

The Faith of the Patriarchs

📖 Hebrews 11:8-16

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The Book of Hebrews is to be understood as written to Jewish believers living in the land of Israel. These Jewish believers had publicly renounced Judaism by means of water baptism, identifying with Jesus as the Messiah. This separated them from that generation of Israel that was going to destruction in AD70. As a consequence, Jewish unbelievers began exerting pressure and even persecution on them. The Jewish believers were contemplating returning to the practices of Judaism at the Temple in order to alleviate the stigma of being associated with Jesus. The author of Hebrews' goal is to warn them of the loss of blessing if they turn back to that system which had come to an end at the cross and was soon to be destroyed by the Romans in AD70. As such the author argues that Christ is better than everything held dear by Judaism. Christ is better than angels. Christ is better than Moses. Christ is better than Aaron's priesthood. Throughout he issues five warnings of divine discipline and loss of reward if they turn back to Judaism. Temporal discipline would transpire because they were returning to a system that could not deal with personal sin. Temporal consequences would result since they would be caught up in the impending destruction of Jerusalem. The answer to the difficulty they faced was not turning back to Judaism but enduring the difficulty by faith. In Heb 10:32-34 they are reminded of past sufferings they endured by faith and the eternal rewards that would consequently be theirs. In 10:35 they are encouraged to maintain that same endurance by faith in their present persecutions. 10:36-39 sets the stage for Heb 11 by exhorting them to endure by faith. He says, "Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.³⁷For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.³⁸But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.³⁹But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." These Jewish believers, therefore, had two choices: they could give in to the temptation to shrink back into Judaism and face divine discipline and loss of reward or they could endure the stigma by faith, going straight to Christ the High Priest in the heavenlies, who is very much better and by it obtain a good testimony with God so that they enjoy temporal blessing and future reward.

Hebrews 11 begins with a description of the faith envisioned. It is a faith that is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” In other words, faith is viewed as the instrument by which the believer is so certain of the fulfillment of a promise that he is able to endure hardship in the present until that promise is realized, even if he dies prior to its realization. Put shortly, faith is resting in the promises of God. A host of named and unnamed saints are exhibited in this chapter because they faced difficulties in their own time and were able to rest in the promises of God yet unrealized. These are examples for all of us to follow since verses 39 and 40 show that God saw in advance something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made complete. We are, therefore, all heading to the same destiny, though there are still distinctions in that destiny. Pete and Andy have opened our eyes to the faith of saints in the Antediluvian Era; the faith of Abel, Enoch and Noah. We now come to the faith of saints in the Patriarchal Era; Abraham, his wife Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. It is my prayer that these examples are added to your arsenal so that you can turn to them and draw strength from their endurance by faith when you face difficulty, so that we, together with them, might please God and obtain a good testimony with Him who is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The Genesis narrative is the fertile ground of the author’s meditation on the patriarchs. In 11:8 we see Abraham. Abraham is the most prominent person in the entire chapter as seen by two evidences. First, by the number of verses allotted to him. He receives twelve verses describing his faith. Moses is second, receiving seven verses describing his faith. Everyone else receives a lesser description. Second, Abraham is the one from whom everyone else in this chapter descends, excepting Rahab. He is our first example and the first thing he illustrates is the Obedience of Faith. Abraham’s story begins in Gen 11 when he still lived in Ur of the Chaldees. We read, **By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.** Gathering the facts of the case, according to Acts 7:2 God **called** Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. According to Gen 15:7 and Neh 9:7 the LORD brought him out of a city named Ur. Ur was a Chaldean city. Abraham was therefore a Chaldean and of Chaldean heritage. Gen 11:30 adds that he was already married to Sarai who also would have been a Chaldean. Finally, we gather from Joshua 24:2-3 that he and his father Terah worshipped other gods. With this background, it is significant that verse 8 says, **when he was called**, meaning at that moment, he **obeyed**. The construction of the Greek is the present participle **was called** preceding the main verb **obeyed**. This construction means that the two actions occurred simultaneously. Westcott said, “He obeyed the call while...it was still sounding in his ears.”¹ Fruchtenbaum said, “While God was still speaking, Abraham was getting up to obey immediately thus demonstrating his faith.”² This is an illustration of the obedience of faith. Abraham immediately got out of his Chaldean culture when He heard the call of God. In Gen 12:1 God said, “Get out of your country...” And in Gen 12:4 “So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him.” The author of Hebrews was correct to note that the moment Abraham was called He obeyed.

