

FAITH

The Grand Canyon is located in Arizona in the United States. It is 277 miles long, 18 miles wide, and over 6,000 feet deep. A cowboy is said to have peered over the rim of the canyon and said: “*Something happened here*”. How obvious! It is also obvious that whatever happened there was of such magnitude that it was not created by man.

The same common sense observation can be made about Abraham. Abraham was once a childless and obscure nomad grazing his sheep in the wilderness and living in a tent. Today he is one of the most famous men in history. The three great monotheistic religions in the world all consider him a hero. The combined total of Jews, Christians, and Muslims is approximately 4 billion, or roughly half the population of the world. Obviously, “something happened” to Abraham. Whatever happened to him is of such magnitude that it was not created by man. The Bible attributes his amazing fame to his faith in God!

The Bible lists three great promises God made to Abraham:

- # 1 - God promised to give him so many children that they would become a great nation.
- # 2 - God promised him as an inheritance the land where his descendants now live.
- # 3 - God promised that in his “Seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed.

The Scriptures teach that Abraham “believed” God and it was credited to him as righteousness! (Genesis 15:6). Now, thousands of years later and against all odds, these three great promises have all come true!

- # 1 - Abraham now has approximately 15 billion descendants and they are indeed a great nation.
- # 2 - As we have said, his descendants now live in the very land God promised him.
- # 3 - Jesus is a descendant of Abraham and through him all the families of the earth are blessed!

Can you name any other man in history with a similar track record of success? Yet, all of these amazing promises came true and the honest observer must admit - “Something happened here”.

ABRAHAM HAD AN IDEA

Atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel wrote his book “Mind and Cosmos” in 2012. The subtitle of that book is stunning. “*Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False.*” In this book Nagel argues that natural and social sciences are unable to account for the existence of “mind” and “consciousness”. Ideas are not physical! Atheism has no explanation for the ideas or actions of Abraham. For believers, however, the answer is simple. Abraham simply did what God told him to do!

The first step in Abraham’s long journey began by leaving his country, his people, and his father’s household (Genesis 12:1). The influence of the physical world can often limit our ability to be influenced by that which is spiritual.

Abraham’s faith in God, however, was based upon evidence. Interestingly, this evidence caused his faith to blossom into maturity at a time of great discouragement. Abraham had been expecting his wife Sarah to have a son for many years. When she didn’t have a son he was in despair. In his

discouragement he doubted that he would ever have children and concluded that his servant Eliezer would inherit his estate. At this low point of depression God took him outside of his tent and told him to look up into the heavens and count the stars if he was able to do so (Genesis 15:5). The magnitude of the heavens is more than impressive. Even with our most sophisticated telescopes we have no idea how many stars there are. Astronomers “estimate” that there are 200 billion trillion stars in the universe. While only 5,000 stars can be seen with the naked eye Abraham still got the point! When Abraham looked up into the heavens he saw evidence of an all powerful God! He had seen those stars every day of his long life but on that night he saw them in a different way. On that night he actually began to think about how those stars came into existence. Such a thought is quite profound! While contemplating the origin of these stars Abraham “believed” God! On that night it dawned upon Abraham that a God who can make the heavens can do anything! On that night he believed that nothing is impossible for a God that powerful! The vast complexity of the universe, of course, makes the grandeur of the Grand Canyon insignificant by comparison!

I am told that the size of an average man is about half way between the greatness and the minutia of the universe. God not only created things incredibly large, but also incredibly small. The word “atom” comes from the Greek work that means “indivisible”. It was once assumed that atoms were the smallest units in the universe, but now we know that atoms are composed of sub-atomic particles known as protons, neutrons, and electrons. Even these sub atomic particles are composed of smaller building blocks known as “quarks”. Such information makes quite profound the statement of Scripture: **“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made of what was visible” (Hebrews 11:3).**

Once we “believe” that God created the heavens and the earth we have opened our mind to unlimited possibilities. In his desert tent Abraham saw things not seen in the city. In fact, he saw the reality of Christ centuries before it came to pass. Jesus confirmed this fact to the Jews by saying: **“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56).** In this regard, unbeliever H.G. Wells wrote in the *American Magazine* (July, 1922) – *“Jesus of Nazareth . . . is easily the dominant figure of history. I am speaking of Him, of course, as a man, for I conceive that the historian must treat him as a man, just as the painter must paint him as a man . . . To assume that He never lived, that the accounts of his life are inventions, is more difficult and raises more problems in the path of the historian that to accept the essential elements of the Gospel stories as fact . . . So the historian disregarding the theological significance of His life, writes the name of Jesus of Nazareth at the top of the world’s greatest characters”.*

ABRAHAM’S FAITH MOVED HIM TO ACTION

At the risk of being indiscreet Abraham’s son, Isaac, was not virgin born. Please consider: **“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He**

was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” (Romans 4:18-25).

The book of James cites another example of something Abraham “did”: **“You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.” (James 2:20-24).**

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is called the “Faith Chapter of the Bible”. This chapter lists many heroes and heroines of the faith and they all “did” something because of what they “believed”. The point is, that true faith motivates us to action!

