Hoping Contrary to Hope?

Alex Schneider · Genesis 15:4.6 · September 29, 2024



Do you sometimes find it hard to believe God's promises? Do you doubt verses (such as Romans 8:28) that God always has a perfect plan? Do you often wonder how God can still fulfill His seemingly impossible promises in your life? Then you can learn from Abraham, the "Father of all believers".

Where Faith Begins

Faith is not a calculation of probability and never asks: "How likely is this statement from God?" Faith begins where we have no other explanation than God's power. Abraham's great faith was demonstrated by an almost unbelievable promise from God: "*One who will come from your own body shall be your heir*" (Gen 15:4).

Why is faith needed here? Because every human reason and every biological probability contradicts God's promise. When Abraham receives the same promise again sometime later, he tells God that it is impossible for a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman to conceive a child (Gen 17:17). Any biologist would agree. But not the believer. The Spirit of God tells us quite simply: "*And Abraham believed in the Lord*" (Gen 15:6). Between verse 5 (the promise of a great descendant) and verse 6 (Abraham's faith), there is not a trace of unbelief or accompanying suspicion. **Abraham took God at His word.**

God's Comment

This is one of the few events in the Old Testament on which God comments in detail in the New Testament (Romans 4:17b-22). Let us read how He evaluates Abraham's faith [1]:

- "*... Him whom he believed - God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did*" (v. 17b): Abraham was dead in the sense (the Letter to the Hebrews calls him "first dead") that his biological clock had run out and he could no longer father children with Sarah. Is this a problem for God, who already sees the non-existent - the yet uncreated Isaac? In fact, God often "kills" any reasonable, logical, or rational basis upon which we can place our trust.

- "*... who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.'*" (v. 18): "Contrary to hope" means that every reason and everything, really everything, stood against God's promise. Everything that could have given Abraham hope was gone. Now "only" God was left, and that was what gave him the hope he needed. Hebrews 11:11 speaks of the begetting of Isaac as "past the age" – but God does not depend on "season".

- "*And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb*" (v. 19): One of the great models of faith, Georg Müller, once said: "The realm of faith begins where probability ends, and where sight and reason fail". Abraham did not look rationally at the old bodies but at God. Great faith is shown when we do not look at the insurmountable mountain before our feet, but at God who can remove the mountain.

- "*He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God*" (v. 20): unbelief is nothing but doubt. Doubtful questions reveal unbelief, which is nothing more than a lack of trust. We do not consider God to be trustworthy. John goes so far as to write: "*He who does not believe God has made him a liar*" (1 Jn 5:10). At the same time, Paul shows us in this verse the goal of such a test of faith: God is to be given the glory. The more improbable, illogical, and impossible God's promise is the greater His glory [2]. The offspring of a couple in their 30s is hardly worth mentioning, but an inheritance for the biologically infertile testifies to the greatness of God. Faith in hopeless situations honors God.

- "*... and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform*" (v. 21): Even if Abraham had doubts in between (see Gen 17:17), God here confirms him with full assurance. Scientists would object: "You can only be sure of facts". But in the realm of faith, this is a mistake: we do not feel our salvation, we do not hope for it, but we know that we have it (1 Jn 5:13). Why is this so? Because God can do what He has promised. True faith is not based on empirical values and calculations of probability but on one thing: the omnipotence of God.

Do you trust God?

Ultimately, the question of the greatness of our faith brings us to our image of God:

- **Do I see God as omnipotent?** "*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*." (Lk 18:27)

- **Do I think God is trustworthy?** "*I will put my trust in him.*" (Heb 2:13)

- **In my opinion, is God faithful to what He says?** "*...because she judged Him faithful who had promised*." (Heb 11:11)

Simple faith that God stands by His Word honors Him because He sees His children blindly throwing themselves on Him (in a positive sense) and exclaiming: "I don't know how this is going to work, but I trust you anyway!" **God honors faith because faith honors God.**

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24)

"*Increase our faith!*" (Lk 17:5)

Footnotes:

[1] In regard to how the Lord Jesus evaluates different "depths of faith", see the following verses: Mt 8:10, 26; 9:28; 14:31; 15:28; 17:20; Mk 4:40; 11:24.

[2] How likely is it that a man can walk on water (Mt 14)? How logical can it be to feed more than 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish (Jn 6)? Is there any reliable evidence that a dead person will wake up (Jn 11)? How reasonable is it that an incurable disease can be cured by touching a piece of clothing (Mark 5)? In all these cases, God received great glory by turning the laws of probability on their head and proving His omnipotence.

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