

Text: Hebrews 11:13-16

Title: The Faith of the Sojourner

Truth: Like the patriarchs, Christians should have a lasting faith that longs for heaven despite having to wait for it.

Date/Location: August 28, 2011 at FBC

Introduction

We've seen five examples of Biblical faith in the preceding verses of Hebrews 11. They worshiped God, walked with God, worked for God, and waited on God. Even though there were things they could not see, they continued having assurance and conviction that what God told them was right and true.

I. Jewish Forefathers Died Still Believing, v. 13a

1. Who are the "these"?

These all in v. 13 refers back to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. It does not go back to Abel, Enoch, and Noah because they were not waiting for the kind of promise that God gave to Abraham.

Furthermore, Enoch did not die, and it was Abraham that had left his home country, not Abel or Noah. The idea of strangers and pilgrims applies well to Abraham forward (Gen. 23:4) but not the earlier men.

2. Meaning of "Died in faith"

Abraham et al. did not "die *by* faith" in the same way they did their other works by faith. Rather they died still *having* their faith. They did what is called "dying well." Some people die not so well, abandoning the faith or accumulating great doubts in the last years of their lives. Not so with these men and women. Their faith outlived their lives.

3. "Not having received the promises"

These people died well even though the promises that God made were not forthcoming in their lifetimes. It would have been easy to wait a while for their fulfillment, and then give up when it didn't appear to be happening (somewhat like 2 Peter 3:4).

There is a seeming contradiction between 11:13 and 6:15. The former says the patriarchs *did not* receive the promises whereas the latter says Abraham *did*. The resolution of this conundrum is that Abraham did receive the initial phase of the promise—his son Isaac. That was the provision needed to make his offspring as numerous as the stars.

4. Retained faith in the promises

They “saw them afar off.” This means they did not *see* them in the present. Still, they were assured of them and embraced them. They did not reject them or doubt them. They had an assurance and conviction of something unseen and not experienced (remember the definition of faith in 11:1?).

They had not received yet, but apparently they must have assumed that they would be resurrected for the promises to come to full fruition.

5. **Application:** We have divine promises too, many not yet fulfilled or only partially so. Here are some examples:

James 1:2 – the crown of life, **promised** to those who love Him...”

James 2:5 – “the kingdom which He **promised** to those who love Him...”

2 Peter 1:4 – “by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious **promises**, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature...”

2 Peter 3:4 – “the **promise** of His coming.”

2 Peter 3:13 - “according to His **promise**, we look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

1 John 2:25 – “And this is the **promise** that He has promised us—eternal life.” See Titus 1:2 on the same promise.

The question is, will we have a *persevering faith* in them and in our God and His Son, or will we give up and doubt before we die? We must continue in eager hope even for that which we cannot see yet (Rom. 8:24-25).

II. They Also Lived a Life of Faith, v. 13b-16a

1. Confession of stranger status.

They admitted they were passing through and not setting down roots in Canaan. See Gen. 23:4, 28:4, 37:1, 47:9.

2. Desire for a heavenly homeland.

Abraham had four places on his mind: Ur of the Chaldees (from which he left), Haran (where he stopped with his father for a while), the promised land Canaan (his nomadic home), and heaven (his permanent future home).

But of those four places, only the latter was a real homeland for Abraham and his sons. They wanted something permanent, something that corresponded fully to God's promises. We believe this will take shape during the millennial kingdom and then be fully realized in the heavenly state.

This better homeland is the same as the city in 11:10, 12:22, 13:14, and the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21:10ff. You have to wonder if it also refers to the dwelling places that Jesus said he was making for us (John 14:2). What a contrast from a nomadic lifestyle.

3. No Desire to return.

There was plenty of opportunity for Abraham and his sons to return to Haran or Ur. Abraham had his servant return there to find a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:4), but made him promise not to take Isaac back there (24:6). And Jacob temporarily fled back there to get away from Esau, but he was there 20 years (31:38) and then came back.

4. **Application:** Christians are strangers too.

The faith of the patriarchs throughout their pilgrimage was exemplary. They weren't perfect. But, they were serious followers of God. We, like they, are pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11, Phil. 3:20). We have to really do business with this truth. Our home is not here.

Many people wander about this earth trying to "find themselves" or find some utopia where they can settle down permanently. In this world? There is no such thing.

Do you really hope for Ann Arbor or Washtenaw County to be a homeland for you? Here? With the crime, the misappropriation of resources, the rampant sin, the killing of babies? Do you buy lands and build houses and set down foundations here and have all your hope in earthly things? Do you really think you will find a homeland here?

III. God's Response to This Kind of Faith, v. 16b

Conclusion

God is not ashamed of those who have faith in him. But he is ashamed of those who don't (Heb. 2:11, Luke 9:26). God honors those who honor him. Primarily we can honor him by loving Him and obeying His word.

God called himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob many times (Genesis 28:13, Exodus 3:6, 3:15-16, 4:5). How would you like to have your name in that list? Have that kind of faith and you will! MAP