

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

The Faith of Sarah

Hebrews 11:11-12

Today we celebrate the faith of a single woman... the effects of that faith are still felt four thousand years later

And today we celebrate the marvelous unity of a married couple... a godly man and a godly woman who walked together in faith under the astounding promises of God

When God created the first woman, he designated her to be a “helper suitable” for her husband

In creating her, God also created the first marriage... a beautiful partnership whose ultimate fulfillment will only be seen in the heavenly unity of Christ and His church

We live in an age in which both excellent womanhood and genuine marriage as God intended it are under vicious attack by the world, the flesh, and the devil

Hebrews 11:11-12 celebrates a godly woman who changed the world BY FAITH in the context of her roles as a wife and a mother

Hebrews 11 thus celebrates the timelessness and beauty of these roles

In an age in which the feminine beauty industry is creating an artificial display—cosmetics, botox, and especially plastic surgery—all designed to stave off the inevitable onslaught of aging, remarkably the biblical ideal of beauty is this godly and AGED woman... a woman whose greatest beauty was displayed when she was ninety years old, wrinkled, and expecting a miracle baby

A woman whose beauty did not come from outward adornment or braided hair, but from the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit who was trusting in God for a miracle

ESV Hebrews 11:11-12 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.

I. Abraham and Sarah: Co-Heirs of a Gracious Promise of Life

A. The Blessed Gift of Marriage

1. God's original plan

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

2. Marriage at the center of it all

a. By creating man "male and female", He created the necessity for marriage

b. By God's ordained path of one man and one woman becoming one flesh would this beautiful plan be consummated

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

3. The "cultural mandate": a command neither male nor female could do alone

4. The woman created to be a "helper suitable" for the man

Genesis 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

5. Through marriage, the man and his wife would become one flesh... naked and feeling no shame

6. Through childbearing, Eve would become the "mother of all the living"

Genesis 3:20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

7. From her seed ultimately the Christ would be born

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

B. Abraham and Sarah: The Example of a Godly Marriage

1. In Hebrews 11, we have one example of faith in action after another
2. This majestic “Hall of Faith” highlights both men and women...
3. Here, in verses 11-12, we have a focus on Sarah, in the overall context of Abraham’s life of faith
4. Together, they make up a picture of a godly couple, blessed by the grace of God, living by faith in the promises of God
5. These days (as in every era), marriage is under the direct assault of the devil
 - a. Disharmony at home—the failure of a husband and wife to live as one by faith—is the origin of much of the sorrow in the world
 - b. This morning’s study will help all married people who listen to reestablish JOINT FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD as the centerpiece of your marriage
 - c. A husband’s primary task toward his wife, then, should be the development of a robust faith in his wife’s heart... that she should be unshakeable in her trust in the promises of God
 - d. A wife’s primary task as well should be the same: that her husband would have a healthy, vigorous faith in the promises of God
 - e. This is the sweetness of a Christian marriage: husbands like Abraham, wives like Sarah

C. Abraham the Father, Sarah the Mother of the Faithful

1. Abraham is frequently presented in the Bible as our father in faith

Romans 4:16-17 [Abraham] is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-- the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

2. In 1 Peter 3, Sarah is presented as the mother of all godly women who, like her, trust in God:

1 Peter 3:5-6 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

3. John Owen:

“As Abraham was the father of the faithful, or of the church, so she was the mother of it, so as that the distinct mention of her faith was necessary. She was the free woman from whence the church sprang.”

Galatians 4:22-23 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

Isaiah 51:1-2 Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; ² look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many.

D. Sarah Indispensible to God’s Promise to Abraham

1. The promises to Abraham are to be fulfilled primarily through Abraham’s offspring
2. Abraham was to be the “father of nations”, and was promised to have descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand in the seashore
3. MOST ESPECIALLY this promise:
4. God intended that all this happen through Sarah, his wife; this was not completely necessary, for Abraham could have biologically had children by other women... indeed he did, through Hagar (as we shall discuss in a moment) and Keturah
5. God was upholding the original pattern of marriage: a believing man, a believing woman, a vast heritage of godly children

Malachi 2:15 Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.

