

Hebrews Book Study
Lesson Forty-one
Hebrews 11:8-16

Introduction/Review

It is a futile and failed attempt when we seek to merit our salvation by working for it. The interesting thing about these characters here in chapter 11 is that all of them did good things for God. But the important truth we must glean from this chapter and from this book is that no one will stand in God's presence because of what they did. The only way we can please God is by recognizing what He did. Without faith it is impossible to please God! So then, we don't work so that we can get to God. We work because God came to us!

Vss. 8-10 Abraham is really the center of attention until vs. 19, partly because he is such an excellent model of faith and partly because of his significance in the outworking of God's plan of salvation. The promise made to Abraham about a place he would later receive as his inheritance (Gn. 12:1) is first recalled. On the basis of this promise, he obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going. Abraham's faith was immediately expressed by obedience to God's call. The motivation for that obedience was the hope of obtaining the promised land. So he lived like a stranger in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with those who were heirs with him of the same promise. When the writer describes Abraham as looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God, he portrays his ultimate goal as the heavenly country or heavenly city mentioned in 11:13-16; 12:22-24 and 13:14. Waiting for God to provide them with an earthly inheritance, the patriarchs came to realize that this life is not an end in itself but a pilgrimage towards a future that God alone can construct for his people.

Vss. 11-16 God's second promise to Abraham was that he would give him numerous descendants and make them into a great nation (Gn. 12:2). Although Abraham was past age and as good as dead, and Sarah herself was barren, by faith he was enabled to become a father. The ground of his confidence was the word of God and he trusted that God would be faithful to his word. So the birth of Isaac was the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise about offspring. But Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all died without receiving the land of Canaan as an earthly inheritance. The things promised were only seen and welcomed from a distance (13). When they admitted to being aliens and strangers on earth, they made it clear that they were looking for a country of their own. If they had been yearning for Mesopotamia, their place of origin, they would have had time to return and make their home there. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. As in v 10, the writer draws a close connection between the faith of Israel's forefathers and the faith of Christians. We are all pilgrims on a journey of faith, bound for the inheritance God has provided for us. Learning to trust God in their situation, the patriarchs looked to a reward that was beyond their earthly inheritance. They did not have the same clear promise of a heavenly homeland that we do but God delighted in their faith and, through Jesus Christ, he has prepared a city for them (the heavenly Jerusalem mentioned in 12:22-24).