

## Faith That Works - September 1984

It isn't long since my wife and I, with our children, were in the throes of packing five years of life in the United States into suitcases and boxes ready to return to Great Britain. Where in the world did we accumulate all that junk? Amid the boxes and paper, dust and perspiration, it was good at times to take a break and linger over some item that brought back memories. Like the old photograph albums or, in our case, boxes of photographs not yet in albums. We spread them out on the kitchen table, determined that before we returned to England we would put them in albums. The task was punctuated by great hilarity as the children discovered what we were up to. 'Cor, didn't they wear strange clothes in your days, Dad! 'What in the world do you mean by "your days"? I'm still around aren't I?' 'Man, Dad, you're getting ancient!' — said in a tone suggesting that, being in my early 40's, I was ready for the geriatric ward! Finally they tired of looking through the albums and left us to linger over those old photos.

### A Supernatural Life

Ours has been a very privileged life. God has blessed us by calling us to preach his Word amongst the nations of this world: North Africa, France, then several years in South America, then five years in North America, plus visits to many other countries. And photographs from every place jog the memory of the blessing of God. We recalled meetings in which great things happened — people saved or healed, childless couples we have prayed for who have since sent photographs of bouncing babies because God has answered prayer. All these remind me again that we are a people who should be constantly enjoying the supernatural of God. All the promises God made to the children of Israel, the covenants he made with them, with the attendant blessings and curses, are now in force for you and me. We are born as heirs of the great promises given to our forefather Abraham. 'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise' (Gal 3:29).

### Keys to God's Promises

#### KEY 1 - OBEDIENCE

If we're to appropriate these blessings we must learn to use the faith that Abraham used to unlock the promise. One of those keys is given us in Hebrew 11:8: 'By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going'. Let me lift the story out of the Bible and re-express it in contemporary language for you. Abraham stood before the Lord, feeling sad at the loss of his father Terah. It was his desire that Sarah would bear a child so that together they might be comforted. It was then that God broke in upon his reverie to give him a clear sense of purpose and direction in his life. God said, 'Abraham, I have a destiny for you far greater than Haran, where you are living now. I know you are 75 years old, but it's not time to retire. I want you to start on a journey of faith, one that

will lead to a great people of God coming after you to fulfil my purpose of one day filling the whole earth with my blessing. I want you to be the first to believe what I am saying and step out for it'.

## **I'd Better Tell My Wife'**

At first, Abraham, overwhelmed at the enormity of God's plan, lingered to talk it over with God before going home to tell Sarah. Imagine for a moment trying to explain to your wife, at 75 years of age, that God has just chosen you to pioneer a work to bless all nations! 'Sarah, we're leaving town', Abraham said. She continued her tidying of the house, commenting with a laugh, 'What, another vacation? We've already had one this year!' 'No, we're actually moving house, Sarah. We're going to start all over again', said Abraham firmly. 'Oh, come on, Abraham! Stop joking!' There was a trace of nervousness in her voice. 'No, I'm not joking, this is for real. We're going to leave Haran and start again'. Sarah suddenly stopped and looked straight at him. 'You can't do that; you're 75 years old! And anyway, you promised me when we left Ur that this would be the last move we'd make. We'd settle down, you said, and once you had the business going all right you'd retire'. 'I know, but things have changed'. 'But you can't change your mind just like that and expect everybody else to follow suit! Lot's anticipating taking over the business, I've just finished decorating the back bedroom, and you've just got the garden how you want it at last. Everything we've ever wanted is within our reach now — well, almost everything', she said, remembering her childlessness. Abraham looked tenderly into Sarah's eyes. How he loved this woman! Despite her childlessness there had never been a thought of infidelity on his part. They were one together. They had worked, cried, prayed and laughed together, and he could well understand her puzzlement and fear at this time. He took her hands and she felt the warmth of the love shining from his eyes as he said, 'Sarah, what I've heard is something far greater than bedrooms and business and gardens. It's far more important than house and retirement and pension. I've heard from God that we're to leave here, and that he's going to make me into a great nation, cause my name to be great among all men and make me a blessing to the whole world! In fact he said that those who bless me he will bless and those who curse me he will bind under a curse, and that he intends every family of the earth to be blessed through me!'

