

**Abraham's faith**

(i) *Involves a word from God*

(ii) *Looks out into the future*

(iii) *Looks to inheritance or reward*

(iv) *But there is no detailed knowledge of the future*

(v) *Ultimate vision is beyond the grave*

(vi) *Separates us from our surroundings*

(vii) *Affects our attitude towards possessions*

(viii) *Abraham lived for reward*

• *The reward consisted of a city*

• *The real city is not man-made*

• *It comes 'down out of heaven from God'*

All Christian believers believe in creation<sup>□1</sup>. Abel pointed to redemption by blood<sup>□2</sup>. Enoch showed death was defeated<sup>□3</sup>. Noah preached the gospel in a day of God's anger<sup>□4</sup>. But worthy of even fuller mention is Abraham, the father of all believers and the pioneer of the people of God. Our writer takes up his story in detail<sup>□5</sup>.

<sup>8</sup>*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was going to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* Abraham is of course the greatest model of faith in the Bible; he is the father of all believers.

In our writer's descriptions many aspects of faith are visible. (i) **Faith involves a word from God.** Abraham was called to do what he did. (ii) **Faith looks out into the future.** It always is combined with expectation or hope. (iii) **Faith looks to inheritance or reward.** We have seen this many times in Hebrews and in the rest of the Bible and it is explicit here. (iv) Although in faith there is a rough knowledge of the future, **there is no detailed knowledge** of the future. Abraham knew roughly that he would be given a land. But it is also true that he did not know where he was going until he got there.

<sup>9</sup>*By faith he lived like a temporary resident; he lived as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents; and Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise, lived the same way.* (v) **Faith's ultimate vision is focused on life beyond the grave.** Even the promised land was not regarded by Abraham as his permanent home. (vi) **Faith separates us from our surroundings** and our people. Abraham was somewhat alienated from his surrounding neighbours. He was like a foreigner. His neighbours felt quite at home in Canaan, but Abraham did not. He did not identify with the beliefs and lifestyle of the Canaanites around him, and he did not regard anywhere on planet earth as his permanent home. (vii) **Faith affects our attitude towards possessions.** Since Abraham did not regard Canaan as his permanent home, why should he build a house and settle down? He lived in tents like someone who would be moving elsewhere at any moment. The Christian is a pilgrim in this world, not a settler. Maybe a home will be useful for us! Living in a brick house is not sin! But we should live in it as if it were a tent and we were about to move elsewhere quite soon – as indeed we are! (viii) Again the point is made: **Abraham lived for reward.**

He was an 'heir' of blessings that God had designed for him. He lived for what God would do for him and he persuaded his son to do the same, and the grandson lived the same way.

This living for reward is emphasized in verse 10. *For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.* God's intended reward motivated Abraham; he was eagerly looking for it. The reward consisted of a city. The ungodly often like town-life. Early in the human race pagan men built towns for themselves<sup>□1</sup> but God devastated their attempts to get to heaven through town-life<sup>□2</sup>. Abraham's nephew wanted the town-life of Sodom but was told 'the Lord is about to destroy this city'. Instead the people of God were to look forward to God's city. Jerusalem was a shadow of it and the psalmists loved Jerusalem just as they loved the Mosaic law. 'On the holy mount stands the city he founded', they said<sup>□3</sup>. But the real city is not man-made at all. Jerusalem was only a faint shadow of it. It comes 'down out of heaven from God'<sup>□4</sup>. It was this that motivated Abraham. He knew there was something in life far better than the town-life of Sodom and Gomorrah. He knew God's city

□1 11:3

□2 11:4

□3 11:5-6

□4 11:7

□5 11:8-19

□1 see Genesis 4:17; 11:4

□2 Genesis 11:8

□3 Psalm 87:1

□4 Revelation 21:2

would have stability (unlike Sodom); he knew God had to be the designer of it and the architect of it.

### Faith affects family life

• Together with Sarah, he received power to beget a child

• The heroes of faith had struggles bringing their families to the same faith that they had

### Faith overcomes seeming impossibilities

• A promise given to one old man

• Millions of Jews

• And millions of Christians who share his faith

(ix) **Faith affects family life.** It seems that Abraham rescued his family just as Noah did <sup>□1</sup> for he seems to have been able to pass on his faith to Isaac and Isaac did the same for Jacob. Verse 11 goes on to speak of Sarah's involvement in Abraham's life. <sup>11</sup>*By faith also Abraham – together with Sarah who had been unable to have a child – received power to become a father, even though he was of great age. It happened because he considered God who had given the promise to be faithful.* The Greek probably does not mean 'By faith Sarah herself...' (since in the kind of Greek used by Hebrews the phrase can only refer to the man). More likely it means: 'By faith also he [Abraham], together with barren Sarah, <sup>a</sup> received power to beget a child...'. But whichever way you look at it, Sarah was involved! Although initially she fell into scepticism <sup>□2</sup> she came to faith because she was able to 'hear God's voice' when she was rebuked <sup>□3</sup>. What is obvious in the story of the heroes of faith is that they had struggles bringing their families to the same faith that they had. Of course sometimes the 'hero of faith' was a woman and elsewhere Moses' mother and Rahab are commended.

(x) **Faith overcomes seeming impossibilities.** Our writer goes on to say: <sup>12</sup>*And so from one man – and in these things he was dead! – were born descendants. In multitude they were as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.* Abraham had to stand alone in faith. The Bible sometimes emphasizes his solitude. 'Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him' <sup>□1</sup>. 'Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land' <sup>□2</sup>. One man alone was given the promise. And he was so old that he was virtually dead! There was scarcely any hope that Abraham could inherit what had been promised to him. But he persisted in faith. The result was the one became millions! Out of Abraham came millions of Jews. The millions of Jews were the context in which another 'One' would be born – the seed of Abraham par excellence, our Lord Jesus Christ. And from that One would come millions of 'children of Abraham' in a yet deeper way, Christians, people who share Abraham's faith who distantly saw the coming of Jesus before it happened <sup>□3</sup>. The one became many – by faith.

#### Note

a.. The Greek *autē Sara* should be read as a dative of accompaniment.

□1 see 11:7

□2 Genesis 18:12

□3 see Genesis 18:13

□1 Isaiah 51:2

□2 Ezekiel 33:24

□3 see John 8:56



slices.org.uk

Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below

Slices for the Nations	Slices for Sponsors	Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable</li> <li>In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge</li> <li>Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the Slices web site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation</li> <li>The same material as Slices for the Nations</li> <li>Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the Slices web site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge</li> <li>Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email)</li> <li>The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations</li> </ul>

To subscribe please contact: [slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk](mailto:slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk) stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at [www.slices.org.uk](http://www.slices.org.uk)  
 Details of the availability of *Preaching Through The Bible* books and how they may be purchased can be found on [www.ibtr.org.uk](http://www.ibtr.org.uk)