

**Lesson 33**  
**The Awakening of Faith**  
**Hebrews 11:11-12**

A very thought-provoking question is, “How long is time with God?” Or another way of stating it is, “Can God ever wait too long?” This becomes a very practical question when we have asked God for something in our prayer life or we are claiming some promise, expecting God to work. Often we think God is too slow and that He ought to act at our whims. We may think that when God does not do something we want Him to do immediately that He has lost track of time. Perhaps when we first make a prayer request to God, our confidence is great. We wait a day, a week, a month and still there is no answer. Has God forgotten? Our spirit of anticipation begins to cool off to a spirit of frustration. Finally we conclude that if He doesn’t do something soon it will be too late. Out of pure frustration, we take the matter into our own hand and try to do something that only God Himself can do. Perhaps when we have acted in this fleshly manner, instead of letting God work out the details, we find ourselves doing some pretty stupid things.

Has God forgotten? Has He let us down? No, often we must learn that God’s time schedule and ours are different. We can only see one side of the situation. Our perspective is limited and we only see the part and not the whole. Because we are finite and limited, we often do not understand what God is doing. When this limited perspective is combined with impatience, the only thing that can result is havoc.

Questioning God’s faithfulness, sovereignty and power goes back as far as Adam and Eve, but it is clearly seen in the life of Sarah. Sarah was a super-saint for she made God’s “Hall of Fame,” but she gained the reputation of being a woman of faith later in her life through one particular incident. Hebrews 11 is pointing out the highlights of faith in these various Old Testament believers, and the record purposely neglects their failures and shortcomings because it is stressing the positive aspects of their faith. However, unless we see the failures, we often have little appreciation for the great acts of faith.

The account of Sarah’s life begins in Genesis 11 and runs through Genesis 23. Little, if anything, would lead us to believe in the intervening chapters in Genesis that Sarah was distinguished for her faith. She had saving faith and she was undoubtedly saved around the same time that God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. Sarah was submissive to her husband and the Apostle Peter uses her as an example of holy womanhood.

***“For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear”*** (1 Peter 3:5-6).

It is my opinion that Sarah did believe in God’s promise to Abraham but much of her faith was due to Abraham’s strong faith which led her along. I would suggest to you that she left the land of Chaldea believing the promise, but her faith was weak and she was motivated more by her

husband's belief than by her own.

Yet, we are going to see how this woman's faith was awakened by God in such a spectacular way that she was given a place in the annals of the heroes and heroines of faith in the Old Testament.

#### THE WILLINGNESS OF SARAH'S FAITH - Hebrews 11:11

***“By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life ...”*** -- The very first words we read about Sarah are, “And Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Gen. 11:30). This was a blow to Sarah because she knew that God had promised to Abraham, her husband, a great nation from his loins.

***“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”***” (Gen. 12:1-3)

Sarah was barren, and this great nation could never come into existence unless Abraham had a son. God gave the promise to Abraham and Sarah undoubtedly knew about the promise because Abraham told her, but God never spoke to Sarah directly. The words “and will make you a great nation,” must have rung in Sarah's ears.

Sarah probably became initially excited about the promise made to Abraham, and she saw that she had a definite part in the bringing forth of a great nation. Sarah had a desire. It was a normal, God-given desire, and one that most women have--she wanted to give her husband an heir, a son, to carry on the family name. Sarah wanted to please her husband by giving him a son that would be the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. Yet she was barren. When she left Ur of the Chaldees to go to the Promised Land, she was about 65 years old and she thought that it was still humanly possible for her to have a child at that age. She knew that God had promised to make a great nation out of Abraham, and God could not do it without her being the mother of the child. She undoubtedly thought that God would fulfill the seed aspect of the covenant immediately because she was getting old fast.

Sarah probably thought she would get pregnant right away, but nothing happened even in their long delay in Haran before they ever got to the land. When they arrived in Canaan, the Promised Land, she probably said, “Now, surely, God will begin to keep His promise. Surely God will act - surely I will have a son for Abraham.” But there was no child. After Abraham had a great military victory in Canaan, God again appeared to him to promise him a son.

***“And Abraham said, ‘O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ And He took him outside and***

***said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be’” (Gen. 15:2-5).***

Again Sarah got her hopes up, when Abraham told her that God was going to keep His promise. But weeks passed by, eventually the weeks became months, the months became years and the years became unbearable. She became frustrated, distressed and depressed because she was getting old and past the age of bearing a child. Perhaps she reasoned like this, “I’m getting older by the day. Doesn’t God know that? Doesn’t God know that every day that passes by cuts down the chances of giving Abraham an heir? Why doesn’t He act? He promised. Has God forgotten? If He doesn’t do something soon, it will be too late!”

Finally, Sarah could bear it no longer and she pushed the panic button, when Abraham was in Egypt, they picked up an Egyptian woman who was Sarah’s servant. It was the custom in that day that if a woman could not have a child herself, her maid or servant would have one in her place and the child would be adopted into the family. All such children were regarded as true sons and full heirs. Sarah panicked, stopped trusting in God, turned to her own reasoning, and took things into her own hands. She was determined to give Abraham a son, and so she sent Hagar, her slave, to Abraham to bear him a son.

***“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, “Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her.” And Abraham listened to the voice of Sarai” (Gen. 16:1-2).***

This was a tragic mistake, for Hagar conceived and brought forth Ishmael. Ishmael was a son of the flesh and not of the promise. God disciplined Abraham and Sarah for their unbelief by making Ishmael and his offspring fierce enemies of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael, the father of the Arabs, has been against the Jews from that time until now.

