

HEBREWS

Hebrews 11:8-40

Introduction

The Hebrew Christians were being encouraged to look *back* at their **history** in order to look *forward* to their **inheritance**. Their future inheritance is described like this:

1. It is a “place” which God’s saints “would receive as an inheritance” (v8).
2. It would be in “the land of promise” (v9) *but it was not yet on the earth* because,
3. It is “heavenly” and being “prepared” by God (v16).
4. It is “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (v10).

The future inheritance is the literal city described in great detail in Revelation chapter twenty-one and called “the New Jerusalem.” It “comes down from God out of heaven” (21:2) in the future. It is the real place Jesus said He was going to prepare for **you**, too, where you would live with Him forever (John 14).

Looking forward by faith to this future eternal city while living on the earth made these historical figures “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (v13). A “stranger” is someone who is **away from home**. A “pilgrim” is someone who is **on their way home**.

The Hebrew Christians were being encouraged to see themselves as strangers and pilgrims. **You and I** are being encouraged to see ourselves as strangers and pilgrims. All believers are away from home but on our way home as we look forward by faith to the heavenly city in which we will live.

Being a stranger and a pilgrim for your entire earthly lifetime seems like it could be discouraging. But as you read about Abraham and these others you find that their lives were satisfying. They were satisfied as they lived by faith in the hope of their future home.

I want to be satisfied; so do you. We'll organize our thoughts around these two points: #1 You Are Shown The Satisfaction Of Living By Faith As A Stranger And Pilgrim, and #2 You Are Known By The Satisfaction Of Living By Faith As A Stranger And Pilgrim.

#1 You Are Shown The Satisfaction
Of Living By Faith As A Stranger And Pilgrim
(v8-38)

Let me make a general comment about faith. The saints in this chapter, and throughout history, walked by faith in what God had revealed to them. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Faith is *not* some feeling independent of God's revelation. It is obedience that rests upon the foundation of God's revealed Word.

These verses do not provide an exhaustive look at the lives of these saints. If you want that you need to read their accounts in the Old Testament. In each example the writer seems to single-out either one overall theme or one specific episode in order to show you the satisfaction of living by faith.

For example: Verses eight through nineteen deal mainly with Abraham and Sarah. The verses mention many individual episodes of faith. But in verse ten you're especially told that Abraham "waited." Thus the overall theme we are meant to see in these episodes from the lives of Abraham and Sarah is that of waiting by faith.

Waiting never seem to be satisfying! Yet here you're shown that you can be satisfied living by faith as you wait.

Hebrews 11:8 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.
Hebrews 11:9 By faith he 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;
Hebrews 11:10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Abraham "obeyed" God. His faith was obedience to God's revealed Word. One of the things he believed was the promise that he would "receive as an inheritance" "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." His faith enabled him to be satisfied

waiting on the earth **even though he would not receive the promise in his lifetime on the earth.**

Abraham journeyed to “the land of promise.” The land of promise is the physical, geographical land of Israel in the Middle East. When Abraham left his homeland he had no idea where he was going – except that eventually he was going to God’s heavenly city.

When he got to the Promised Land on the earth he “dwelt” there “as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents.” He was satisfied to live as a stranger in the very land that belonged to him and his descendants by looking forward to the city that was being prepared in heaven for him.

Hebrews 11:11 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.

Hebrews 11:12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Sarah was ninety years old when God told her she would conceive! She had given up any hope of having a child; but after her much waiting she conceived and bore their son, Isaac. Abraham was “as good as dead” in the sense he, too, was old – ten years older than his wife. Still, after waiting a lifetime, he became the father of a nation of “innumerable” descendants.

These parents of innumerable descendants only ever had one child between them! They were satisfied waiting for God’s promise even though they would never see it fulfilled. In fact, they would never see many of God’s promises fulfilled in their earthly lifetimes. Which leads the writer to say, in verse thirteen,

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

This is a statement of spiritual satisfaction. The word translated “confessed” can be translated *admitted openly*. In other words, they were not ashamed of it. It is from Hebrew root words which mean to *acknowledge* and *thanks*. **They thankfully acknowledged and admitted openly they were strangers and pilgrims.**

Hebrews 11:14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

Hebrews 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.

