

¹ Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. ... ⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 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. 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. ¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (NIV)

Text: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 A 1/21/18 Genesis 15:1-6 Matthew 8:1-13 Psalm 33 Resp. Ps.: 19
Hymns: 5, 291, 381, 54

THE FAITH GOD GIVES US

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

How do we know that Mary's baby Jesus, whose birth we just celebrated, is also the Son of God? How do we know that Jesus truly worked the astounding miracles the Bible says He did? How do we know that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and the sins of the whole world, and that He rose again and is alive? How do we know that Jesus is going to take us to heaven one day? We know all these things and more by faith.

What is faith? Some people think that faith is believing in yourself. Some think that faith is believing that somehow (they don't know how) things will turn out all right. Some think that faith is believing in your own ability to believe (which is very confusing).

An atheist says, "There's no God, and that the Bible is not the Word of God." But in fact, an atheist can't know those things for sure. An atheist who is honest with himself has to admit that he only thinks there is no God, and only thinks that the Bible isn't the Word of God. Atheists may challenge us Christians, "You can't prove that God is real and that the Bible is the Word of God." We can turn that challenge around to the atheists: "You can't prove that God isn't real and that the Bible isn't God's Word." The truth about these things can only be known by faith.

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." "Being sure" in the original text refers to a "foundation," to "real substance." "Being ... certain" in the original refers to "convincing proof." That is the faith God gives us. The word "*faith*" here in the original, since it's speaking of faith in God, is a conviction full of joyful trust. (Contrast that with

the Bible's description of unbelievers "*having no hope and without God in the world*" – Eph. 2:12). Human 'faith' is uncertain hope and wishful thinking for something that may or may not be true, that may or may not happen. The faith God gives us is certain confidence in Him and His Word. The Bible says that "*we walk by faith, not by sight.*" (2 Cor. 5:7). In the faith that God gives us, even though we can't see God, we know He is there, and we know that the Bible is His Word.

"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command" (literally, "the universe was formed by the Word of God"), "so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." Atheists who don't believe that there is a God and that He created all things actually have a great deal of faith. It is neither logical nor scientific to believe that the universe came into being all by itself out of nothing – that the universe created itself. Now that takes faith! The first chapter of the Bible tells us how all things came into being: "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*" (Gen. 1:1). "*And God said, 'Let there be..., ' and it was so*" (Gen. 1:3, 7, 9, etc.). Everything got its beginning from God. God created everything out of nothing simply by the power of His Word. "*By faith we understand that the universe was formed by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*"

Many people believe in evolution – that over millions of years people and all other living things gradually developed from lower life forms. But we're told, "*By faith we understand that the universe was formed*" (from the original, literally, "*the universe was completed*") "*by the Word of God.*" After God had finished His Creation, in Genesis chapter two, verse one, He says, "*Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.*" Every form of evolution at the very least limits God's power ("God didn't create everything in six twenty-four hour days. It took millions of years."). At its worst, evolution denies that there is a God who created everything. "*By faith we understand that the universe was completed by the Word of God.*"

God warns us in His Word, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith*" (1 Pet. 5:8-9). The devil is actively trying to destroy our faith by attacking the foundation of our faith: our faith in God's Word. Satan tries to get us to question and doubt things the Bible says ("*Did God really say?*": Gen. 3:1), such as the Creation account in Genesis. If we let Satan succeed, do we really think he's going to stop there? Satan will keep working to eventually try to get us to question and doubt our salvation in Jesus. That is what he's aiming at!: "If the very first chapter of the Bible is untrustworthy when it speaks of God my Creator, how can God's Word be trusted when it speaks of Jesus my Savior?" Don't think this can't happen to Christians. It can, and it does!

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." When Abraham was an old man, God told him to move to a faraway country. We're told Abraham "*did not know where he was going.*" Not only did Abraham not know where God was leading him, from the original we can also tell that Abraham didn't dwell on it and worry about it. God spoke, and Abraham obeyed God and went. Faith – the faith God gives us – obeys God's Word. The place God led Abraham was

Canaan, which later became the Promised Land. It's where many years later God brought Abraham's descendants, the Jewish race. *"And so from [Abraham] ... came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore."* This all pointed ahead to the Promised Land of heaven where all of Abraham's spiritual descendants – all of us who believe in the promised Savior as Abraham did – are going. Abraham didn't live to see the Jews enter the Promised Land of Canaan. But Abraham now lives eternally with all the other believers who have died, and with God, in the Promised Land of heaven! Abraham received all this by faith.

"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." Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had been unable to have any children when they were younger. Miraculously, in their old age God let them have a son, Isaac. God promised them it would happen. They placed their faith in God and His Word, and God made it happen.

"These people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ... Instead, they were longing for" (from the original, *"they were stretching themselves out in order to grasp"*) *"a better country – a heavenly one."* The certain hope that keeps us believers going in life is heaven. We live by faith in Christ and for Christ during our life on earth, and then we live with Christ forever in heaven! *"I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home!"*

We're told that because we believe in Him, *"God is not ashamed to be called [our] God."* Isn't that amazing?! We look at Abraham and say, "I wish I had faith like that." As we read more about Abraham in the Bible we see that there were times when he had doubts and failed to trust in God and His Word. We're all sinners. We, too, are weak. We become too easily attached to this life, and distracted from our goal of heaven. All too often we fail to trust in God and His Word. We so easily get stressed and worried and filled with doubts. But Jesus died on the cross and took all of our sins away. For Jesus' sake, *"God is not ashamed to be called [our] God."*

What about our weakness of faith? God's Word that commands us to believe is the power that gives us faith. *"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God"* – Romans 10:17. As we keep turning to God's Word and asking Him to increase our faith, the Word takes away our doubts and fears, and makes our faith strong.

We're told that God *"has prepared a city for [us]."* Can we see God? No. Is God there? Yes. Can we see heaven? No. Is heaven real? Yes. Are we going to heaven? Yes. How do we know these things? By the faith that God gives us. Jesus says, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* (Jn. 11:25-26). Yes, by the faith that God has given us, yes!

By faith we know that the Bible is God's Word, and that everything it says is true. By faith we know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for our sins on the cross and rose again. By faith we know that Jesus is taking us to heaven. "Thank You, Lord God, for giving us our faith. Keep us in our faith in You and Your Word until you take us to be with You in heaven." Amen.