## **We'll Go Together**

As she stared into his face, she could see that, whatever it was that had happened, it had captured him in a way that nothing else had ever done before. But still her mind battled with the prospect as she said, 'Well, all right, but where did God tell us to go? Is it somewhere we know? I think I can cope so long as it's a nice place. Where is it?' Her question stopped Abraham in full flow. 'Ah, yes, I thought you'd ask that', he said. 'I puzzled about it on the way home. The fact is, I don't know where we're going'. 'What! How do you mean you don't know? You can't expect me to pack everything up and then, when the neighbours ask where we're going, just say "Somewhere"! They'll laugh at us, Abraham! They've always felt we were a bit strange anyway, you know that. They've told me more than once that I need to have a chat to somebody about the way you keep going off by

yourself, muttering and mumbling. Oh yes, I know you're praying but they can't make it out'. Sarah's tone of voice and the expression on her face showed growing concern. 'Darling, I know. But I also know for sure that God has said we must leave here', Abraham replied, wishing he could find the words to convince his wife of his inner certainty.

## **Common Sense?**

'Now, let's use a bit of common sense, Abraham. God wouldn't just say leave here and not give you any idea where you're to go, would he?' 'Well no, not normally. But this time he just said, "Go to a land that I will show you". So I feel we must just obey and it will probably become clearer to us as we move', he replied gently but firmly. Sarah knew that once Abraham's mind was made up in this fashion it was no use arguing. In fact, she didn't really want to argue, because when he was this firm he was usually right anyway. And over the years she had come to trust his love for her and his direction for their lives. So she asked, 'Where will we live as we travel?' 'Well, I thought we'd take the tent'. She threw up her hands in despair. 'Not a tent in those open areas! Anyway we gave up tenting years ago. When that last sand-storm hit the tent I said I couldn't put up with that kind of life much longer and you promised me we wouldn't ever go tenting again'. And so the conversation must have gone on until finally Sarah came to peace in Abraham's direction, and together they obeyed and went. The key to his obedience was that the word of God had come, producing faith in his heart — a faith that he used to rule over the questions of his own mind and those of others.

## **KEY 2 - A MIND RULED BY THE WORD**

### **The Questioning Mind Overruled**

The greatest battles we face in regard to faith are always those in our minds. Most people will obey if they can see where they are going, but how about a place that God has yet to show you? Lots of people will obey if the job is signed up and it's better than the previous one, with at least a £3,000 a year rise, but how about when no job is offered? Many will go if the house is sold. Abraham was moving before he'd even got the house listed for sale! The fact that we have questions in our minds is not necessarily a sign of unbelief. It's what we do with the questions that will determine our ability to walk in faith. Whatever the promise of God, the mind will question it. If you are sick and have read, 'By his stripes you were healed', your mind will say, 'Ah, yes, but the doctor said...'. The mind will seek to elevate the words of the doctor over the Word of God. The same is true with financial difficulties. Privately you have spread your case before God in prayer and you are trusting him to supply the

need. Your mind now says, 'How can you expect somebody to give to you when they don't know you're in need? You need to go and tell someone about your plight'. However, the Word of God says, 'Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly'. Since God is the source of your supply you don't need to tell anyone else. The Person who is going to meet the need already knows it and has made a promise that he will meet it. 'My God shall supply all you need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus' (Phil 4:19).

### **A Mind Renewed**

The apostle Paul realised the power exercised over our lives by the way we think and spoke of 'being renewed in the spirit of your mind' (Eph 4:23). Again he said, 'He who is spiritual appraises all things, yet himself is appraised by no man, for who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ' (1 Cor 2:15-16). Having the mind of Christ, we allow his mind to rule the questions that enter our minds. Every time your mind starts imagining the worst or people speak to you in a negative way provoking sceptical thoughts, remember that Paul said, 'We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ' (2 Cor 10:15).

### **KEY 3 - NO FEAR OF THE FUTURE**

#### **Fear Evicted**

Abraham not only refused to allow a questioning mind to undercut his faith; he also refused to be ruled by fears of the future. Faith will not allow fear of future circumstances to govern today's obedience. What we can't see we are always tempted to fear. That's why people are so busy today trying to get the 'nest egg' together or 'saving for a rainy day'. Fear of the future dominates their present to such an extent that they act, work and slave to forestall future fears. If you are busy saving for the rainy day you're going to have to have a rainy day to enjoy what you have been saving! Worse still, the devil will make sure you get a rainy year and so devour your rainy day savings quickly. What then? Sarah probably asked Abraham, 'What will happen when the tent wears out? Where will you be able to buy more tent canvas in the wilderness?' Or again, 'What if we can't find water in the desert? Those tribal people aren't likely to sell us any'. The Word of God is clear: 'Perfect love casts out all fear'. I know God loves me perfectly, so my fears are gone! Someone may say, 'Ah yes, but we must face the facts'. True, but the facts are not what your fears tell you; the facts are what God has said! Irrespective of what your natural senses convey to your mind, it is what God's Word says that should rule your thinking.

