**Hebrews 11 – No 2 Verses 8 to 19 Abraham and Sarah**

There are twelve verses here to cover such a huge figure in the history of God’s dealings with his people. But compared to others in the ‘Hall of Faith’, Abraham gets the largest coverage. It’s well worth your while reading the full account of Abraham’s life in Genesis 11:26 to 25:11 to see why the author of Hebrews sees his life as a supreme example of faith.

Abraham’s movement from Ur of the Chaldeans to Palestine must not be under-estimated. Southern Mesopotamia (top of the Persian Gulf) had a sophisticated culture. The great temples (Ziggurats) of Ur have been visited by the army from their nearby base at Basra during the Gulf War.

It is likely that Abraham was at the upper end of Chaldean society (an advanced society for its time) – he had a lot of family and possessions and, after the first leg of his journey to Haran, they all went with him as he set out for the land where God had told him to go.

1. Read Genesis 12:1 to 3. This is the word that came from God to Abraham. It is clear that he had little knowledge of the Promised Land (Canaan). But this underlines the theme the author set out in 11:1. Faith involves ‘the unseen’.

Think of a country you know very little about – then imagine God calls you to go there. How would you react?

Look at the promises in Genesis 12 – what is the essence of God’s command to Abraham?

He ‘lived in tents’ (11:9). Does this say anything about how we should regard where we live? (2 Corinthians 5:1). It is clear Abraham’s intention was not to settle into Canaanite cities – he was seeking a more permanent city made by God.

1. How should we interpret this? What does it mean for us to search for ‘God’s city’?

What does it say about how we should regard our ‘earthly city’?

Are we sometimes too cautious about where God might lead us?

Do we disobey God because we think obedience would give us too much hassle?

Should we be more aware of what God is doing in other cultures?

Abraham became a father because he believed God. (Genesis 18:10 to 15 and 21:1 to 7). When faith moves beyond normal boundaries, miracles can happen. Conception had even become a laughing matter and source of tension between Abraham and Sarah. Imagine an 85-year-old woman going to the doctor and saying she was pregnant – that could prompt an unprofessional chuckle after the appointment.

1. The event of Sarah’s conception encourages us to take our eyes off the obvious human constraints.

Are there dangers if we limit the power of God to accomplish miracles?

If Abraham thought back to the promise of Genesis 12 where he was told he would become ‘a great nation’ and then realised he was old and Sarah was past childbearing age, how should he react?

Does our ‘rational analysis’ sometimes block out God’s promises?

Let’s remind ourselves of the promises of God that he has made for us.

1. In your group talk about God’s promises that he has made to all of us through the Bible. You might start with
* ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’ (Hebrews 13:5)
* ‘I will come again’ (Matthew 25:31)

You may then like to talk about personal promises that God has made to you and that have either come true or you are still waiting to see.

In verses 13 to 16 the author takes a break from his ‘Hall of Faith’ to summarise what he’s been teaching. The key point is probably the admission that we are ‘aliens and strangers’ (See 1 Peter 2:11). This is all about security – earthly or heavenly?. Abraham could have longed to go back to Ur of the Chaldees and to all the familiarity that represented. But he looked forward not to an earthly city but to live in the place where God dwells.

1. This raises huge questions for us. Where is our security? Do we cling to earthly provision rather than seeing such things as transient?

How can we look forward to the city of God?

When you look at your life, how much are you focussed on the past, how much on the present and how much on the future?

In verse 17 we come back to Abraham and a life-changing event in his life. How many of us have stood above a beloved offspring that we have longed-for for years with a knife in our hand? (read Genesis 22:1 to 8). In essence this a challenge to trust God when your head is screaming to disobey. After all, the promises of God were to be fulfilled through his son Isaac (11:9) yet God commanded he should be made a sacrifice.

1. Abraham reasoned that ‘God could raise the dead’ (v19) – that was the only way that he could see that God’s promises and his command to kill his son could be resolved.

Does it strike you as unfair that Abraham should have to face such a stark dilemma?

Why does God test us?

How do we react to being tested? (Anger maybe?)

And moving on 2000 years, resurrection was the only way that God could resolve the problem of human sin. A perfect sacrifice was made by the Lord Jesus and, because he was raised from the dead, that means we can be raised with him for eternity. Abraham’s obedience is a foretaste of Christ’s obedience as he goes to the cross.

**Why not read the story of Abraham and, as you do, ask yourself two questions**

1. **What does the narrative tell me about living a life of faith?**
2. **What would I have done faced with the situations that Abraham faced? Does this challenge the way I live?**