

January 13, 2021 | Hall of Flaw

Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-19 | Abraham, the Fearful

Last week we kicked-off a series called "Hall of Flaw." This six-week series explores the flaws of those listed in Hebrews chapter 11, the "Faith Hall of Fame." Through examining the lives of people like Sarah, Moses, and David, we'll see human weakness overwhelmed by God's faithfulness. Ultimately, as we look at the flaws of those in the Hall of Faith, we'll discover that our actual "role model" is not some historical figure who lived long ago, but Jesus Christ who not only lived then but is also alive today. That though we can look to the heroes of faith from time to time, we must always keep our eyes on the Son of God.

Today, we'll be looking at our first character study: Abraham. Technically, he isn't the first, or the second, or even the third "hall of famer." Instead, Abraham is the fourth to show up in Hebrews 11. We're skipping people like Abel and Enoch because we do not know anything about their flaws. And we'll be covering the life of Noah later on this year. Abraham, on the other hand, is a pretty prominent figure in the OT. We have a pretty good sketch of both his good and bad character traits. But before we get into that, let's set the context of our study in what Hebrews has to say about Abraham.

READ: Hebrews 11:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ By faith **Abraham** obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

READ: Hebrews 11:17-19 (ESV)

¹⁷ By faith **Abraham**, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Now, interestingly, Abraham is one of two individuals in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11 to get more than one mention. Abraham is praised for two faith-deeds, whereas Moses, later on in the chapter, is commended for three.

Now, a few times, the cracks in Abraham's character are on display, but we will only look at two. And, interestingly, both instances share a commonality: fear.

READ: Genesis 12:10-20 (ESV)

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake." ¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go." ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

After this, a lot happens in the life of Abram.

- Abram and his nephew, Lot, go their separate ways, and God blesses Abram.
- Abram rescues Lot from a group of warring kings.
- Abram is blessed by Melchizedek.
- God formalizes his covenant with Abram.
- 11 years after they left the Haran, Sarai (Abram's wife) convinces her husband that God needs help with his plan to give them a son. So, she offers Hagar to be sort of a surrogate since Sarai cannot seem to conceive.
- Abram's name is changed to Abraham, and Sarai's name is changed to Sarah.
- God affirms that Sarah and Abraham will have a son, even though, by this point, Sarah was 90, and Abraham was 100. It had been over 25 years since they left their ancestral home.
- Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom.
- Lot is rescued before Sodom is destroyed.

And then...we come to Gen. 20.

READ: Genesis 20

¹ From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. ² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

⁸ So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." ¹⁰ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" ¹¹ Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' ¹² Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother."'"

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." ¹⁶ To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated." ¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. ¹⁸ For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

These two instances of Abraham giving away his wife bookend about 25 years of Abraham's life. But the primary flaw of Abraham, in both instances, is **fear**. Abraham feared for his life because

he thought God could not preserve his life from Pharaoh. Again, Abraham feared for his life because he believed God could not preserve his life from Abimelech. His fear for the kings of this world was greater than his trust in the King of the universe.

Through that fear, there was heartache everywhere. We're not told what Sarah thought of this whole ordeal, but one can easily imagine that she wasn't too well pleased, to say the least. What's more, both Pharaoh and Abimelech, their families, their servants, and their countries were under imminent threat of death because of the lies born from Abraham's fear.

Fear is the enemy of faith because it not only robs your confidence, but it convinces us that we can control our reality. But we can't. Only God can. Abraham thought he could save his life by giving away his wife. If God said he would give Abraham and Sarah descendants; how, exactly, was Abraham supposed to have a son with Sarah if Abraham and Sarah weren't together anymore? You see, in Abraham thinking he was saving his life, he was really forfeiting his future. Thankfully, God would not allow it. He intervened, sending visions and warnings for these rulers to return Sarah. But it was all because Abraham, in a moment of anxiety, worry, and fear, chose to rely upon himself rather than God.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Fear of the Lord produces faith in the Lord; whereas, fear of the world produces faith in ourselves.

Interestingly, the most frequent command in the bible is to not be afraid. According to Rick Warren, there are precisely 365 instances in scripture where this command (although not in that exact phrasing) shows up. That means there's a "do not be afraid" for each day of the year.

But the bible is clear that not every kind of fear is wrong. Fear itself is not a fallacy, but fear in the wrong thing is a fallacy. And there is only one thing...or person...we should fear: God. A fear of the Lord is greatly encouraged throughout the scriptures (cf. Deut. 10:12; Josh. 4:24; 2 Ki. 17:35-27). In Psalm 33, the Psalmist even says in the most straightforward way possible, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!"

READ: Proverbs 3:5-8 (ESV)

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. ⁸It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Fear is practical atheism. And no matter what causes your anxiety, at its heart, worry is the offspring of unbelief.

READ: Mark 9:35-43 (ESV)

³⁵ While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷ And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.

³⁸ They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Don't miss this; the father set aside his fear for believing in the Son God, which then brought this father's daughter back from the dead.

READ: John 14:1 (NKJV)

[Jesus said,] "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."

A belief in God calms a troubled heart.

So, yes, Abraham in the Hall of Faith. But he also had a significant problem with fear. But later, when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Abraham did not fear but trusted that, even if he were to go through with it, God would raise Isaac from the dead. It took him over 25 years to come to grips with his own fear, but, in the end, Abraham's faith in God won out over the fear in his own heart.

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VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Hall of Flaw | Week 2

TITLE: Abraham, the Fearful

TEXT: Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-19

While it is true that Abraham is in the “Hall of Faith,” this does not mean he was some super-spiritual person who never struggled like we do. In fact, throughout his life, we find that Abraham struggled with fear more than anything else.

How ironic that the man who stepped out by faith to follow God into the great unknown still struggled with anxiety. So much so that Abraham gave away his wife to save his own life...twice! Who would've thought a frightful man like Abraham would end up being in the “Hall of Faith?” What's more, if God can save Abraham from his worries, surely God can also keep us from any doubts or reservations we may have today.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/BXfSail>