



NG Study Guide: Hebrews 11:8-22 :: “Jesus Inspires Greater Faith” pt. 2 [12.31.23]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Regularly review the notes at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: The patriarchs were not morally or spiritually perfect, but trusted God to fulfill His promises; let’s discover how to live by (and die in) a faith that pleases God regardless of our imperfections till the end like the patriarchs.

Subject: The Faith of the Patriarchs

Object: Live by Faith and Die in Faith

Context: The author of Hebrews has been masterfully expounding on the supremacy of faith in Christ over adherence to the Mosaic covenant, without diminishing God’s purpose in instituting the Mosaic covenant. In this passage, the author is going to show that salvation has always been by faith in God’s promises, not in our performance of a creed or covenant; this is because the Jews had long wrestled with a question that many Christians similarly struggle with: how were people made right with God and inherit eternal life before the current covenant? They did this in the first seven verses of this chapter through the existence of creation and the faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

1. Live by Faith [8-12]

a. Abraham's Faith in the God of Jerusalem [8-10]

We know virtually nothing about Abraham (other than his genealogy) before God calls him to leave his family, his inheritance, and everything he knows so that God will make him a great nation and receive His blessings (Genesis 12). There is no indication of any preexisting faith or righteousness before this, and so we have to assume that there was nothing about Abraham in particular that caused God to choose Abraham to make into the nation of Israel and the descendant of the Messiah. What’s even more perplexing is that Abraham responds with immediate obedience; in this ancient context, it was not uncommon to hear stories of deities and spiritual beings interacting with people, and so Abraham probably recognized what was happening and chose to receive the blessings of this God rather than enjoy the blessing of his father’s inheritance in the land of Ur. What’s so impressive about Abraham’s faith is that we know from the outset that he was wealthy, and so moving to an unknown land was risky and seemingly reckless; but God had promised something that Abraham could never buy: to make a great nation of him. This nation that God promised Abraham was what compelled Abraham to trust Him, and what inspired his sons Isaac and Jacob to continue to trust in the God of their father.

b. Sarah's Faith in the God of Promises [11-12]

In the ancient world, much of a woman’s perceived worth was tied up in their ability to bear children; Sarah could not. You can understand why when God promised Abraham in Genesis 15 that he would have a biological son in

his old age, that Sarah would assume that perhaps it meant that it would be her child only by proxy through her servant Hagar. Even though her and her husband's misjudgment resulted in strife between Abraham and Sarah, God's plan and promises could not be thwarted. You can also understand why she laughed in Genesis 17 when God revealed that the promised son would be her son as well. But God had been faithful to her and her husband up until now, and in a very real sense, she had nothing left to lose. She continued to laugh in Genesis 21 when Isaac was born to her, a seemingly infertile woman of ninety years!

Living a life by faith in God and His promises of future perfection is difficult when we live in a presently imperfect world. It was hard for Abram to believe that God would make him into a great nation when he hadn't yet even made him a father. It was risky for Sarah to trust that God would grant her a child at ninety when He hadn't granted her one for her whole life. Similarly, it can be difficult to trust in the person and work of Christ and hope for eternal life in the city of golden streets and perpetual light when we're driving our high mileage vehicles over potholes and speed bumps; but like our predecessors, we can have faith in God's perfection even when we struggle to recall his past faithfulness. For the unbeliever who has never trusted in God, they can turn to His Son for the first time knowing that He made all things and is the source of every good thing in their life, whether or not they have ever acknowledged Him as the source of those good things. For the believer, we can continue to trust in Christ knowing that if nothing could thwart his earthly rescue mission, then nothing will stop him from coming back and bringing us home.

Faith is nothing in and of itself, however. Abraham and Sarah likely understood that faith was not the goal but simply a means to an end: communion with God.

2. The End of Faith [13-16]

a. The Pilgrims of Promise [13-14]

Here the author points out that the main promise that God had made to Abraham and Sarah was not fulfilled in their lifetime; Sarah died in the promised land of Canaan, but as a foreigner, and the land where her grave belonged to the Hittites before being purchased by her husband. She died while her son was unmarried and childless, and Abraham died before Isaac and Rebekah had borne children. But had made good on so many other promises He made while they were alive; so it was reasonable to believe that He would fulfill the rest after they died. They understood their roles as pilgrims in this life, knowing that the faith that had brought them so far would take them all the way to an eternal city, even after death. Nothing they did in life earned them the reward of their faith, and so it would be in death.

b. The Heavenly Homecoming [15-16]

The temptation to return to the comfort and ease of life before trusting in God is powerful. For Abraham and Sarah, they could have very easily lived the rest of their lives in luxury and security; but they would have died without children, without a legacy, and most importantly, without hope. Their lack of contentment in their previous circumstances was actually advantageous, because it meant that God could call them to something and somewhere better. Even though they were prosperous in Ur, it wasn't truly their *home*, and so God offered them both an earthly and a heavenly home through faith in Him and His promises.

Our lack of contentment in this world is the result of it not being our true home; this world is subject to sin, which results in pain, suffering, and death; the ultimate pain, suffering, and death is permanent separation from God, on whom is all peace, love, and joy. God has made a way to escape from the effects of sin and this

fallen world through faith in His Son: His life, death, and resurrection. We can experience the benefits of that invitation to heavenly citizenship today, and it is the fulfillment of those heavenly promises in this life which gives us confidence that He will fulfill the ultimate promise of eternal life in the new heavens and new earth with God in the next life.

Let's learn from our spiritual ancestors how to die in faith by God's faithfulness.

