



Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God... ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

SUMMARY

You can't have a discussion on faith without mentioning Abraham, a man known *specifically* for his faith. Because of this reputation, the author devotes several more verses to him and his family than he did to Abel, Enoch, or Noah.

Hebrews 11:8 summarizes Genesis 12:1-5 and Acts 7:2-4. When Abraham was living in Mesopotamia, God appeared to him and told him to leave "your land and...your kindred and go into the land that I will show you" (Acts 7:3). Said differently: "Leave everything that is familiar, comfortable, and safe and follow me to a land you've never been to." Despite enormous cost, Abraham obeyed and "went out, not knowing where he was going."

The land God lead him to was Canaan, the “place that he was to receive as an inheritance”. But it’s important to note that God didn’t promise the land to Abraham’s offspring until *after* he had followed God there (Genesis 12: 7; 13:14-17).

This means when Abraham left everything and set out for Canaan, he wasn’t going there to possess it. Inheriting it was never an option in his mind on his journey. The “payoff” in Abraham’s mind for leaving everything behind was simply being obedient to God. The promise of inheriting the land was the *reward* of Abraham’s obedience, not the *cause* of it.

Hebrews 11:13-16 expands on this. Abraham and Sarah, their son Isaac, and grandson Jacob “all died in faith”, never seeing their descendants occupy Canaan. But for them, owning land was never the point. Otherwise they could have just gone back to Mesopotamia (v 15). Rather, the *real* reward for them was the relationship with God that faith makes possible. Because they looked forward to living with *him* in “a better country” (v 16) and “the city...whose designer and builder is God” (v 10), they were content to live this life in tents as “strangers and exiles” (v 13).

The persecution the original readers of this letter were facing probably reminded them often that this world is not “home”. But the author’s point is that longing for our heavenly country is what has always helped God’s people endure the trials of this life. And if we, like Abraham, endure by looking forward, God will not be ashamed to be called our God.

DISCUSS

Read 1 Peter 2:11-12 and Philippians 3:17-21. Why is it important as Christians to realize that we too are “sojourners and exiles” and “citizens” of another country? What kind of effect should this mindset have on our lifestyle? How might remembering this truth affect a certain sin struggle in your own life? What everyday trials might it help you to endure?

Consider your own motives for obeying God. Is an intimate relationship with God enough of a motivator for you to obey him? Why or why not?

Compare Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 26:4-5. What about Abraham is praised in each passage? How does this help us to understand the connection between faith and obedience?