

Hebrews 11:11-12
“When I am weak, then I am strong”

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I. Introduction

The unapologetic statement of Hebrews chapter 11 is that, “**Faith Works**”! Faith is NOT in opposition of WORK; it is **the MOTIVATION of WORKS!** **Faith is, doing**

something now, in view of the future. Some in the Church think that we are called to sit and wait for Jesus to take us home, but that view is **NOT living the LIFE OF FAITH.**

The life of faith is what Jesus said in Luke 19:13 “**Doing His business till He comes**”.

These examples of faith in Hebrews 11, were set to work by their faith. Their activities of faith changed the course of history; and saints ours can too!

- Faith does **NOT** act blindly, it’s **NOT** just doing **ANY** activity; faith **evaluates**, it **weighs the possibilities**, and **the alternatives**.
- **Faith gladly sacrifices the present advantage to gain the future promised.** These heroes of faith speak to us today saying, “**Live now in view of the future, and you will gain both the future and the present!**”

One of those “*characteristics of faith*” is found in Hebrews 11:11-12 and Sarah where we notice that “**faith dares**”. We shall see this morning that when God spoke to Sarah, **her**

faith had to ignore the contrary evidence even though the evidence made her situation absolutely impossible. To look at this text, we will need to examine the original language

as well as take a look at the illustration found when we look at Genesis chapters 15-18

and the fulfillment in Genesis chapter 21.

II. Vs. 11 Learning to believe

Vs. 11a “*By faith Sarah herself*”: The Greek wording of this pronoun “*herself*” emphasizes that it was Sarah who was **previously** “***unbelieving***” of God’s promise of an heir through her that **NOW** responded in faith. To understand this, we need to go back before the writer’s illustration in Hebrews 11 to Genesis 15:1-6. There we are told that Abram had a vision in which the Lord said, “*I am your shield, your exceeding great reward*”, to which Abram respond in verse 2 “**Lord God**” or “*Adhonay Yahweh*” which shows that ***Abram was not doubting God’s power to perform what He promised but questioned HOW this would be accomplished.*** Abram’s next words were “*What will you give me*” and should better be rendered as in one translation “*you have given me everything I could ask for, **except children***”. Back in Genesis 12:2 and 13:6 God had already promised Abram descendants but ***by this time in Genesis 15, ten years had passed*** and there was still no fulfillment. ***By now he and Sarai were well passed the age of child baring.*** In fact, according to the Hebrew the phrase of 15:2 “*I go childless*” is literally “***stripped of children***”. Then ***in verse 3 Abram speaks to God about his inability to understand how God is going to accomplish that which He promised*** by saying that the only heir of his entire house was Eliezer (*God is my help*) because he was born in his house. In spite of this question as to HOW God would fulfill His promise, God answers with a further promise and ***not a rebuke. God has told Abram three times*** that He will ***give him an heir and in verses 4-5 He does so again saying:***

1. Vs. 4 “*This one shall not be your heir*”: ***He has not forgotten His promise***
2. Vs. 4 “*But one who will come*”: ***He reminds Abram of His original promise in 12:2, 13:15-16.***
3. Vs. 4 “*From your own body shall be your heir*”: ***He gives further understanding of His promise so that Abram would not misunderstand what God was going to do.***

4. Vs. 5 “*Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be"*: **Finally, God confirms it with an illustration showing Abram His power to perform the impossible. He is the God who made the heavens out of nothing but the power of His word in power and He will have no problem being able to bring forth descendants from a barren womb.**

It’s in Genesis 15:6 we read for the first time in the Bible that someone “**believed**”. The root of the word in Hebrew is where we get the word **amen** and means, “**it is so**”. When you believe you are saying “**it is so**” and **NOT** “**MAY** it be so”! Abraham’s **Faith took God at His WORD and responded to His Word before He even performed it.** Notice what the object of Abrams faith was, “**in the LORD**”. He didn’t say “**it is so**” based upon **a higher power** or **trusting in his trust**. Faith is **NOT** the most important factor alone; **it is the object of FAITH!** Because Abram said “**it is so**” to the Word of the Lord his acting upon this was accounted to him as righteousness.

Vs. 11b “*Also received strength to conceive seed..*”: The Greek phrase means “*throwing down*” and relates to the male seed in the womb. The question to Greek scholars with reference to this is **does this refer too Abraham through Sarah “receiving strength” with his seed or Sarah “receiving strength” as she was past age?** Here again it is helpful to go back to Genesis 16:1-4 where we are told in verse 2 the “*adverse circumstances*” combined with “*appropriate opportunity*” led to six reasons why the two of them came up with the plan to use her maid Hagar to fulfill God’s promise:

1. “*See now, the LORD has restrained ME from bearing children.*” She recognized that the Lord had power over their lives, so she deduces that the problem in fulfilling the promise made was her and not Abram’s or the Lord’s fault.
2. “*Has restrained me from bearing children.*” She believed that the situation was hopeless because she was the problem and she could not be fixed.
3. “*Please, go in to my maid.*” She believed God’s promises but God never said that the Child would come from her only that the child would come from Abraham.
4. “*Please*”: She believed that there was still a way to accomplish God’s promises by spiritual means.
5. “*Go in to*”. Her request involved two good traits:
 - a. **Self-denial**: She had to deny herself her own desire of being the instrument of God fulfilling his promise of a child.
 - b. **Self-sacrifice**: Though she would still be Abram’s wife she would be promoting Hagar to be his second wife and not just her maid.
6. “*My maid*”. Hagar was the opportunity to accomplish what God had promised but she was unable to produce.