3. Die in Faith [17-22]

a. Abraham's Faith in the God of Resurrection [17-19]

The story of God calling Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22 is both a religious and cultural phenomena; the spiritual and ethical implications are vast and profound, but the author of Hebrews instead calls to our attention Abraham's faithful obedience to God's call. Although there is never any explicit mention of Abraham's thoughts or feelings, the author of Hebrews makes the statement that Abraham's rationale for obeying God was that God could miraculously raise Isaac from the dead because He had already miraculously caused Sarah to conceive Isaac. If God's promises of providing Abraham a biological heir and granting Sarah the ability to bear a child had come to pass irregardless of their performance or potential, so too would the promise that Abraham's descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky come to pass. That is why Abraham told Isaac that "God would provide for Himself the lamb" when his son asked where the sacrifice was; it wasn't because Abraham knew beforehand that God was going to stop him before he killed Isaac, but because God was going to give Isaac back so that He could come through on His promise. It wasn't really going to be a sacrifice, in a sense, because Abraham knew that God would give Him back through resurrection.

b. The Patriarchs' Faith in the God of Blessings [20-21]

In the ancient world, to receive the blessing of your father was not simply an affirmation of his faith in you, but promises that the blessing would be fulfilled. For Jacob and Esau to be blessed by Isaac, the Son of Promise given to Abraham, the man chosen by God to become a great nation and the descendant of the coming Seed, those blessings meant more than those from any other man on earth. Naturally, Esau would receive the best blessings as the firstborn son while Jacob received the lesser blessing; but as a result of Jacob's deception, Isaac gave Jacob the blessing intended for Esau and vice versa. Jacob and his descendants would now be blessed with power and wealth, while Esau and his offspring would be consigned to violence and subjugation. Even though it appeared that God's purpose of blessing Abraham and his sons had gone totally wrong and now lay in the hands of deceptive Jacob, Isaac knew just as his father Abraham knew that God's purpose could not be stopped, and so he died in faith knowing his blessings would be fulfilled.

In Genesis 49, it's Jacob's turn now to bless his twelve sons, who were all the result of a less-than-ideal blended family between his two wives and their concubines. His sons were arguably even less righteous than he was: his firstborn son Reuben had slept with his stepmother, his sons Levi and Simeon slaughtered the entire tribe of Shechem, and Judah had slept with his daughter-in-law Tamar. On the surface, it seemed like there would be no way God could use his sons to fulfill his promises, but just as God was faithful to Abraham, Isaac, and himself in life, he knew God would be faithful in death to fulfill his promise, and so Jacob blesses in sons in full faith, knowing God would unconditionally bless them and He had blessed him.

c. Joseph's Faith in the God of Deliverance [22]

Joseph, to whom roughly twelve chapters of Genesis is devoted to, tells his brothers before he dies that God is going to make good on His promise to their ancestor Abraham to bring them into the promised land and give it to them. At this point, his and all his brothers' family lived in Egypt, not Canaan; it seemed that they were farther from the fulfillment of God's promise than ever before. They had fled Canaan due to famine; was the Promised Land even desirable anymore? But Joseph had lived a life of faith in the God of promises, and so he knew that despite how it looked, he knew that God would make good on His promise. He asked to be buried in Canaan, and even though his remains were placed in an Egyptian sarcophagus and remained there for over four hundred years, God used Moses to finally bring Joseph's bones to the promised land. Even in death, Joseph knew he would be delivered into God's promises just as he had been delivered throughout his life.

We don't often think of what it means to die in faith, knowing that God will fulfill His promises to us. It is perhaps the most important act we can ever do in this life, as it is our last act in this life and is the ultimate expression of our faith. It's one thing to have faith in God's promises while we're alive to see His promises fulfilled and be used by Him to bring them to fruition; it's much more daunting to trust that when we "fall asleep", that we will wake up in Paradise with Him, not because of our own doing, but because we trust that God will be faithful to us in death and He was faithful to us in life. Just as He was faithful to the saints of old to provide a Messiah to provide a means of deliverance from sin and death, so He is and will be faithful to us in life and death.

Summary

Without faith in God's promises, we are without hope and doomed to exist forever separated from God and His goodness. But with faith in God and the ultimate promise of His son Jesus Christ, we can have strong assurance of hope in the everlasting life He has promised to give those who accept the invitation by faith. We can live by faith in God's perfection and experience the sanctification that is just a taste of heavenly perfection, and we can die in faith having experienced the benefits he has promised for those who live by faith and look forward to an eternity of communion with the God of faithfulness to those who trust Him.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. When was a time you or someone you knew lived by faith in God and His promises when it seemed unlikely to work out.

Q2. What is a promise of God in the Bible you or someone you know lives by. What is a promise of God you want to live by in the future?

Q3. Describe examples of Christians whose lives have inspired you to live by faith in God's promises. Describe examples of Christians whose deaths have inspired you to die in faith in God's promises.

Q4. How do you want your life and death to inspire the faith of others?

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. **Genesis 12-50:** These chapters are what the author of Hebrews is referencing in this passage. Here’s a link to a Bible Project video that explains these chapters: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4isSyennFo>
2. The song **“Promises” by Maverick City Music** beautifully describes God’s faithfulness and what it means to live a life in God’s promises. Here’s a link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5m09rqOoxE>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:
Offer to pray with (or for) a neighbor where you live, work, study, play or worship.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don’t force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. **Preparation and participation:** Group participants should read the teacher’s notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?**
If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don’t hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.
3. **The “Disciples Who Dig Deeper” section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the “Disciples Who Dig Deeper” section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
4. **The “Love your neighbors” section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better.** As a leader, discuss this section frequently.
5. **The “Disciples who make disciples” section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples.** Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.