

# Hebrews Chapter Eleven (vv.8-16)

## **True Faith Sojourns (vv.8-10)**

**8** *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

True faith is obedient to the word of God without delay. It was 'while Abraham was being called' (present participle) that he 'went out'. Here is faith which does not question, seek to know or understand; it just obeys. He went out 'not knowing whither he went', that is, he did not 'put his attention' or 'fix his thoughts on' where he was going. This was irrelevant. God had called. His faith displaced all worry and trouble. Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 15.7, Nehemiah 9.7), a great and prosperous city which was located in southern Babylonia and had achieved a high level of civilization. What could possibly cause a man to leave such a civilization and 'go out' to an unknown destination? Only the personal revelation of the God of Glory to his soul (Acts 7.2)! The best the world had to offer was not attractive to the man with a vision of the glory of God. The world was never the same to Abraham again.

Abraham's departure from Ur is a picture of the salvation all believers enjoy. Once God had made a personal revelation to Abraham, he responded in faith and made a complete break from the old life. New desires now filled his heart. *Genesis 12.1: 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.* He was delivered from his country (old **position**), kindred (old **condition**) and father's house (old **association**). Likewise we have been delivered from the world and born anew into God's family with heavenly associations.

Noah was moved by the **warnings** of God (v.7) but Abraham was drawn by the **promises** of God which *initially* did not include the land (Genesis 12.1-3). This promise was a reward of faith, being granted after he had stepped foot into Canaan (Genesis 12.6). Note. Abraham did not personally receive this inheritance all the days of his life (Acts 7.5, Hebrews 11.13). Faith in God's promises requires patience (10.36).

**9** *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: **10** For he looked for  $\epsilon$  (the) city which hath (the) foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

Abraham 'sojourned' in Canaan, the land of promise, as in a 'strange' or 'foreign' country. As one who sojourned, he 'dwelt beside' the people of the land 'without rights of citizenship'. This is well illustrated by his buying a burial place for Sarah from the children of Heth (Genesis 23). He did not lay down any permanent roots, but dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob (who was **15** when Abraham died). Abraham was looking for a 'better ('heavenly') country' (v.16) and a permanent heavenly city. In fact, this city was his 'eager expectation' ('looked for'). 'The city' (definite article) separates it from all human constructions. This is 'the city' which has 'the foundations' that endure; a city whose 'designer', 'builder' and 'preparer' is God. What is this city? The word 'city' occurs four times in Hebrews and each time it refers to the same city. It is already built and **prepared** by God (11.10, 16), it is **populated** by the redeemed of all ages (12.22-23) and is heavenly and **permanent** in character, rather than earthly and transient (13.14). This can be none other than the 'city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem' (12.22). It is also called 'Jerusalem which is above' (Galatians 4.26), 'the city of my (Christ's) God' (Revelation 3.12), the 'holy city, new Jerusalem' (Revelation 21.2) and 'that great city, the holy Jerusalem' (Revelation 21.10).

There are lessons to be learned from Abraham's attitude to life on earth. *John G Butler: Faith puts a tent on this earth, but a castle in heaven. Let us put a right perspective on time and eternity. Faith has a higher sense of values than the flesh. The flesh is satisfied with trash, but faith wants the best. The cities of this world did not satisfy Abraham, but Lot was satisfied with Sodom. Where do our values and affections lie?*

## **True Faith Strengthens (vv.11-12)**

**11** *Through (By) faith (he) also (together with) **Sara herself** received strength to conceive (deposit) seed, and was delivered of a child when he was past age, because he judged him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.*

The Greek suggests that these verses are still emphasising the faith of Abraham in partnership with his wife Sarah. What a blessing it is when husband and wife are partners in faith (cf. Luke 1.6, Acts 18.26). Both Abraham and Sarah were beyond the age of natural childbirth (**100** and **90** years old respectively), but *through faith* God was able to do for them what was naturally impossible. Their physical powers were renewed *by faith* resulting in the birth of Isaac. Therefore, from **one** dead one (Abraham, cf. Romans 4.19) came forth an innumerable seed. Abraham had a **natural** seed (through