The solution that these two came up with is found in Genesis 16:3-4a. First we need to realize that the act **did not involve romance it was only about conception**, as the handmaid would actually sit on her master’s lap (Sarai) as Abram inseminated her. But even though all this was true it didn’t make it right. **This shows us what links the flesh will go to obtain the promises of God! The flesh will do anything except die to obtain the promises of God. Let this story forever put an end to the false teaching that: “God helps those who help themselves”.** This is where we can insert Hebrews 11:11 and Sarah

“received strength” as she would conceive 13 years later and could have avoided all of this fleshly work as God always keeps His promises. The worst thing was, that their plan succeeded as Hagar conceives. Barnhouse wrote; *“Christian work that is done through the zeal of human effort with out counting the body as dead, may produce great revival campaigns but with few genuine saved, it may produce large numbers in the Church but with many tares in the wheat!”*

Vs. 11c *“and she bore when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”* The question is when did this take place? Genesis 17:15-19 reveals that Sarah was taken into the covenant as she is specifically mentioned as being the mother of the child of promise. **The truth was the promise was already hers 13 years earlier and she did everything in the flesh to inherit what was already hers by faith.** According to God’s words to Abraham in verse 16 there is a mystery that is uncovered only when the read the NT. God said to Abraham, *“I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and **she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.**”* Sarah had only **one child** and from **Isaac** came only **one nation, Israel.** Yet God prophetically proclaims that Sarah was to *“be a mother of nations”*, how is that possible?

- a. Matt. 1:1 We read, *“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.”* Isaac was not this child, he was weak through the flesh, the nation that sprang from him never has fulfilled becoming a blessing to all other nations. Isaiah wrote of this light being **singular and not the nation.** The Psalmist declared something glorious in 8:4-6 *“What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? **For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.**”* In Heb. 2:9 the person the psalmist spoke about is revealed as we are told, *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”* In Gal. 4:30-31 we are told that *“the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”*

Thus the mystery of this verse is understood only in light of the incarnation of the only Son of God the divine son of Abraham and Sarah. That means that Sarah being **a mother of nations** speaks of Jesus and that the “nations” is believers! Paul said in Gal. 3:7-8 *“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed. In Genesis 17:17 Abraham’s response is to laugh, not in unbelief, but rather of astonishment and joy. He is told in verse 20 that they will give birth to the child of promise. There are four things mentioned in this verse that through Isaac the promise of the godly line would come:*

- a. *“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son”*: The child would be of faith and not the energy of the flesh.
- b. *“You shall call his name Isaac”*: His name will be *“he laughs or laughter”* which is always produced in the hearts of grace.

- c. *“I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant”*: The covenant with him would be an everlasting one that their son would be the heir of the promise.
- d. *“With his descendants after him”*: The use of these words “descendants” is connected to God’s promises to Abraham over 10 times so they were assured that the blessing of this child was the same blessing spoken to him 25 years earlier.

In Genesis 18:9-15 the Lord asks Abraham twice where Sarah is thirteen years earlier God had told Abraham His promise but now He wishes for Sarah to hear it as well.

Moses, in verse 11 interjects to explain the impossibility of procreation apart from the Lord’s intervention. The words *“Sarah had passed the age of childbearing”* literally mean *“the manor of a woman had ceased to be with Sarah”* which meant that she could not possibly be able to have children. Her case was irreversible, she had already gone through the change of life. In verse 12 she listens to the Word of the Lord and laughs within herself as to the impossibility of her having a child. In her head she says, *“After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”* As Sarah was concerned her problem with this word from the Lord was physical and emotional but in reality her real problem was spiritual. **“What Sarah wanted the most in life (the child of promise) she believed could be produced in the energy of the flesh but doubted it could ever take place in the energy of the Spirit!”** In Genesis 18:13-14 Sarah is taught four lessons about the Lord that she need:

- a. **She was taught that the Lord is all knowing**: Sarah saw her limitations, but the God revealed that those limitations were nothing compared to her lack of trusting Him.
- b. Vs. 14a **She was taught He was all-powerful**: She viewed herself as being beyond nature, what she did not grasp was **what He has promised He alone is able to perform.**
- c. Vs. 14b-15a **She was taught that God is a God of grace**: He had promised, she had doubted, He had revealed more, she again doubted, He confronts her she denies it. But a year later He will still bring forth the child that He promised. Paul said in 2 Tim. 2:13 *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”*

- d. Vs. 15b **She was taught of His holiness**: She had lied in her heart yet God clearly knew that she had lied and confronted her with the truth.

III. Vs. 12 At the set time

Vs. 12 The final section is in Genesis 21:1-3 where we are told that “*the LORD visited Sarah **as He had said**, and the LORD did for Sarah **as He had spoken**.” Num. 23:19 says that “*God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*” The very first word we are told about Sarah back in Genesis chapter 11:30 was that she was barren and had no children. In Genesis chapter 18:12 when she first heard that it was through her womb that the child of promise was to be born she laughed in unbelief that at 90 years old she would have a child. The Lord asked her while she was hidden in side the tent, “*Is there anything too hard for the Lord?*” It had been thirty years since Abraham and Sarah had left Ur in chapter 12, they are now 100 and 90 respectively. Yet we read in Genesis 21:2 that the son of promise was born “**at the set time**”. **What was the set time that Abraham speaks of here?** The “**set time**” **was the time it took for Abraham and Sarah to both realize that you could not obtain God’s promises by the work and energy of the flesh.** It 30 years for them to die to self, to learn to trust God and His Word and not themselves. Isaac’s name was originally linked to Sarah’s failure to trust God’s Word, yet in the end it becomes linked to joy in God fulfilling His Word in spite of our lack of trust. They could forever look at this child and say his name and be reminded that “**when I am weak, then I am strong.**” (2 Cor 12:10)*