

Vayera — “And He appeared”

Portion for the week leading up to November 19, 2016

Faith Like Abraham



Abraham stands as one of the greatest testimonies of faith in the Bible. He did not consider the values of the world as anything to pursue, but rather put his faith in God completely. As there is much discussion about the relationship between faith and works, we may be able to find some truths by looking at how Abraham applied each of these concepts in his life.

Abraham, being without child and very old, is greeted by some intriguing visitors, one of whom is referred to as “the Lord.” He tells Abraham that come next year, he and Sarah will have a son. Just as her husband did when he first heard the news in the previous chapter, Sarah laughs at the declaration. It is a natural reaction for us to laugh when we encounter something that seems illogical or impossible, but God affirms that He is serious: “And the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, “Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?” Is anything too difficult for the Lord?’” (**Genesis 18:13-14**).

The promised child is born and begins to grow. Many attempts have been made to guess exactly how old he was, ranging anywhere from 2 to 37 years old, when God spoke to Abraham: "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you," (**Genesis 22:2**). Perhaps Abraham thought that believing God for a son required faith, but now how much more faith it required to give him back to God. Abraham relied on God’s promise that He would multiply his descendants, and he knew that somehow, God would make a way: "Abraham said, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son,'"

(**Genesis 22:8**). Before Abraham finishes the job, God holds back his hand from the slaughter and provides a ram for a burnt offering in place of Isaac. He reinforces the promise He had made earlier: "Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you," (**Genesis 22:16-17**). If instead Abraham had chosen to ignore God's request to sacrifice his son, he would have forfeited a great blessing. We know what happens when people break faith with God, as we see with the people of Israel after coming out of Egypt. God still brought them into the land as He had promised, but not before forty years of difficult times in the wilderness. God always keeps His promises, regardless of how we respond; but with disobedience comes punishment.

Even though Abraham's actions were something to marvel at from a human perspective, it was not through these actions that he received justification: "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God," (**Romans 4:2**). There is only one who is sinless, that being Yeshua (Jesus). It is through Him alone that we receive justification through belief, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Abraham could never be perfect, and indeed we see him make the wrong decision on multiple occasions. This did not lessen his level of righteousness in God's sight, for he approached God the same way we do: "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness,'" (**Romans 4:3**). This is true not only of Abraham, but of all whom God has accepted as pure, from the beginning of mankind until today: "For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, 'A father of many nations have I made you')," (**Romans 4:16-17**).

How is it, then, that we as well can have faith like Abraham? We see that he did not expect to gain merit in the eyes of God by obedience, but rather believed God at what He said, and this was counted to him as righteousness. Listening to God requires active participation, as God's desire is to change us. In order to fall in line with God's will, we must faithfully obey. No matter how much the command required of Abraham, he knew that his sacrifice was pleasing in God's sight. Although he was not counted as righteous before God due to obedience, he received the fullness of God's blessing when he held nothing of himself back. In short, he proved the truthfulness of his faith by obeying God's commands. If today we choose to conduct ourselves in the same manner of faith, then we can confidently affirm that we too are children of Abraham.