



Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*®

Substance

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from the **Golden Text**

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

To the author of Hebrews, a scholar suggests, “[Faith] is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it is the hope which looks forward with utter conviction.” One translation has, “Now faith means that we have full confidence in the things we hope for, it means being certain of things we cannot see.”

from **Section 1**

1 | [Proverbs 8:1, 4, 21, 34, 35](#)

Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? . . . Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. . . . that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures. . . . Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.

In ancient times, city gates were congregating spots where business was conducted, disputes settled, and journeys begun. Together with “the posts of my doors,” the gate image stresses the vital place of wisdom in daily life and thought. A scriptural expert writes, “‘Wisdom’ is the biblical term for . . . on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven everyday living.” He adds: “. . . the way we think of and respond to God is the most practical thing we do. In matters of everyday practicality, nothing, absolutely nothing, takes precedence over God.”

from **Section 2**

6 | [Genesis 12:1, 2](#)

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.

God's mandate to Abram to leave country, family, and home represents a sweeping demand for allegiance to Him. Abram's polytheistic upbringing would have taught him reliance on pagan gods for these basic needs. In light of this background, the patriarch's obedience to a call from an unknown deity—and his unquestioning trust in God's promises—have made him known as the “father of the faithful.”

Commenting on the significance of Abram's story, one source explains: “Opening with God's call to Abraham in Haran, . . . the action then shifts all over the map of the Fertile Crescent, ending with Abraham's great-grandchildren—Joseph and his eleven brothers, eponymous founders of the Twelve Tribes of Israel—settled in Egypt. The journeys of Abraham and his progeny, in fact, outline the geographical contours of the biblical world, from the valley of the Euphrates to that of the Nile. . . .”

7 | [Genesis 13:1, 6–9, 11](#)

Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. . . . And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: . . . And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. . . . Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

Nomadic people regularly searched out pastures for their flocks. In this case, the increase of their herds impels Abram and Lot to seek separate grazing areas. Though the elder of the two, Abram peaceably offers Lot first choice of the land—a gesture that appears to leave him at a disadvantage, since Lot selects the fertile Jordan River valley.

Lot's decision turns out to be disastrous. His proximity to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah brings about his captivity and the loss of his goods. Abram rescues Lot and his family (see [14:8–16](#)), but their separation continues. Scholars note that Lot's descendants (Moabites and Ammonites; see [19:37, 38](#)) stay at odds with the Israelites over the subsequent centuries (see [Deuteronomy 23:3, 4](#); [Ezra 9:1, 2](#)).

7 | [Genesis 13:14, 15, 17](#)

The Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. . . . Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

God here reiterates His pledge to bless Abram (see [12:2](#), citation 6), adding the promise of extensive land. Bible authorities point out parallels between Abram's journey and Jacob's travel to Beth-el, where a similar divine assurance is given (see [28:10–14](#)).

To walk through a territory symbolized taking possession of it. Abram signals possession of his God-given land—and the end of his itinerant existence—by taking down his tent and erecting an altar to God (see [13:18](#)).

Abram's new land, west of the Jordan River, is Canaan. Thought to be named after Noah's grandson (see [10:18](#)), it remains the home of Abram's descendants until their move to Egypt at the time of Joseph (see [chap. 46](#)). Later called Palestine, Canaan will not be theirs again until after the Exodus (see Joshua, [chap. 3](#); [21:43–45](#)).

from **Section 3**

8 | [Proverbs 3:9](#)

Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.

Jews kept this charge in several ways—through tithing, contributing funds to support the Temple, and sacrificing the first and best yields of their crops (see [Leviticus 23:10; 27:30–32; Deuteronomy 14:22–29](#)). A commentary remarks: “Our use of world and wealth reveals our true commitments. Specifically, by it we show either honor or scorn to God. . . .”

9 | [Genesis 17:1, 2, 5–7, 15, 16](#)

When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . . Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. . . . And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

In this passage God again proclaims His covenant promise to Abram. Then He makes an unprecedented announcement—that Abram's name is to be changed and that he is to be the ancestor of kings and nations.

The difference between the names Abram and Abraham is slight, the first believed to mean “exalted father” and the second, “father of a multitude.” At this time, Abram's role as a human father is limited to his son Ishmael by his wife's maid Hagar. Yet God reconfirms his position as father of many (to be realized through Ishmael and Isaac) with the more expansive name of Abraham. And although “Sarai” and “Sarah” both mean princess, Sarai's new name is seen to signify a greater purpose or destiny as “mother of nations.”