ABRAHAM’S FAITH IN THE RESURRECTION WAS REASONABLE

The Bible tells of various individuals, in addition to Jesus, that came back from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus, of course, is unique in that everyone else died again. One example of many is found in 2 Kings 13:21 - **“Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man’s body into Elisha’s tomb. When the body touched Elisha’s bones, the man came to life and stood on his feet”.**

All of these examples of people coming back from the dead, however, happened long after Abraham was dead. Abraham had no model or example as evidence upon which to rest his faith. His “belief” in the resurrection came from “reasoning”.

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Men once believed that it was impossible to go faster than the speed of sound. In fact the speed of sound was called the “sound barrier”. As proof of this “barrier” they could sight the example of British test pilot Geoffrey De Havilland Jr. His experimental plane called the “Swallow” exploded at .94 Mach early in 1947. Chuck Yeager, however, did not believe in the “barrier” and on October 14, 1947 went faster than the speed of sound. He broke the “sound barrier” by flying the X-1 at 1.07 Mach. Yeager opined that he didn’t even feel a bump when crossing that “barrier”. He said that breaking the sound barrier was like a poke through Jello. Today, as you know, men routinely fly several times the speed of sound. Evidence is a friend of faith and enlarges the scope of what man can “believe”.

Thomas, was one of the twelve apostles. Three different times we are told that he was called “Didymus” (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). The word “Didymus” means “twin”. When Thomas was told that Jesus was resurrected from the dead he didn’t believe it. As a “twin” he was familiar with

mistaken identities. He therefor said: **“Unless I see the marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” (John 20:25).**

As you know, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Thomas and said: **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe”.** Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:27-28).

Thomas, who witnessed the resurrection in person, died as a “martyr” for what he “believed”. The word “martyr”, as you know, means “witness”. Thomas was only one of many “martyrs” who had seen the resurrected Jesus in person. The fact that these witnesses died without denying what they had seen is powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus! The early church would have quickly disappeared if someone had merely produced the body of Jesus. The fact that they didn’t is significant! The apostles themselves were willing to base their own confidence in Christ on the reality of his resurrection. Paul wrote: **“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Cor. 15:14).**

OTHER KINDS OF EVIDENCE

The testimony of Jesus to Thomas alludes to other kinds of evidence. **Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

Thomas believed because of what he “saw”. There are, however many other kinds of evidence. John recorded some of that evidence in his Gospel: **“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31).**

We have plenty of evidence for believing without seeing. This is the way we “believe” the facts of history! We “believe” in men like Caesar, Socrates, Alexander the Great, and Napoleon in spite of the fact that we have never seen them!

Obviously there is plenty of reliable evidence to “believe” in many things we have never seen!

WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH

The Scriptures teach: **“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3).** The word “credited” comes from the Greek word “logizomai” which is a word used in accounting. What Abraham experienced was centuries ahead of modern banking. Only recently can we make an electronic deposit that will produce credit into an account many miles away. Even though we cannot “see” this transaction it is nevertheless very real. In the same way Abraham’s faith did this same thing many centuries ago as his “faith” was “credited” as righteousness with God.

The Law of Moses is not based on faith (Galatians 3:12). Paul explained this: **“Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’”(that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth**

and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” (Romans 10:5-10)

Samuel F. B. Morse was the son of a preacher and a devout Christian. He is famous for inventing the telegraph. The first message sent by telegraph occurred on May 24, 1844. It was a quote from Numbers 23:23 in the Bible - **“What hath God wrought”**. This officially opened the Baltimore to Washington telegraph line.

The invention of the telegraph, of course, pales into insignificance by comparison to our eternal salvation. **“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out” (Romans 11:33).**

FAITH IN GOD EXPANDS YOUR MIND

We will conclude this brief article by reminding you that God is a Spirit and chose to make himself know through Jesus. **“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known”.** (John 1:18). This “belief” is foundational to the Christian “faith”!

Believing the story of the incarnation, however, is not easy. True faith is not flippant or casual. It requires diligent concentration and effort. When the people asked Jesus: **“What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (John 6:28-29).** Just as an accountant uses his mind to work at his desk, the Christian uses his mind to believe in Christ!

Please focus your mental and spiritual energies on these words by the late C.H. Spurgeon. He wrote them on January 7, 1855 when he was only twenty-five years of age.

“It has been said by someone that the proper study of man is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God’s elect is God; the proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of the child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in the contemplation of Divinity. It is a subject so vast that all of our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self content, and go our way with the thought, ‘Behold I am wise’. But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass’s cold; and with solemn exclamation. ‘I am but of yesterday, and know nothing.’ No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.

But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe . . .The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the

Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as the devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of Deity.

And while humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is in the contemplation of Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietness for every grief; in the influence of the Holy Spirit, that is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know of nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as the devout musing on the subject of the Godhead."

Yes! **"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."** (Hebrews 11:1)