Now I take it that this obedience of faith was exercised within phase two of salvation. There are three phases or tenses of salvation. Phase one is the past tense, we have been saved. What we have been saved from is the

penalty of sin. This salvation is justification and refers to being credited with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. It occurs at the moment of faith alone and is complete at that moment. Phase two is the present tense, we are being saved. What we are being saved from is the power of sin. This salvation is sanctification and refers to spiritual growth. It occurs as we live by faith. Phase three is the future tense, we will be saved. What we will be saved from is the presence of sin. This salvation is glorification and refers to the resurrection body. I take it Abraham already had phase one salvation, he was justified by faith and was in phase two, sanctification and the reason I think that is because everyone in this chapter is an example of a believer already justified in phase one and in sanctification of phase two. Living in phase two, sanctification, Abraham was put in a difficult situation of exercising faith. He was called to leave his homeland, the only place he had ever known; he was called to leave the land of his inheritance, he was called to leave his culture, he was called to leave his gods and follow another God. And when he was called the voice of God calling was still in his ears when he got up and **obeyed** the call. This is a fantastic faith response and I wonder, when we hear the word of God do we immediately obey? Is this our response?

Now we come to the rest of the verse. **And he went out, not knowing where he was going.** This is another fantastic faith response. God did not tell him **where he was going** and yet **he went out**. Most men here would say, could you show me on the map where I am going? But Abraham didn't say that. The Greek words translated **not knowing** are *μη επισταμενος* and mean "not acquiring information about." Abraham did not acquire information about where he was going. He did not get a map. But **he went out** anyway. In the Genesis text he was not even told till he was in the land of Canaan that this land would be the inheritance of his descendants. So he really knew nothing. A. T. Robertson said, "Abraham is a sublime and graphic example of faith. He did not even know where the land was that he was going to receive "as an inheritance"..."³ That would be a very difficult situation to digest and yet he trusted God simply putting one foot in front of the other and trusting that God would tell him where to put his foot next. So, our first illustration is Abraham and he illustrates the obedience of faith and we have to ask ourselves when we come to a promise of God do we obey it out of faith as it is still ringing in our ear, do we obey without knowing the outcome of our obedience, simply trusting that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? Or do we require more information.

In 11:9-10 we continue with Abraham but add in passing Isaac and Jacob. Together these men constitute the patriarchs of the nation Israel. They are our second example and they illustrate the Patience of Faith. **By faith he [Abraham] dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.** When Abraham got to the land God promised it to him and his descendants as an eternal possession, but he never acquired it. Instead **he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country.** The word **dwelt** is *παρωκησεν* and refers to "a sojourner," one who "inhabits a place as a foreigner," as a temporary resident. Abraham never legally possessed any land in Canaan except the burial plot that he later purchased for Sarah. Instead he wandered around Shechem, Bethel, Hebron and Beersheba living a nomadic existence **in**

tents. This kind of life involved a number of difficulties; since Abraham didn't own any land he was constantly on the move and did not have the stability that a permanent home provides. Nor did he have any citizenship rights that would have been common among those who did permanently reside in the land. So he was a man who had no permanent home at the time in this land and yet he had patient faith that one day he would have a permanent home in the land.

Neither did **Isaac and Jacob** who also **dwelled in tents.** They all shared the nomadic existence even though they all shared the **same promise,** and none of them ever acquired it. If you add up their lifespans this went on for more than about two centuries. Two hundred years of **dwelling in tents** in a land you are promised but never owning more than one burial plot. Dwelling in tents. That is the picture of patient faith. Fruchtenbaum said, "Abraham firmly believed that, no matter how long it took for the covenant's fulfillment, even if it meant it would be fulfilled beyond the grave and a future resurrection, one day he would own the Land." There really is no other way to explain why he and **Isaac and Jacob** kept **dwelling in tents.** Are we willing to wait patiently for God to fulfill His promises to us? Are we realizing now that many of His promises will not be fulfilled until after our lifetime? This is the patience of faith.

