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Exhortation

"By faith..."

5. Abraham (Heb. 11:8-10)

Tony Nield

"BY FAITH Abraham . . . obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8). At the age of seventy-five he was called from the great, populous city of Ur, full of its pagan worship in which his family once participated (Josh. 24:2,3). There was no doubt or hesitation in his mind as he moved northward to Haran and then southward over the Euphrates into the land of promise. It was an act of spontaneous obedience for which he was to become a role model. Great and precious promises were made to him conditional upon him being obedient to the call. These important promises, as they developed at this period of his life, formed the very basis of the gospel message (Gen. 12:2,3; Gal. 3:8).

God blessed Abraham with great riches, and Lot, his nephew, too. This led to a family disagreement, Lot leaving his uncle for the luxurious and seemingly comfortable plains of Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities of the plain were attacked by the powerful king of the north, Chedorlaomer, and his allies. Lot was taken captive, to be rescued by Abraham. This demonstrated Abraham's courage as well as his faith.

His faith stemmed from belief in God's Word, so that, when God told the childless Abraham that his progeny would be as numerous as the stars of heaven, the record states that "he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Paul adds: "And being *not weak in faith*, he considered not his own body now dead . . . neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:19,20).

He married Hagar at the instigation of Sarah in order that they might "obtain children by her" (Gen. 16:2). This was not necessarily a weakness of faith, but a natural reaction to assist in the outworking of God's purpose. Nevertheless it was not God's way, as the promised seed was to come through Sarah. To impress that fact, they were told that their names would be changed

from Abram (high father) to Abraham (father of a great multitude), and from Sarai (my princess) to Sarah (princess of the multitude).

At the age of 100 his promised son was born. Isaac replaced Ishmael, the son of Hagar. This provided the background to the greatest test of Abraham's faith, the proposed sacrifice of his son. He did not flinch from the test. He implicitly trusted God, believing that, by offering his son, he would receive him again as through resurrection (Heb. 11:17-19). On this evidence of his outstanding faith and obedience to the Divine command, the promises were renewed to Abraham unconditionally, confirmed by an oath (Gen. 22:15-18).

In addition to Ishmael and Isaac, the sons of Hagar and Sarah, Abraham had children by Keturah (25:1-4). In a real sense, through her, he truly became a father of many nations, for her children later developed into nations.

The life and faith of Abraham reveal much to be emulated in these last days. The exhortation we take to ourselves individually as we finally consider some of his characteristics. He **believed**, even when the evidence indicated that what was promised was impossible (Rom. 4:18). He **obeyed**, even though he knew not what was before him (Heb. 11:8). He had **vision**, as he looked for that which he could not then see (v. 10). He had **patience**, because he waited for God to act (Gen. 17:17). He had **courage**; though warfare stalked the land, he did not shrink from moving to the aid of Lot (ch. 14). He was a man of **prayer** as he pleaded the cause of Lot and was granted his petition (18:23;19:29). He was a man of **sacrifice**; not only did he sacrifice animals unto God, he was prepared to give part of himself, even his "only" beloved son (ch. 22).

So the Old and New Testaments both tell us of the faith of Abraham. He is truly one of the greatest characters in our Scriptures. His faith was perfected by action, and we are encouraged to walk to the Kingdom the same pathway that he so faithfully trod.