6. So we see that, in Christ, man is not independent of woman, nor woman of man:

1 Corinthians 11:11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

E. “Co-Heirs” of a Gracious Promise of Life

1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1. Thus does Peter call a believing wife a “co-heir” with her believing husband

2. They share the burdens of trials on earth, and then the joys of receiving the promises afterward

F. Question: Does this Passage Refer to Sarah?

1. NIV vs. ESV

Hebrews 11:11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age-- and Sarah herself was barren-- was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

^{ESV} Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

2. Why? Good reasons...

- a. The general flow of the chapter has a primary focus on Abraham, and verse 12 grammatically seems to be talking about Abraham
- b. Even more significantly, verse 11 has a very masculine expression:

“katabole spermatos”... “to conceive seed” certainly focuses primarily on the father’s reproductive contribution

Thus one good commentator puts it this way:

By faith he [Abraham] also, together with barren Sarah, received power to beget children...

3. BUT YET... Sarah is mentioned by name, and the simplest translation focuses on her straight through; therefore most translations (KJV, NASB, RSV, ESV...etc.) say ***By faith, Sarah...***
4. Either way: Abraham and Sarah are certainly linked forever in the birth of the miracle baby, Isaac; and Sarah is presented in 1 Peter 3 as a role model for godly women... so today is her day!!

II. The Development of Sarah’s Faith: Overcoming Obstacles

A. Sarah’s Faith on Display Initially

1. Like Abraham, Sarah left Ur of the Chaldees and Haran to settle in the Promised Land
2. Like Abraham, Sarah lived in a tent and moved about from place to place in the Promised Land

B. Sarah’s Barrenness an Ongoing Test

1. Abraham's promise focused on his descendents
2. BUT Sarah was barren... year after year, she had no child
3. Even more difficult at this point, she was past the age of bearing children; by the time Isaac was conceived, she was more than 90 years old

Genesis 17:17 Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"

4. Thus did Abraham cry out to God in Genesis 15:

Genesis 15:2 "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

5. The trial went on, as Genesis 16 began:

Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

C. The Great Misstep: Hagar (Genesis 16)

Genesis 16:1-4 she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

1. There is no doubt that this was a very serious mistake
2. In Genesis 12, God had already protected Sarai's purity by afflicting Pharaoh's household with a disease because he was merely INTENDING to take Sarai to be his wife; Abraham had said she was his sister; God's protection of Sarah at that moment was a clear indication of the sacredness of marriage and especially the specialness of Abraham and Sarah's marriage
3. This is a clear example of someone seeking to fulfill God's supernatural promise by earthly, even sinful means; we will see it again later with Rebekah's desire to cheat her husband Isaac and lie to him so that he will bless Jacob and not Esau... the story of faith is not a pure one, not an unbroken line of spiritual successes... it is the story of the triumph of God's gracious purposes in the midst of great human sin and failure

D. God Clearly Identifies Sarah as the Mother of the Promised Child

1. Like Abraham, Sarah received a similar promise from God concerning her offspring... by this, God clearly identified Sarah as the woman of promise as Abraham was the man of Promise

Genesis 17:15-16 God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

2. Key moment in Redemptive History:

Genesis 17:19 Then God said, "... your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

E. Sarah's Laughter: A Display of Unbelief

1. As the time drew near for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham and Sarah, three men came to visit Abraham... and Abraham and Sarah offered them rich hospitality, setting a meal before them
2. It turns out it was the angel of the Lord—the preincarnate Christ—and two angels
3. After the meal, the Lord spoke up and made an amazing prediction about Sarah:

Genesis 18:9-12 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. ¹⁰ Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

4. This laugh was a response of unbelief; this should not in any way cause us to stumble; actually it is a great encouragement to us
 - a. Faith is not given to us as some prefabricated mansion, ready built, in its maturity the moment you receive it
 - b. Faith must GROW like any living thing

2 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more

- c. The disciples were consistently called by Jesus

O you of little faith

- d. Peter and the other disciples could not stretch their faith enough to include Christ's death on the cross for their sins; that's why Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus said He was going to die; Jesus in turn rebuked Peter saying,