In 11:10 it is explained to us that Abraham wandered around because he was looking to acquire more than the land, he was looking to acquire a city in the land. **for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.** The verb **he waited** means "to wait with expectancy of receiving something." It is in the imperfect tense referring to ongoing action in past time. Abraham was waiting with expectancy to receive **the city which has foundations.** He did not know if he would receive it within his life, but he knew that God's promise was true and one day he would receive it. **The city** he was looking to dwell in **has foundations** and this contrasts with his dwelling in tents. In the ancient world a tent was a temporary home but a city with foundations was viewed with permanency. Ron Merryman said, "By faith, Abraham lived as a temporal visitor in the land of promise as though it were a foreign country. In contrast to a city with foundations, he lived in tents that have no foundation. Verse 9 emphasizes Abraham's anticipation for permanent abode in God's heavenly city."⁴ It's the word "anticipation" that catches the nature of faith Abraham exercised as described in verse 1 as a realization of hope. Abraham was able to anticipate living in the new Jerusalem through the eyes of faith. It was so real to him that he continued to wait expectantly for it by faith dwelling in tents.

The NKJV says of this city that it's **builder and maker is God.** The first word translated **builder** is *τεχνητης* and really has the meaning of "designer" or "architect." Architect would be a better translation. The architect of the city is **God.** The second word is *δημιουργος* and does refer to "builder" or "maker." **The builder** of the city is **God.** As such its foundations are permanent and the city in view must be the New Jerusalem. Kent says, "Inasmuch as God is the architect and builder of this city, it is clear that the earthly Jerusalem is not meant. Other references in Hebrews to this city are 11:16, where God is said to have prepared it, 12:22, where it is called the "city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," and 13:14, which refers to it as "the one to come." Galatians 4:26 speaks of

“Jerusalem which is above” as the spiritual origin and home of true believers. Revelation 21 describes the new Jerusalem, mentioning also the twelve foundations of its wall inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles (21:12).⁵ This city will come down from heaven to earth. Abraham lived his whole life as a stranger in the land looking for it to come down to earth. Estes said, “Like Abraham we should look forward to our inheritance in the coming world and should live as strangers and pilgrims in this world (1 Pet. 1:1).”⁶ So our second illustration is Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and they illustrate the patience of faith and we have to ask ourselves, when it comes to receiving our inheritance whether we wait for it patiently, expecting to receive it at the proper time or do we go on living in light of its certainty without being able to see it, counting ourselves as mere strangers and aliens? Do we have the patience of faith that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? Or do we become impatient, stop living as strangers and aliens, and make this world our first priority?

In 11:11 we come to Sarah, the wife of Abraham. She is our third example and she is an illustration of the Miraculous Results of Faith. The NKJV clearly sets Sarah’s faith in view saying, **By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.** However, the expression “received...to conceive seed” is *καταβολην σπερματος*, an expression which invariably refers to a male depositing his seed. There is not one single usage either biblically or extra-biblically that ever uses it of a female conceiving. If the author wanted to refer to concept he would simply say *εις συλληφιν σπερματος*. But that is not what he said. Therefore, many think that Abraham is the subject of this sentence and that it refers to his faith as the one who deposited his seed. To support this conclusion, they argue that the expression “Sarah herself also” must be an early addition by a copyist. However, there is no evidence of this being an addition and there are better explanations that do not involve such a radical manipulation of the text. The best explanation is that Sarah is the subject and the preposition *εις* should be understood as “in connection with” Abraham who deposited seed.” The author’s intended sense would be to translate it thus, “By faith Sarah received power in connection with Abraham’s depositing of seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” A lesser difficulty is pointed out by those who oppose Sarah having faith by the fact that when the Lord told Abraham “... this time next year...Sarah your wife will have a son,” she laughed to herself (Gen 18:12). Her laugh was undoubtedly an expression of disbelief. How then could the author of Hebrews commend Sarah for her faith? We are asked. Surely then, Abraham’s faith must be in view. However, it is conveniently forgotten that when the Lord first revealed to Abraham that he would give him a son by Sarah saying that she would be “a mother of nations; kings of peoples would come from her” (Gen 17:16) that Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” (Gen 17:17). So Abraham’s first response was really no better than Sarah’s. They both laughed in unbelief. Is it not possible that the author of Hebrews, aided by the inspiration of the Spirit, saw Sarah’s belief where we can see none? The emphatic “even Sarah herself” (*και αυτη Σαρρα*) is too strong to disregard. I maintain that it is difficult to argue that the author does not have Sarah’s faith in view. And as Zane

Hodges said, we have here the “first heroine of faith.”⁷ So even though she did laugh at first, so did Abraham, and it appears that sometime after it was revealed but before the conception she did have faith and the author was permitted to see her faith by the aid of the Spirit of God. She is an example of the Miraculous Results of Faith. In fact, what God wants to do through our faith is bring about miraculous results, results that are not in harmony with the normal course of events.

