

Faith: The Better Way ~ Part 2c¹

Messianic Jews 11:8-22

Letter to the Messianic Jews

In my last post, we began to explore what many call **The Hall of Faith** or as Stern might say **The Hall of Trust**. We started in **Messianic Jews 11:4-7** to learn of the **Trust of the Early Patriarchs**. In this post, we examine **Trust of Avraham and His Children** in **Messianic Jews 11:8-22**. Obviously, this is a massive chunk of scripture to digest in one post, so we will begin with verse 8 in this post. That explains the weird numbering system I have had to employ to maintain the topical headings from my old RSV.

⁸ By trusting, Avraham obeyed, after being called to go out to a place which God would give him as a possession; indeed, he went out without knowing where he was going. ⁹ By trusting, he lived as a temporary resident in the Land of the promise, as if it were not his, staying in tents with Yitz'chak and Ya'akov, who were to receive what was promised along with him. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with permanent foundations, of which the architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By trusting, he received potency to father a child, even when he was past the age for it, as was Sarah herself; because he regarded the One who had made the promise as trustworthy. ¹² Therefore this one man, who was virtually dead, fathered descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and as countless as the grains of the sand on the seashore. ¹³ All these people kept on trusting until they died, without receiving what had been promised. They had only seen it and welcomed it from a distance while acknowledging that they were aliens and temporary residents on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak this way make it clear that they are looking for a fatherland. ¹⁵ Now if they were to keep recalling the one they left, they would have an opportunity to return; ¹⁶ but as it is, they aspire to a better fatherland, a heavenly one. This is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. ¹⁷ By trusting, Avraham, when he was put to the test, offered up Yitz'chak as a sacrifice. Yes, he offered up his only son, he who had received the promises, ¹⁸ to whom it had been said, "What is called your 'seed' will be in Yitz'chak." ¹⁹ For he had concluded that God could even raise people from the dead! And, figuratively speaking, he did so receive him. ²⁰ By trusting, Yitz'chak, in his blessings over Ya'akov and Esav, made reference to events yet to come. ²¹ By trusting, Ya'akov, when he was dying, blessed each of Yosef's sons, leaning on his walking-stick as he bowed in prayer. ²² By trusting, Yosef, near the end of his life, remembered about the Exodus of the people of Isra'el and gave instructions about what to do with his bones." ~ Messianic Jews 11:8-22 (CJB)

The **Tanakh** itself extols **Avraham's** faith (Nehemiah 9:7-8), as does **Sha'ul** (Romans 4, Galatians 3). Our author devotes more space to him than to anyone else, giving no less than four instances of his **trusting**: his obeying God's call to leave home for an unknown land (v. 8), his steadfast hoping for the unseen heavenly city (vv. 9-10, 13-16), his trusting God to provide an heir through Sarah despite its natural impossibility (vv. 11-12), and his offering of that heir as a sacrifice (vv. 17-19). The passage may also be divided into these two parts: faith for this life (vv. 8-12), and trust that transcends death (vv. 13-19).

Avraham first appears in Scripture beginning in Genesis 11:26 as the son of **Terach**. *"Then Avram ¹and Nachor took wives for themselves. The name of Avram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nachor's wife was Milkah, the daughter of Haran. He was the father of Milkah and of Yiskah. Sarai was barren — she had no child. Terach took his son Avram, his son Haran's son Lot, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram's wife; and they left Ur of the Kasdim to go to the land of Kena'an. But when they came to Haran, they stayed there."* ~ Genesis 11:29-31 (CJB)

Verse 8 is essentially a summary of Genesis 12:1-5. **"Now Adonai said to Avram, 'Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your**

¹ Remember that **Avraham** (father of many) was originally named **Avram** (exalted father) until the God changed it in Genesis 17:5.

name great, and you are to be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you, and by you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.' So Avram went, as Adonai had said to him, and Lot went with him. Avram was 75 years old when he left Haran. Avram took his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, as well as the people they had acquired in Haran; then they set out for the land of Kena'an and entered the land of Kena'an." ~ Genesis 12:1-5 (CJB)

It has always amazed me that **Avram** left his homeland with all his possessions and traveled to a land that God would not show him until he got there. Now, my family and I have lived in several parts of the United States, but it has always been a move that was to someplace where we had family members close by. As kids, we learned in school the basic geography of our country, but **Avram** had no idea where he was going and what it would be like. He certainly didn't have Google Maps available. **By trusting, Avraham obeyed!!!** I confess that it is hard for me to put my mind around that kind of trust.

Barclay offers some interesting background information on this dilemma: ²

Jewish and eastern legends gathered largely round Avraham's name, and some of them must have been known to the author to the Messianic Jews. The legends tell how Avraham was the son of Terach, commander of the armies of Nimrod. When Avraham was born a very vivid star appeared in the sky and seemed to obliterate the others. Nimrod sought to murder the infant but Avraham was concealed in a cave, and his life saved. It was in that cave the first vision of God came to him. When he was a youth, he came out of the cave and stood looking across the face of the desert. The sun rose in all its glory, and Avraham said: "Surely the sun is God, the Creator!" So he knelt down and worshipped the sun. But when evening came, the sun sank in the west and Avraham said: "No! the author of creation cannot set!" The moon arose in the east, and the stars came out. Then Avraham said: "The moon must be God and the stars his host!" So he knelt down and adored the moon. But after the night was passed, the moon sank, and the sun rose again, and Avraham said: "Truly these heavenly bodies are no gods, for they obey the law; I will worship him who imposed the law upon them."

The Arabs have a different legend. They tell how Avraham saw many flocks and herds and said to his mother: "Who is the lord of these?" She answered: "Your father, Terach." "And who is the lord of Terach?" the lad Avraham asked. "Nimrod," said his mother. "And who is the lord of Nimrod?" asked Avraham. His mother bade him be quiet and not push questions too far, but already Avraham's thoughts were reaching out to him who is the God of all. The legends go on to tell that Terach not only worshipped twelve idols, one for each of the months but was also a manufacturer of idols. One day Avraham was left in charge of the shop. People came in to buy idols. Avraham would ask them how old they were and they would answer perhaps fifty or sixty years of age. "Woe to a man of such an age," said Avraham, "who adores the work of one day!" A strong and hale man of seventy came in. Avraham asked him his age and then said: "You fool to adore a god who is younger than yourself!" A woman came in with a dish of meat for the gods. Avraham took a stick and smashed all the idols but one, in whose hands he set the stick he had used. Terach returned and was angry. Avraham said: "My father, a woman brought this dish of meat for your gods; they all wanted to have it and the strongest knocked the heads off the rest, lest they should eat it all." Terach said: "That is impossible for they are made of wood and stone." And Avraham answered: "Let thine own ear hear what thine own mouth has spoken!"

All these legends give us a vivid picture of Avraham searching after God and dissatisfied with the idolatry of his people. So when God's call came to him, he was ready to go out into the unknown to find him! Avraham is the supreme example of faith.

In my next post, we will continue on our topic of the **Definition and Illustration of Trusting** by examining further **The Trust of Avraham and His Children** in **Messianic Jews** 11:8-22.

² Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT) by William Barclay.