Matthew 16:23 Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

- e. Sarah was a woman of faith... that is clearly testified to; but there are no perfect heroes of the faith whose faith never wavered
- i) It was through unbelief that Isaac was about to bless Esau, the one that God had rejected
 - ii) It was through unbelief that Moses "looked this way and that and murdered the Egyptian taskmaster"
 - iii) It was through unbelief that Gideon asked for the fleece to be laid out a second time after God had already given him one sign
 - iv) It was through unbelief that Samson slept with a prostitute
 - v) It was through unbelief that David committed adultery with Bathsheba
 - vi) Frankly, if our faith didn't need bolstering and strengthening and nourishment, Hebrews 11 would never have been written! It would have been unnecessary
- f. Sarah laughed through unbelief, as is proven by the correction the Lord had to give her:

Genesis 18:13-14 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

5. By this, God sought to restore her focus on HIMSELF and on His power to fulfill the promise...
6. Since this is what Hebrews 11 says Sarah was thinking about, we can see that God's REPETITION of the promise was essential to the development of her faith

F. Sarah's Fear and Lie... and God's Gentle Dealing

Genesis 18:15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

G. The Overall Lesson: “Faith must develop, because even heroes and heroines of the faith were not perfect in faith”

H. God’s Gracious Overlooking and Covering of Sin

1. These Heroes and Heroines of the Faith were not perfect people
2. Notice how gracious God is to celebrate such imperfect people
3. God is able to overlook the smoldering of sin and unbelief and to celebrate the fire of faith
4. Clear example: David

Psalm 40:12 For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

1 Kings 15:5 For David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the LORD's commands all the days of his life-- except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

2 Chronicles 29:2 [Hezekiah] did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done.

5. In the end, the grace of God in Christ overwhelms our defects and celebrates our faith and its fruit

III. The Immediate Outcomes of Sarah’s Faith: Consideration and Strength

^{ESV} Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

A. She Considered God Faithful

1. Parallel statement to Abraham in Romans 4
 - a. What Paul says of Abraham

Romans 4:19-21 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

- b. Paul delves into the mental process of faith there... what Abraham considered, what he was pondering and working through
- c. So also Sarah here

2. Her faith went BEYOND the thing promised to the ONE who had made the promise
 - a. The true object of our faith is not the things God promised in the first place, but God Himself who makes the promise
 - b. God is the focus of Sarah's mind; her heart is absorbed in God... His goodness, His power, His attributes, His faithfulness
3. Mental process... consideration... meditation
 - a. The Greek word refers to a considered opinion, a reckoning, a judgment... she was in effect JUDGING GOD and finding Him faithful
 - b. "Who is it that is making this promise?"
 - c. "Is anything too difficult for the God who made heaven and earth?"
 - d. "God created the universe out of nothing... surely he can call a baby out of my seemingly dead womb."
 - e. "God cannot lie; He has made the promise... He will certainly keep it! God is faithful to everything he says!"
4. This mental process is greatly glorifying to God
5. By this process we also must glorify God
6. We must look at each of the vast promises of the Bible made to us in Christ and do the same sort of faith-filled reasoning
7. We must "consider Him faithful who has made these promises"
 - a. God has promised He will never leave us or forsake us... do we consider Him faithful to that promise?
 - b. God has promised to not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, but with the temptation, to make a way of escape... do we consider Him faithful to that promise?
 - c. God has promised He will sustain our faith to the very end of our lives... do we consider Him faithful to that promise?
 - d. God has promised He will acknowledge us as His children on Judgment Day, covering all our sins... do we consider Him faithful to that promise?
 - e. God has promised He will raise our bodies from the grave and give us glorious resurrection bodies... do we consider Him faithful to that promise?

B. She Received Strength to Conceive Children

1. By faith, Sarah's physical body was changed
 - a. All her life she had been barren
 - b. Now, at age 90, she was beyond the age of bearing children
 - c. God did something directly in her physical body to give her a capability she did not possess before

Genesis 18:14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.