The full picture of what is in mind is so wonderful that we must draw attention to it. Even while Abram and Sarai were in Ur, before they departed, Gen 11:30 says, “Sarai was barren; she had no child.” Thus when the Lord told Abram in Gen 12:2 “I will make you a great nation” it was not understood how this could possibly be. This was exactly Abram’s predicament in Gen 15:2 when he said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” Abram was trying to understand who his heir would be and how God’s promise could come true. Was his heir to be Eliezer of Damascus? But the “word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” A careful Bible student will note that God only said the heir would come from Abram’s body, He made no mention of Sarai’s body, which Abram knew to be barren. Thus, are we too surprised in Gen 16:2 to find Sarai saying to Abram, “See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.”? This may sound like a strange suggestion to 21st century Westerners but in that culture it was customary for a maid to provide an heir if the wife was barren. Abram followed the cultural custom at the suggestion of his wife and went in to Hagar the Egyptian maidservant. Perhaps this was the way God would fulfill His promise, with man’s help. The result was Ishmael, the child of the flesh. It is notable that Abram was 86 years old and he was by no means sterile. So far they had reasoned this way, God promised an heir; is Eliezer the heir? No, said God, the heir will come from your body Abram. Okay, now we have Ishmael through the maid Hagar, is Ishmael the heir? Thirteen years passed, Ishmael grew up and then God said to Abraham “I will bless Sarah and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she will be a mother of nations...” (Gen 17:16). That is when Abraham fell on his face and laughed that such a thing could be done to a man who is one hundred years old and a woman who is ninety years old! Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” But “No,” God said, “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after you.” God pushed through all their human gimmicks to find an heir and in the process taught them a life-long lesson. He said, the heir is not Eliezer, born of your house, the heir is not Ishmael, born of your body, the heir is Isaac, born of your and Sarah’s body. Clearly this could only be achieved by the promise of God! It is to show the miraculous results of faith. The entire point of the narrative shows that this was impossible, as far as any natural or human concept Sarah could not have a child. Remember, she had not one, but two strikes against her. She was barren in her early birthing years and now she was well beyond the birthing years. How then could it be? That is why they both laughed when they first heard. But at the end of verse 11 the author of Hebrews saw her faith in that she did come to

judge Him faithful who had promised, and that, I would say, before the conception, for then it would not be faith in the sense of this chapter, as an unseen reality realized through faith, but as a seen reality, and that is no faith.

And **therefore**, verse 12, **from one man, and him as good as dead**, with respect to Sarah, because we know later from Gen 25:2 that even after Sarah died Abraham took Keturah as his wife and had six sons through her at a ripe old age. So Abraham was not as good as dead with respect to all women, only with respect to Sarah. The problem then, and the clincher in this passage that the faith of Sarah is in view, is that Abraham didn't have a fertility problem, only Sarah had a fertility problem, and really she had two problems, barrenness from birth and now way past the age of childbearing. And do you see that God did this for a purpose, that He did this to demonstrate the miraculous results of faith. And so when it says **him as good as dead** it means Abraham was **as good as dead** with respect to Sarah. There was no way he could deposit seed in Sarah with any results. And yet, as our translation of v 11 shows, when Abraham deposited seed she received power, her regenerative powers were made alive at that moment and verse 12 gives the miraculous results, not just one child, Isaac, was born. But note, **Therefore from one man were born...as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore**. The emphasis is on the innumerable multitude of offspring that came from the dead, barren womb of Sarah. Only God could give that result. That is why this is an illustration of the miraculous results of faith. The entire nation of Israel was born out of a dead womb. Go think about that. And when Isaac was born in Gen 21:4 Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." This was not the laugh of unbelief as before but the laugh of wonderment and awe at what God had done for her. And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?" And, of course, the only One who could have said that is the God who calls that which is naught into existence. So, our third illustration is Sarah. She is an example of the miraculous results of faith. Are you trusting God for miraculous results? That is what God wants to do. He is not interested in what we can accomplish. He is interested in what He can accomplish through faith.

Now verse 13, **These all died in faith. These all** are Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. It doesn't include anyone earlier because Enoch clearly did not die in a manner consistent with faith for 11:5 says "he did not see death." The expression **in faith** is different than the repeated "By faith" which introduces each new example in Heb 11. That repeated usage is the dative of faith, *πιστει*. It means "by means of faith." Each of these believers was able to grasp a future reality before its actual realization by means of faith. Here the construction is *κατα πιστιν* which means "according to faith" or "in a manner consistent with faith." Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob did not die by means of faith but they died in a manner consistent with faith! How remains to be seen but the way they died was a clear testimony of their faith. It is an elaboration of the illustration of the patience of faith. **These all died in faith, not having received the promises**. The **promises** are the **promises** in the Abrahamic Covenant God made with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The **promises** have three aspects: the land, the seed and the blessing. Vv 13-16 focus on the land, something they never acquired. **But having seen them afar off were**

assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Earth is the Greek word *γη* and should be translated “land.” **They were strangers and pilgrims upon the land** of promise. The author has in mind the events in Gen 23:4. When Sarah died in Hebron at the ripe old age of 127, Abraham went to the sons of Heth who owned the land and said to them, “I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” The point is that Abraham did not own one parcel of land in the land that God promised to him, yet he sought a place in the Promised Land to bury Sarah. In that passage some debate occurred over whether Abraham should have to pay for the land. In the end Abraham insisted on purchasing the field and cave at Machpelah for 400 shekels of silver. At that time it was “deeded to Abraham as a possession.” It then repeats for emphasis saying, “The field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place.” The point is that was all of the promised land that was ever acquired by them. Later he, Isaac and Jacob were also buried in this place. Today orthodox Jews have a memorial at Hebron called the tomb of the patriarchs. What the author of Hebrews noticed was that the purchase of a burial ground demonstrated Abraham’s actions as consistent with faith. Isaac and Jacob never came to possess the Promised Land either but they too acted consistent with faith, insisting on being buried within the land because they believed God would one day give it to them in fulfillment of the promises. Jacob secures this understanding in Gen 47:9 when he said to Pharaoh, “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.” They were all just sojourners, they never possessed the Promised Land. But the author of Hebrews says in v 13 that they saw the promises from **afar off** and **were assured of them**, and **embraced them**. This is the nature of faith as here described; they never realized the land promises but they were so certain of them that they purchased a burial ground and insisted on being buried in the land. Later Joseph reminds us of this same faith when he insists that his bones be taken out of Egypt to the Promised Land to be re-interred there saying, “God will surely visit you...” He too was confident in the promises of God and knew they would be fulfilled in due time.

In 11:14 we are given the full explanation, **For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.** That is, those who say that they are nothing but strangers and pilgrims, by such **declare plainly that they seek a homeland.** The word **homeland** is *πατριδα* and “connotes a true homeland from which one has sprung and where he really belongs.”⁸ Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sought to find a place where they really belonged but they never found that place, they only wandered in it. The verb **seek** is from *επιζητεω*, the intensive form of the verb. It means they had a strong desire to find a true homeland but they never acquired it, they only sojourned in it.

In 11:15, **And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.** They had come out of Ur of the Chaldees, Mesopotamia, between the rivers, that was their “homeland.” The word **country** is in italics and not in the original, the reference is to their “homeland” from verse 14. **If they had called to mind that homeland.** The conditional clause signaled by the **truly if** is a

first class; assumed reality for the sake of argument. In other words, if they had **called to mind**, imperfect tense, if they had set their minds on **that country from which they had come out**, if they had been dwelling on it, if they had “a hankering for it” then upon that condition being fulfilled **they would have had the opportunity to return**. But it is evident they did not have a hankering for it, for even when Abraham sought a wife for Isaac from his own people in Mesopotamia he himself did not go but he sent a servant (Gen 24:1-10). The evidence stands; they went out of their homeland seeking a better homeland and they never looked back. That is the substance of verse 16.

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Again, **country** is not in the original, it is simply a **heavenly** homeland. Many commentators say they were desiring heaven itself, in the sense of escaping this earth. But the evidence against this is in these very verses; they were walking around the land of Canaan waiting expectantly for this heavenly homeland to come. The word **heavenly** is a genitival adjective describing the source and character of the homeland they were continually looking for. It is going to come from heaven and it is therefore going to be like heaven. This homeland is the new Jerusalem. In Rev 21-22 the New Jerusalem is described as coming down from heaven to earth. **Therefore**, because they desired such a better homeland, **God is not ashamed to be called their God**. Throughout the OT and NT, we see the evidence that **God is not ashamed to be called their God** every time we read the phrase “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” God puts His name with their names. He **is not ashamed to be called their God** because they counted God and His promises true, even when they only saw them afar off, **for He has prepared a city for them**. This city had already been prepared and yet it was hidden from their sight. This **city** is the New Jerusalem. It will descend out of heaven from God to the new earth and it will be the permanent abode that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were continually searching for by faith in the land of Canaan. They illustrate the patience of faith. At the last they will find this city in the resurrection. Then they will no longer be strangers and aliens in a foreign land but at home in possession of all the promises.

In summary, in 11:8 Abraham is set forth as an illustration of the obedience of faith. By faith he obeyed even when the call of God was in his ear and he went out to the place he would receive as an inheritance, not knowing it would be His inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going, but simply trusting God for it moment by moment, day by day. In 11:9 Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are set forth as illustrations of the patience of faith. By faith Abraham dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling as a nomad in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, all heirs with him of the same promise, yet never having ownership. In 11:10 we have explanation, for he waited for the New Jerusalem, the city which has permanent foundations, whose architect and builder is God. In 11:11 Sarah is set forth as an illustration of the miraculous results of faith. Sarah herself received power in connection with Abraham’s depositing of seed, and she bore a child when she was both barren and past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. In 11:12, therefore from one man, and him as good as dead with respect to Sarah, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude— innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. An entire nation was born from the one man Abraham

through the dead womb of Sarah. Only God can do this. In 11:13 the author sets forth Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob as illustrations together that expand the patience of faith. These all died in a manner consistent with faith, not having received the promises in the covenant but having seen them afar off and yet were assured of them and embraced them and confessed to the sons of Heth that they were nothing but strangers and pilgrims on the land. In 11:14, those who say such things declare plainly that they are seeking a homeland, a true place to put down their roots. In 11:15, And truly, if they had been thinking about the homeland from which they came out, they would have had opportunity to return. But indeed they desire a better homeland, that is, one that will come down from heaven to earth. And because of this God is not ashamed to be called their God, because He has prepared the city for them. Faith acts on future promises as present realities.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, the obedience of faith. When Abraham heard the promise of God he immediately responded by faith not knowing the outcome. When you hear a promise of God in Scripture do you immediately respond by faith not knowing the outcome? Without faith it is impossible to please Him. You must believe that He is, as Abraham believed, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Second, the patience of faith. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob all dwelled their entire lives in tents wandering around the promised land never owning one piece of it except a burial ground they purchased so they could be buried in the land because they believed that God would in the resurrection give it to them. Do you have this patience of faith? God has promised us a future dwelling place in the Father's house and in the New Jerusalem to come. In the meantime, we are but strangers and aliens in this world. Do you have the patience to continue throughout your life searching and looking for the promised abode that is truly ours? Third, the miraculous results of faith. Sarah came to believe that God would revitalize her womb by the deposition of Abraham's seed such that she would have an heir. Through that God brought about an entire nation as innumerable as the grains of sand on the seashore. Are you believing God for miraculous results? God has a miraculous future in store for us in the resurrection and beyond. Are you believing this? If you are this pleases God for without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hopefully this forward looking capability of faith will enable you to endure the difficulties you face in the present.

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² Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Messianic Jewish Epistles*, p 154.

³ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Heb 11:8.

⁴ Ron Merryman, *Verse-by-verse through HEBREWS: A Study Guide, Vol II*, p 64.

⁵ Homer Kent, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p 224.

⁶ See Daniel J. Estes, "Looking for Abraham's City," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:588 (October-December 1990):399-413, for evidence of Abraham's pilgrim character in Genesis as quoted by Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Heb 11:8.

⁷ Zane Hodges, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

⁸ Homer Kent, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p 228.