### **KEY 4 - DETAILS NOT IF REQUIRED**

Forget The Small Print Another feature of Abraham's obedience was that his faith did not demand from God the small print in the contract. He didn't want the fine details. He didn't say before being willing to go, 'Now God,

before we move I want to know how we're going to eat, what we'll wear, whether should we carry enough clothing for two years or are we likely to be settled inside two months?' Abraham didn't need the details; he simply obeyed the word he had. Indeed, if God had told him how long he would be journeying he might never have started! Many of us have received promises from God and we're still trying to work out the small print. God told you your husband would be saved and you've been saying, 'Now Lord, will it be through a tract I leave? Or is it going to be this Sunday in church? Or will it be next Easter when we attend the special presentation?' God hasn't given the details so you're suggesting what they might be! God has said he will meet all your needs and here you are in financial difficulty, beginning to panic. You know his Word says he will meet the need but you're saying, 'God, how are you going to do it?' With God it doesn't matter how. It's your believing he will that counts. It's not how will he heal you; how will he save your husband; how will he save your children; how will he bring back that backslider; how will he meet your needs; how will he build the church; how will we take the city? God isn't answering the 'hows'. If God says, 'I will', he Will. Abraham obeyed without knowing the details. When we walk in this kind of obedience we can enjoy the future today. Abraham didn't start out thinking, 'One day I'll be through all the sand-storms of life; meanwhile, I'll grit my teeth, pray hard and toil on'. No he started off saying, 'Thank God for the promise. One day my children will fill the whole earth. One day this place where I am now standing will be covered with those who love God like I do'. He brought God's tomorrow into his today. That's why Jesus later referred to his life of faith by saying that Abraham 'saw my day and rejoiced'. Faith-living is a happy way of life. You press on, not toil on; you smile, not grit your teeth!

## **KEY 5 - A SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE**

### **Faith Has A Sparkle In The Eyes.**

What's more, the obedience of faith keeps the element of adventure in life. At 75 years of age Abraham found a new sparkle in life. Roll back the pages of time in your own life. Whatever age you are, reel it back to when you were 16 or 17. Do you remember what you were like? Why, the world was waiting for you! You were going to sort it out politically; you knew how to deal with its economic problems; you were a dashing, daring person. When you made plans then, you didn't think small; no, your thinking was large. If your aims were in the realms of business, you imagined yourself a successful tycoon. If it was preaching the Word of God, you were going to reach the ends of the earth. If it was sport or creative art, you were going to become number one in your field. The world was there for the taking! One of the most dreadful things that can happen is to reach mid-life and discover that none of the dreams of your youth have been realised. You ask yourself, 'What in the world went wrong?' The answer is plain: You didn't put your faith into action; you stopped dreaming. I started dreaming early and I'm dreaming still. I haven't achieved it all but I'm enjoying every minute of achieving it — and it's growing! There's adventure here. Once you lose the adventure of life, life dies on you.

Not By Sight Abraham's obedience was not ruled by sight. Many times, as he journeyed, Abraham looked around and what he saw in the natural seemed to contradict what God had said to him. Yet day after day he

would say to Sarah, 'I'm excited today; I know we're in the land of promise!' Others, looking outside the tent flaps and seeing the scattered towns of the Hittites, Hivites and Perizzites, would say, 'Well, I don't know about that. It doesn't look too much like our promised land to me. There's lots of them and pitifully few of us'. One day, while Abraham was standing before the Lord, God said, 'Abraham, it doesn't matter what others say. Look up here. Do you see these stars? One day you will be as numerous as these. Pick up a handful of sand, Abraham, and let it drain through your fingers. Can you count the grains? So shall your children be'. This man had embarked on an adventure of faith that didn't allow God's Word to be governed by what his eyes told him, for he daily strengthened himself in the Word of God — by obeying it.

## **KEY 6 - EXPECTING GREATER THINGS STILL**

### **Ever Increasing Blessing**

As Abraham journeyed, so the promises of God expanded on him. What started out as a land that God would show him soon changed to become the whole world as his promised inheritance! 'The promise to Abraham and to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the law but through the righteousness of faith' (Rom 4:13). Somewhere on that journey God spoke to him and said, 'Abraham, I want to tell you something else. You see the land I told you about? Well, that was just the hors d'oeuvres. I have decided that your children will inherit the whole world'. Isn't that just what the Father said to his own Son? — 'Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession' (Ps 2:8). Jesus believed the promise made to Abraham and received the same promises from his Father for himself, which is why he said to us, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' As you move out in faith in the promises God has given you — for your finance, your health, the salvation of loved ones, your job, your house, your ministry, your church or whatever — know that, as you go, God will increase his blessings upon you. But only as you believe and obey his Word, refusing to allow questions, fears, circumstances or the lack of detail to hinder you. You are the seed of Abraham! The whole world and its blessings are your inheritance. All that is in Christ is yours, for in him you are the heirs to every promise made to Abraham and his seed. Rise to it now!