God's assurance about “thy seed” is cherished by countless generations of Hebrews—as well as by Christians and Muslims, who also consider Abraham the father of their faiths. In the book of Acts, it is cited by Peter as evidence of Christ Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy (see [3:25, 26](#)).

10 | [Galatians 3:6, 7](#)

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

The Hebrew people identified themselves as descendants of Abraham, and Jewish Christians continued acknowledging this connection (see examples in [Matthew 1:1](#); [Luke 13:16](#); [19:9](#)). With the advent of Christ Jesus, however, “children of Abraham” was applied to all followers of his teachings, including Gentiles (see also [Galatians 3:13, 14, 28, 29](#)).

Some early adherents—in particular, a group known as Judaizers—insisted that believers strictly abide by Jewish ritual and refused to accept those who did not agree with them. Paul soundly rejects this exclusivity, elsewhere making the point that Abraham was chosen by God before he was circumcised (see [Romans 4:8–10](#)).

from Section 4

11 | [Genesis 17:17, 19](#)

Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? . . . And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

At this period, childlessness was attributed solely to women and was deemed one of the greatest misfortunes a family could face. But God’s power brings healings of barrenness to other women besides Sarah: Rebekah, Rachel, Samson’s mother, Hannah, the Shunammite woman, and Elisabeth (see [Genesis 25:21](#); [30:22](#); [Judges 13:3, 24](#); [I Samuel 1:20](#); [2: 21](#); [II Kings 4:8–17](#); [Luke 1:7, 13, 57](#)).

Abraham’s and Sarah’s laughter (see also [Genesis 18:12](#)) upon hearing that they are to become parents at their advanced ages leads to naming their son Isaac (Hebrew, *yishāq*, meaning “he laughs”). The two learn to believe God’s Word, though, and centuries later both are mentioned in the New Testament catalog of the faithful (see [Hebrews 11:8–11](#)).

from Section 5

13 | [Acts 3:13](#)

The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus.

Here, following the healing of the lame man at the Temple gate, Peter is expounding on Jesus’ unparalleled role in the salvation of humanity. He begins by establishing a clear link to the Hebrew patriarchs, declaring that the same God they worshiped has honored Jesus as His Son—“the Holy One and the Just” and “the Prince of life” ([vv. 14, 15](#)). Then, quoting [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), he names Christ Jesus as the prophet predicted by Moses ([see v. 22](#)).

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are repeatedly referred to in describing the God of Israel in Hebrew Scripture (see examples in [Exodus 3:6](#); [Deuteronomy 1:8](#); [II Kings 13:23](#)). Representing distinct generations, all three receive God’s guarantee of land and many children. Together they illustrate the continuity of His goodness.

from Section 6

16 | Galatians 3:9

So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Following up on his earlier reasoning (see vv. 6, 7, citation 10), Paul reemphasizes Gentiles' inclusion in God's promises to Abraham and his progeny (see vv. 14, 16). It is faith in God, not ancestry or ceremonial practices, that identifies and blesses His children.

18 | John 8:56, 58

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

In these verses Jesus is answering a group of Pharisees who have accused him of making himself greater than their revered ancestor, Abraham (see vv. 51–53). His opponents have confirmed their status as offspring of Abraham (see vv. 33, 39); now the Master reveals a higher relationship in Abraham's witness to Jesus' Messiahship. Notably, Jesus calls the patriarch "your father" rather than "my father"—an unmistakable contrast to his reference to God as "my Father" (see v. 54).

"My day" is viewed as encompassing the Savior's entire life and ministry. Rabbinic teaching held that Abraham had been given foreknowledge of the Messiah, as a scholar observes: "No rabbi would object to Jesus' claim that Abraham would see the messianic era. But Jesus does not say this. Instead, he says: 'Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing *my day*; he saw it and was glad' (italics added). The messianic era is now fulfilled in Christ."

This source further reflects: "To exist before the birth of Abraham—and yet to stand here today—is the boldest claim Jesus has yet made. It recalls the affirmation of the prologue that the Word existed even at the beginning of time. His existence has been continuous since his life is completely drawn from God's eternal life."

Read a related article, "[A partnership with God](https://jsh.christianscience.com/a-partnership-with-god)" by Elaine Follis, at jsh.christianscience.com/a-partnership-with-god.

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