said that He would make a great nation out of Abraham. Abraham was waiting for that promise to happen and that promise goes all the way back to the covenant of Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1-2

¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

But this is not what was happening... Sarah was barren and Abraham couldn't father children. *"Houston, we have a problem."* But, here comes the Lord to intervene in the realm of the impossible.

Hebrews 11:11-12

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² 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.

God made a promise to this couple and it would take God to fulfill it. They couldn't do it. There was nothing Abraham and Sarah could do except to depend on the Lord! Are you there today? You've done all you can do... You've tried and tried to figure it out...make it happen...but, it's not happening. Quit worrying. Quit trying in your strength and rest...let the Lord do it in His time! That's the patience of faith, and if you ask me, I think that's the hardest part of having faith. It's one thing to have faith to take a leap off a cliff...right now... But, it's another thing to be told to do nothing but wait. That takes faith!

LISTEN: Faith sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, touches that which can't be held, and accomplishes the impossible. Oh...faith is so powerful when we use it to trust God! Sarah was barren, Abraham as good as dead and God did it! In their old age...they had Isaac! Jesus said:

Luke 18:27

²⁷ But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

And all generations to this day have been blessed through Abraham...the man called the "Friend of God." And this brings us to verse 16... last thought...an astounding one at that...stunning really...

Hebrews 11:16

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 for them a city.

What a stunning statement...God is not ashamed to be called their God. I can't think of a higher honor, can you? Can you think of a higher honor than God to be identified with you...with me. Isn't that the ultimate honor? God says, "I am the God of Kevin Brown, you fill in your name_____." **God is not ashamed to call us by our name, as our God!** And that, Church family, is the personal relationship He desires to have with us... And that's the point of the book of Hebrews...we don't work our way to God...it's not religion...we can't earn our way to God...we're helpless in and of ourselves... No...we live BY FAITH...we trust God...just like Abraham who went out, not knowing where he was going...Abraham and Sarah trusting God for the impossible. Just like us. Even when you're down to \$12.