Ishmael), **covenant** seed (through Isaac) and **spiritual** seed (through faith). Abraham's seed is both *heavenly* (the stars) and *earthly* (the sand of the seashore). *Galatians 3.7: You may be certain, then, that all those who 'believe God' are the real 'sons of Abraham'.* All this was possible because Abraham and Sarah 'judged Him faithful who had promised'. Initially Sarah laughed in unbelief (Genesis 18.12) but at Isaac's birth she laughed with joy and delight at the purposes of God being fulfilled (Genesis 21.6). They both made a *moral assessment* of the character of God and considered Him to be faithful and true to His promises. In their minds the certainty of God's **word** far outweighed the adverse and contrary circumstances. True faith honours, respects and places confidence in the word of God resulting in spiritual strength. Note. This strength came when they had reached the end of their own strength.

### **True Faith Sustains (vv.13-16)**

**13** *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having **seen** them afar off, and were **persuaded** of them, and **embraced** them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. **14** For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.*

'These all' likely refers to those to whom the promises were made, i.e. Abraham (and Sarah), Jacob and Isaac (v.9). These all died 'according to faith', i.e. they died as they lived, with total confidence in God. They had not, at this point, received the complete fulfilment of God's promises but saw them in the distant future by the eye of faith (John 8.56)<sup>1</sup>. *They died under the regime of faith, and not the regime of sight.* The order is: **seeing** (by faith), **believing** (being persuaded) and **receiving** (embracing). We should *consider* God's promises, *rest* on them as reliable and *delight* in them.

The remarkable truth is that these patriarchs were not looking for an **earthly**, but a **heavenly** inheritance. They therefore considered themselves as foreigners on earth. They openly confessed they were **strangers** (away from home) and **pilgrims** (on the way home) on the earth (see Genesis 23.4, 47.9, Psalm 39.12). Having found a satisfying portion in the promises of God, they renounced any concerns in the world. Believers too are strangers and pilgrims. As **strangers** we are foreigners in this world, being marked by *habits, actions and language* which is strange to the world at large (1 Peter 4.4). As **foreigners** we are often assailed by home (or heaven) sickness (Philippians 1.23)! Being **pilgrims** we never feel entirely at home. We travel lightly (few earthly ties) and press on with the ultimate heavenly goal in mind (Philippians 3.14). The patriarchs were not looking for this passing world. They sought an abiding country or homeland, a permanent place of residence in the heavenly city. *Matthew Henry: Their designs are for it, their desires after it, their discourses about it...*

**15** *And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. **16** But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath (already) prepared for them a city.*

If they had been in the habit of **remembering** the country from which they had come (imperfect tense), their pilgrim existence gave them ample opportunity to return. They could have had the natural comforts instead of a tent life. But, the truth is, **they didn't!** It is most important for believers to discipline their minds (Proverbs 23.7, Romans 12.2, 1 Peter 1.13). If you are parked in front of a TV all your spare hours and neglect the Scriptures and prayer, your mind will be on the world; and this will make you more aware of the opportunities to return to the old paths of sin. We should put out of the mind all that impedes spiritual progress. So, 'stop mentally slacking', 'roll up your mental sleeves', 'pull your mind together'.

Divine revelation had taught them to 'desire', 'eagerly reach after' and 'aspire for' the things of **heaven** (12.22-24, 13.14) *not* the things of **earth**. This was a desire which pervaded their whole lives. The same can't be said for the nation of Israel who yearned after the pleasures of Egypt (Exodus 14.12, 16.3, Numbers 11.5) or the Galatians who returned to the bondage of the law. Do we desire the heavenly? Faith is interested in spiritual matters; to the flesh these things are boring. Faith wants the **sermon**; flesh wants the **supper**. Faith wants to **pray**; flesh wants to **play**. Faith desires **exposition**; flesh wants **entertainment**.

The **faith** of these patriarchs resulted in a twofold reward:

- Divine **association**. God is not ashamed to be called their God, or 'add an additional name to His own', i.e. be surnamed as their God. He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Would God be ashamed to have **my** name added as a surname to His?
- Divine **preparation**. The eternal city is ready for their permanent dwelling place (John 14.2).

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<sup>1</sup> *Some of God's promises to Abraham were not completely fulfilled in his lifetime. For example, he did not live to see his innumerable descendants or possess the land of Canaan.*