2. The same statement is made to Mary concerning the birth of Christ

Luke 1:34-37 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ ¶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

3. We should not underestimate this amazing statement
 - a. The original expression says she received POWER... the exact same word as in Acts 1:8
 - b. God is able to give us abilities... even physical abilities... that we did not possess before
 - c. Sarah's barrenness was well established over decades of inability to conceive and bear children
 - d. But God, BECAUSE OF HER FAITH, transformed her body and made it ABLE to do something it formerly was unable to do
 - e. God is able to make us able... He is powerful to give us power... He is energetic to make us energetic

Colossians 1:29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Illus. George Whitefield's astonishing energy level... even to the last day of his life

But... the real issue is this one: God's ability ultimately to raise our dead lifeless bodies out of the grave!!

4. From DEAD to ALIVE

Romans 4:19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-- since he was about a hundred years old-- and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

Hebrews 11:12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

- a. This is the consistent pattern hovering in the background of Hebrews 11...
God's power over death

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him

Hebrews 11:13 All these people were still living by faith when they died.

Hebrews 11:19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Hebrews 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Hebrews 11:22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

Hebrews 11:35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.

- b. The Author of Hebrews is consistently pointing upward to God's power to raise the dead... so that we believers will be absolutely UNDAUNTED in life and fearless in death

IV. The Ultimate Outcome of Sarah's (and Abraham's Faith): Descendants

^{ESV} Hebrews 11:12 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.

A. Because of Sarah's (and Abraham's faith)... God's Promise Could Come True

1. The verse restates the obstacles to the promise AS WELL AS the promise itself
2. The promise was fulfilled physically
3. The promise is being fulfilled spiritually

B. The First Long-Term Result: A Vast Array of Physical Descendents

1. Seventy-five souls when Jacob entered Egypt
2. Six hundred thousand men, plus women and children at the time of the Exodus
 - a. Probably at least 2 – 3 million people!!!
 - b. Far more in number than the stars that Abraham could have counted with his naked eye
3. These were ALL descended from Sarah... all of them... the Jewish nation
4. The incredible impact of the Jews on history all stems from the faith of this one elderly couple... and for our focus this morning, from one godly woman, Sarah

C. The Eternal, Long-Term Result: A Even More Vast Array of Spiritual Descendents

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

D. The Greatest Result: Christ

1. Jesus was descended from Abraham and Sarah as well
2. Jesus was the seed of Abraham through whom all peoples on earth were blessed
3. He came from Sarah's body as much as He came from Abraham's!!

E. Celebrate: the Eternal Consequences of one Faith-filled Man or Woman... even better, one Faith-Filled Couple

V. Application

A. Come to Christ

B. Understand the Growth and Development of Faith

C. Husbands and Wives: Live Your Married Lives by Faith in God's Astounding Promises

1. First, be certain that the promises of God are the center of your marriage

- a. Don't be like the pagans in your marriage... plodding along from paycheck to paycheck, living for the things of this world
- b. Don't live as though the promises of God were nothing
- c. Make certain that the intentions and purposes of God are the structure of your married life
- d. Concentrate on the promises of God for full redemption:
- e. Make your marriage centered on the TWO INFINITE JOURNEYS
- f. Study God's promises deeply and trust them:
- g. Promises for physical provision

Matthew 6:31-33 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

- h. Promises for answered prayer

Matthew 21:22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

- i. Promises for constant presence

Hebrews 13:5 God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

- j. Promises for guidance

James 1:5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

- k. Promises for spiritual protection

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

- l. Promises for final salvation

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

- m. Promises for physical resurrection

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

n. Promises for the New Heaven and the New Earth

2 Peter 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

2. Second, seek to develop each other's faith by prayer and the ministry of the word

a. Husbands, take the lead in this, as Christ washes the church with water through the word... so bolster your wife's faith daily by the word

b. Wives, live as Peter commanded you do in the pattern of Sarah:

1 Peter 3:1-2 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

1 Peter 3:3-6 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴ Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

D. Overcoming Obstacles by Considering God

1. Understand the amazing promises of God
2. Feel the weight of the obstacles hindering the fulfillment
3. Do not waver through unbelief regarding the promises of God...
4. Be strengthened in your faith and give glory to God
5. Be fully convinced that God has power to fulfill all of His promises