

January 20, 2021 | Hall of Flaw

Hebrews 11:11-12 | Sarah, the Skeptic

Two weeks ago, 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." Ultimately, as we look at these deeply flawed human beings, we'll discover that our actual "role model" is not some historical figure who lived long ago, but Jesus Christ. 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.

Last week, we looked at our first character study: Abraham. In that message, we gave a pretty good sketch of both his good and bad character traits. Interestingly, Abraham is one of two individuals in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11 to get more than one mention. And while he is the Father of Israel, he had a severe problem: fear. Because of fear, Abraham gave away his wife...twice. He was more concerned with saving his own skin than protecting his wife and remaining faithful to God. Because of fear, Abraham thought he was saving his life, but, in reality, he was really forfeiting it. Yet God would not allow it. He intervened. God remained faithful to a faithless and fearful Abraham.

Today, we get to look at Abraham's wife, Sarah. Unlike her husband, her primary flaw was doubt. How ironic that Abraham, a man known for his optimism, would have a wife known for her skepticism. Yet God was not deterred by her distrustful nature. Even when her faith wavered, He remained loyal. So much so that eventually Sarah, holding the tangible proof of a faith in God and thinking back on her own disbelief, laughs. "How observed...how ridiculous...how comical," she chuckles to herself, "that I ever doubted One so faithful."

But before we dive into her flaws, let's first read what the writer of Hebrews has to say about Sarah.

READ: Hebrews 11:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ By faith [Sarah](#) herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

What a magnanimous and glowing endorsement of Sarah. Her entire life summed up in a single sentence as an individual of faith. Because of her faith, God grants Sarah the power to become a mother even though she and Abraham were well-past such years. By faith, she trusted God,

who then gave her a son whose descendant grew into a mighty nation. Wow. But as you know, it isn't as simple as that, is it?

Let's go back and read the story of Sarah.

READ: Genesis 15:1-6 (ESV)

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ² But Abram said, "O LORD God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

So, no doubt, Abraham then explains this whole thing to Sarah. And while Abraham believed the LORD, Sarah was ***skeptical***. Now, we cannot be too harsh on her. From our perspective, she did have some legitimate objections. For instance, they had walked with God for over ten years by this point, and God hadn't provided an heir yet.

What's more, Sarah wasn't stupid. They might not have had the knowledge we do today, which explains why age prevents a woman from conceiving, but she knew enough of the facts to make an educated conclusion: old women simply didn't have babies. It was already an impossibility to conceive when they set out by faith all those years ago, and now, with each new passing year, it became more and more unlikely.

So, Sarah comes up with a plan to "help" God.

READ: Genesis 16:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵ And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave

my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" ⁶ But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

So, what happened when the skeptic in Sarah overcame her faith? She looked for a loophole. Maybe, when God said he would give them a son, Sarah thought he meant it in a way that coincided with their customs. After all, there have been many patriarchs who couldn't produce an heir on their own. And so, for the time, there was an utterly common and rather obvious solution: surrogacy. Abraham would have an heir by law if not by blood. Indeed, she thought, this is what God had intended.

Isn't it interesting that when God doesn't play by our rules or act according to our timeline, how easy we begin to doubt? We think we know how God will act. But when reality goes contrary to what we thought, we, all of a sudden, have a crisis of faith. And those moments, when our skepticism overcomes our faith, it is because we have put our trust in our plan, our assumptions, and our wisdom rather than in our God.

Now, sad to say, even after making a mess of their family, Sarah still held a secret skepticism about how God would give her child. In fact, in Gen 17, 13 years after the birth of Ishmael and all that drama, God formalizes his covenant with Abraham and Sarah, reassures them of his promise to give them a child. God even tells them to name the child "Isaac," which means laughter. (This will become extremely applicable to the story in a moment.) God then provides Abram and Sarai with new names. And then, right after that, in Gen 18, we're told of another encounter between God and Abraham where Sarah's skepticism is once again revealed:

READ: Genesis 18:1-15 (ESV)

¹ And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, **three** men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, "O LORD, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So **they** said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it

quickly. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before **them**. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ **They** said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." ¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹² So Sarah **laughed** to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah **laugh** and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'" ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah **denied** it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was **afraid**. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Sarah's skepticism, un-checked, led her to be cynical. This made her laugh, giving a literal voice to her own faithlessness. Yet when God confronted them, she did not admit it but denied it because she was afraid.

Skepticism → Cynicism → Denial → Fear

From there, we have Abraham interceding on Sodom's behalf. This fails, of course. But God then delivers Lot before destroying Sodom. After that, we have the embarrassment of Abraham giving away his wife for the second time in Gen. 20. But then we come to Gen. 21.

READ: Genesis 21:1-7 (ESV)

¹ The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. ² And Sarah **conceived** and **bore** Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." ⁷ And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would **nurse** children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

God named Isaac a full year before Isaac was born. He even called him "Laughter" as not only a foreshadowing of Sarah's own skepticism fueled laughter in Gen. 18 but also a foreshadowing of the joy and laughter that Sarah experienced when Isaac was finally born. Sarah's mocking laugh in Gen 18 is replaced by the genuine laughter of Gen 21 because God is faithful when we are not.

What's more, this laughter does not stop in Gen 21, for, in Sarah's joy, we too can laugh. Isaac is the promised son, which confirms every promise of God since. Through God, we also can laugh.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

A faith rooted in the word of the Lord is a faith that overcomes even a life-long battle with doubt.

In this, I'm reminded of the father who had a demon-possessed child that said to Jesus in Mark 9:24, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Or, when in Matthew 14, Jesus catches Peter as he's falling beneath the waves, "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased." Or, quite possibly, the most famous account of doubt and skepticism comes at the very end of John's gospel.

READ: John 20:24-31 (ESV)

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

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A faith rooted in the word of the Lord is a faith that overcomes even a life-long battle with doubt.

When confronted with our doubt, may we ask the same question the Lord asked of Sarah in Gen 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" To this rhetorical, may we laughingly reply, as Sarah did, "No." What a funny thought. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He not only gave an

elderly woman a son, but He would later provide a virgin girl with a baby boy that would eventually conquer death. So, no. Nothing is too hard for our Lord.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Hall of Flaw | Week 3

TITLE: Sarah, the Skeptic

TEXT: Hebrews 11:11-12

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: