

The Book of Hebrews

מֵאַנֶשׁ מִנִּמְ דָּא מִנִּי תֵּ אֶקְלָא
צִמְאֵל לֵ נְתַאֲצֵרְחָ דְרֵתְסֵנִ סְקָ
אֵ חֵ פְקֵלָא תֵ סֵנִ סֵרְבָאֵל
רֵרֵ תֵאֵ סֵרֵ תֵאֶקְסֵנִצֵ דִמִּמְצֵ
תֵאֲתַפְלֵשׁ נֵ תֵרְדֵנָהֵרְפֵרֵ נֵ רֵלֵדֵ
תֵאֲנֵשׁ רֵלֵדֵ מֵלֵלֵצֵ סֵסֵ תֵלֵשׁ



Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)
- V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)**
- VI. Epilogue: Final Exhortations (13:1-25)

Outline of Hebrews

V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)

- A. Exhortation to Draw Near, Hold Fast, and Encourage One Another (10:19-25)
- B. Warning: No Hope of Forgiveness for Those Who Turn from Christ (10:26-31)
- C. Call to Persevere in Faith (10:32-12:3)
 - 1. Don't Abandon Confidence but Persevere in Faith (10:32-39)
 - 2. The "Hall of Faith" – Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1-12:3)
- D. Exhortations to Readers to Endure (12:4-29)

Outline of Hebrews

2. The “Hall of Faith” – Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1-12:3)
 - a. Prologue: The Nature of Faith (11:1-3)
 - b. The Faith of Those Prior to the Flood (11:4-7)
 - c. The Faith of Abraham and His Heirs (11:8-22)
 - d. The Faith of Moses and Those Entering the Land (11:23-31)
 - e. A Closing Catalog of Faith (11:32-40)
 - f. Run the Race Looking to Jesus as the Supreme Example of Faith (12:1-3)

The Faith of Abraham and His Heirs – Part 2 (11:13-16)

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.*

The Faith of Abraham and His Heirs – Part 2 (11:13-16)

- In this section the author pauses in his person-by-person account of the faithful to tease out certain implications he wishes his hearers to recognize concerning Abraham and his heirs.
- The principles that the author draws out in this section are highly instructional for his readers and their current crisis.

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.*

- “*These all*” – refers to those mentioned in the five preceding verses (which we looked at last week): Abraham (along with Sarah), Isaac, and Jacob – “*died in faith,*” as they had *lived* in faith.
- They lived their lives with a ***firm conviction*** that God ***would*** fulfil the promises he had given them, and even as they faced their death they ***continued*** to look forward to the fulfilment of those promises.
- This is especially evident from the words which Isaac and Jacob spoke in the final blessings they bestowed on their sons and grandsons – a fact which our author will bring to our attention in Heb 11:20-21.

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.*

- Even though they didn't ever actually possess the land of Canaan (living there instead as "*strangers and exiles*"), the patriarchs didn't die in cynicism and unbelief.
- Instead they "*died in faith*" as those who had **not yet received** the promises, but nevertheless "*having seen them... from afar*".
- They didn't **pretend** the promises had been fulfilled at the time of their death, but because they **knew** God was faithful, they knew that he would **eventually** keep his promises to them.

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.*

- The author wants his readers to see the **parallels** to their **own** situation.
- The readers may feel in their current distress that God isn't fulfilling his promises, but if they were to take a **long** view of their situation, they would realize that God is **always** faithful to keep his word.

¹⁵ *If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

- Although the patriarchs spoke of themselves as pilgrims in a foreign land, they did not refer to the land they had *left* as being their true home, either.
- Any one of them could easily have gone back to the land from which they came. But in fact they had no thought of doing so.
- When Abraham's servant suggested to his master that Isaac might have to go to Mesopotamia in person to persuade his bride to come to Canaan, Abraham said: "*See to it that you do not take my son back there*" (Gen 24:6).

¹⁵ *If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

- In the following generation Jacob was sent to Haran by Isaac in order to seek a wife, but the vision he received at Bethel on the first night of his journey there made it impossible for him ever to think of Mesopotamia as his home (Gen 28).
- When the Lord directed Jacob to return to Canaan, some twenty years later, he referred to it as “*the land of your fathers*” (Gen 31:3), even though he and his fathers had always lived there as foreigners.

¹⁵ *If they had been thinking of **that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.***

- The actions and attitudes of the patriarchs showed their devotion and commitment to the Lord.
- The readers of this letter, on the other hand, were tilting in the **other** direction.
- They were tempted to go back to Judaism to enjoy the comfort and security of **this** world.
- Judaism was a legal religion in the Roman empire, and they may have been inclined to move in this direction to avoid persecution.
- Or perhaps they wanted the tangible assurance that their sins were forgiven through the concrete and repeated activity of the Levitical sacrifices.

¹⁵ *If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

- They may have even tried to justify such a move by saying they were returning to the “faith of their fathers”.
- But actually, as our author tells us here, their fathers didn’t look **backward** but **forward**.
- Their fathers, and the patriarchs in particular, didn’t put their trust in any **earthly** city but a **heavenly** one.
- Our author, therefore, encourages his readers to follow the example of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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.*

- The truth is, the patriarch's **true** homeland was not on earth at all.
- The “*better country*” on which they had set their hearts was a “*heavenly*” country.
- The earthly land of Canaan and the earthly city of Jerusalem were but **temporary** object-lessons pointing to the saints' **everlasting** rest in the well-founded city of God.

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**.*

- The promise of a “heavenly city” is rooted in the Old Testament where there are **stunning** promises made concerning Jerusalem:
 - We are told that a day is coming when “**LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem**” (Isa 24:23).
 - We see promises of a coming day when Jerusalem will be the center of the universe: “**At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart**”. (Jer 3:17)
- What the Old Testament says about the **earthly** Jerusalem is fulfilled in the **heavenly** Jerusalem according to Hebrews.

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.*

- Those who put their trust in God look forward to living in this heavenly city.
- The example of the patriarchs and their focus on their future heavenly reward is intended to serve as an encouragement to the readers of this letter to value the things that really matter.
- Like the elect exiles of the Dispersion addressed in 1 Peter (cf. 1 Pet 1:1), we are to live in this world as “*sojourners and exiles*” (1 Pet 2:11)
- And like the Philippians to whom Paul wrote, our “*citizenship is in heaven*” (Phil 3:20).

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.*

- It is easy for Christians in our day to lose sight of this heavenly focus.
- Yet there have always been those who **have** possessed this pilgrim attitude and could enthusiastically sing along with Henry Francis Lyte when he writes:

*It is not for me to be seeking my bliss
And building my hopes in a region like this:
I look for a city which hands have not piled;
I pant for a country by sin undefiled.*

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.*

- This is **not** to say that as Christians we are not to be concerned about the troubles we see going on in the world around us – too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly use.
- Abraham's neighbors were enriched by the presence of this wandering stranger in their midst.
- When the territory of some of them was devastated by an invading army on one occasion, it was “*Abram the Hebrew*” who took immediate and effective action to deal with the situation (Genesis 14).
- Indeed, **throughout** church history, Christians have had a profoundly positive impact on the society on in which they lived.

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.*

- Since the patriarchs longed for a heavenly homeland and city, and heaven is the residence of God, it is evident they longed for God more than they desired any of the things of this world.
- Because dwelling in God's presence is their greatest desire, "*God is not ashamed to be called their God*".
- Indeed, "*he has prepared for them a [heavenly] city*" so they may reside with him forever.
- The author has the same hope for his readers.
- Their desire should **not** be for **earthly comforts** but God's **heavenly presence**, and they should recognize that if they endure in faith and hope until the end that God has prepared a city for them.

Class Discussion Time



***Class Discussion Time**

- There has been a strong emphasis in today's text on having a "heavenly focus" and yet we are called as Christians to have a preserving influence on the society around us (salt and light – cf. Mat 5:13-14).
- Is there a conflict between these two ideas? If not, how do you see them fitting together?
- As a society, we enjoy many freedoms and comforts in our day to day life that the vast majority of people living on the earth, both now in in the past, do not enjoy.
- If, in the near future, we as a society were to lose many of those freedoms and comforts, how well do you think you would cope?

*Class Discussion Time

- Do you sometimes find yourself becoming discouraged by the trials that you face in your day to day Christian life?
- If so, were there any takeaways in the text that we covered today that you think would be helpful in overcoming that discouragement?
- The three patriarchs referenced in today's text were far from faultless, and yet, the text tells us, God is not ashamed to be called their God.
- It is noteworthy that, while Jacob is in many ways the *least* exemplary of the three patriarchs, God is called the "God of Jacob" more frequently in the Bible than he is called the God of Abraham or of Isaac.
- If you are a Christian who tends to beat up on yourself and worry that God is ashamed of you, do you find the positive things said in this passage about these imperfect patriarchs to be encouraging?