Fleshy acts of unbelief always get Christians into trouble, for we become objects of God’s loving discipline.

Four years later, God appeared to Abraham again to give him a message concerning Sarah.

***“Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her” (Gen. 17:15-16).***

This must have shocked poor old Abraham, for he thought that it was impossible for Sarah and him to have a child. Furthermore, he thought that they had solved the problem humanly. But Sarah was to have a son. Abraham was filled with amazement, and he laughed. ***“Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’” (Gen. 17:17)*** Abraham did not have a laugh of unbelief, but the laughter of excitement. It was the same kind of laugh any of us might have when we realize that God has done some supernatural work for us.

Sometime later God assured Abraham that he would have a son and sent him in to Sarah. ***“Then they said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he said, ‘Behold, in the tent.’ And he said, ‘I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him”*** (Gen 18:9-10). Sarah and Abraham were old. She was 90 and he was 100. They had waited 25 years and now they concluded it was impossible for them to have a child. Sarah heard the conversation between God and Abraham because she was secretly listening in the tent. When she heard these words, she laughed. But Sarah’s laugh was different from Abraham’s. Her laugh was the laugh of unbelief. She doubted. She did not believe that God could do it. It had been too long. It was a biological impossibility. She just thought that she could never get pregnant, and had a big laugh over the whole matter. ***“And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?’”*** (Gen 18:12)

God then spoke to Abraham about Sarah’s laugh of unbelief, and Abraham confronted Sarah and she denied that she did it.

***“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? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year and Sarah shall have a son.’ Sarah denied it however, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. And He said, ‘No, but you did laugh’”*** (Gen 18:13-15).

She lied because she was afraid of God and Abraham.

It never pays to lie. We might lie to men but we cannot lie without God knowing about it and taking definite action against us.

From this point on Sarah believed God. Her faith was awakened and she brought forth a son.

Finally, the child of promise came and they named him Isaac, which means laughter, and then Sarah laughed again with the laugh of amazement and belief. ***“And Sarah said, ‘God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me’”*** (Gen.21:6).

***“... since she considered Him faithful who had promised ...”*** -- God waited 25 years before He gave the fulfillment of the promise to Sarah. Why? Because God had many lessons to teach Sarah. What were these lessons? First, she learned patience and something about the faithfulness of God. She understood and grasped for the first time that God is faithful to fulfill His promises. ***“Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary”*** (Isa. 40:31). Second, she learned something about faith. Her initial doubt gave way to faith. This faith came after God repeatedly revealed Himself to Abraham, and Sarah learned by repeated declarations of God’s promise. Third, God’s overall purpose for this waiting was to teach Sarah and Abraham about the power of God. The purpose is expressed in the rebuke of Sarah by Abraham. ***“Is anything too difficult (hard) for the LORD”*** (Gen. 18:14a)? Absolutely nothing is too hard for the Lord. God can and does do the impossible when He promises to do

so.

Faith is crucial if we are going to see God work in our experience. God promised a son to Sarah for Abraham, but the conception and the birth of that son would have never come about apart from Sarah's faith. Faith is the means whereby we believe God and see Him work in our experience. Without faith it is impossible to please God!

Barclay, a Christian scholar puts the concept of faith into good words. He says,

Men spend the greater part of their lives putting limitations on the power of God. Faith is the ability to lay hold on that strength which is made perfect in our weakness, that grace which is sufficient for all things, in such a way that the things which are humanly impossible become divinely possible. With God all things are possible and, therefore, the word impossible is a word which should have no place in the vocabulary of the Christian and of the Christian Church.

THE FRUIT OF SARAH'S FAITH - Hebrews 11:12

*"... therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that ..."* -- Abraham was also unable to procreate, but God did the impossible. He worked a miracle.

*"For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain 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') in the sight of Him who he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, 'SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.' And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform"* (Rom. 4:16-21).

Both Abraham and Sarah had faith in God's promise and without that faith they would have never had a son.

Both Abraham and Sarah had faith. It is important that both the husband and wife have faith in God. The woman must have her own faith and not lean on her husband. Husband and wife should work together, pray together and make their decisions together. Even Sarah had to believe, and a Christian marriage is not healthy if there is not a believing wife.

*"...as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE."* --'Abraham's and Sarah's belief in the promise of God brought great fruit, for from them has come all physical Jews and all true believers, whether Jew or Gentile, who have believed in Jesus Christ, the Lord

and Savior.

Who knows what God might do with any of us if we begin to take His promises in the Bible seriously! By faith, we can do wonders, and without faith we can do nothing!

## CONCLUSION

### Saved

Christian, will you believe God for what seems to be humanly impossible? Is there anything too hard for God? Don't panic, but wait patiently for God to work. Do you have unsaved loved ones? Don't stop praying, for time is relative with God! Do you need Christian friends? Don't give up, for in time God will bring you true Christian friends! Do you have some crushing crisis? Don't despair, but wait on God who will do all of His good pleasure! Remember, Christian, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Each time you take your life out of God's hands and put it into your own hands, you are in for havoc.

### Unsaved

You who are without Christ, do you know the Bible says you are a sinner, separated from God and under God's wrath? You are in a hopeless and helpless condition, but God can do the impossible. Nothing is too hard for God. God alone can save you and grant you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. What must you do? You must trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. By faith, you must trust Jesus Christ as your deliverer from sin and turn to Him as King of your life.