Hebrews 11:16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The Hebrew Christians had the opportunity to go back to the Temple at Jerusalem. They should instead be like their ancestors and desire the future New Jerusalem – especially in light of Jesus’ warning that their Temple and Jerusalem were soon to be destroyed.

For us, it’s not Jerusalem that we want to return to. Still, there are many *places* or *people* or *practices* that we may backslide to. Instead we can be satisfied even though we, too, are waiting to go to the place Jesus is preparing for us.

Waiting can get pretty intense:

Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*,

Hebrews 11:18 of whom it was said, “*In Isaac your seed shall be called,*”

Hebrews 11:19 concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Abraham had other sons but Isaac was the only “begotten” son in the sense that he was the only one born to him from Sarah, and Isaac was the unique son through whom all the physical descendants of the promises would be born. In the face of this, Abraham was still willing to sacrifice Isaac. **Abraham believed God could and would raise Isaac from the dead!**

You know the story: God stopped Abraham at the last moment and substituted a ram as the sacrifice. He thus “received him in a figurative sense.” In other words, the trial of his faith was also a figure or a *parable*. On the very same mount upon which Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only begotten son, God would centuries later actually sacrifice His Son, Jesus Christ, for the sins of the world. Jesus was the fulfillment of the substitute Who must die that you might live.

The first century Hebrew Christians were being challenged to endure – to **wait** - in their trials, even though martyrdom could come to them and their children. Their hope should be in their future resurrection.

Leaving Abraham, the writer looks in rapid succession at His son Isaac, Isaac's son Jacob, and Jacob's son Joseph. He looks only at their deaths. You're shown that you can be satisfied as a stranger and pilgrim by looking beyond your life of faith to your **future rewards**.

Hebrews 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

Hebrews 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

Isaac and Jacob never received the promise; still, they "blessed" their sons and "worshipped" God even when they were dying. They understood that they were a link in the chain of what God had ultimately promised. Their reward for a life of faith was future, *after* their death.

The same is even more true of Joseph. You know the story. He was the dearest son of Jacob but was despised by his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt. There, by God's providence, he rose to become second in power and authority to Pharaoh. God used his position to spare his father and brothers and their families during a famine that would otherwise have destroyed them.

Joseph could have been buried in a magnificent tomb or pyramid. Instead he preferred his bones be buried in the Promised Land to signify that his heart was set upon God's future rewards, *after* his death.

Whether you are a nomadic tribesman or the second most powerful man on earth you can be satisfied. You can be satisfied knowing you are to be rewarded in heaven after your departure from earth. As one anonymous poet put it, "*Only one life will soon be past; Only what's done for Christ will last.*"

The writer has come historically to Moses. You're shown you can be satisfied even though you choose to "**suffer affliction**" as a believer.

Hebrews 11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

Hebrews 11:25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,
Hebrews 11:26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.
Hebrews 11:27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.
Hebrews 11:28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.
Hebrews 11:29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting *to do* so, were drowned.

The story of Moses hinges on his decision to “suffer affliction” rather than “enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” This phrase, “the... pleasures of sin,” does not only refer to immoral or illicit activities. It’s more a comparison between a life of *emptiness* versus one of *enjoyment*. You can be happy but empty; or you can suffer affliction but have joy and be satisfied.

The Hebrew Christians were being asked to choose between suffering affliction or going back into Judaism. When you are shown the example of Moses the choice becomes obvious.

From Moses and the Exodus the writer comes to the conquest of the Promised Land by Joshua. Interestingly, he doesn’t mention Joshua; he focuses on Rahab. You’re told concerning her,

Hebrews 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.
Hebrews 11:31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Rahab was not a Jew; she was a Gentile prostitute living among those who were to be destroyed. Forty years earlier she heard that the Jews had been delivered from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. Now they had crossed the Jordan and were coming to destroy the inhabitants of the Promised Land, beginning with Jericho. She believed God even though she was not part of His covenant people. She hid the Jewish spies and asked them to spare her and her family. They instructed her to put a scarlet cord in her window and promised her that God would indeed spare them when Jericho’s walls fell. She went on to marry a Jew named Salmon and gave birth to Boaz who was an ancestor of King David – *putting her in the line of the Messiah!*

What do we learn about being satisfied from Rahab? Again we're helped by remembering the context of this letter. Jericho was a city about to be destroyed. Centuries later, *Jerusalem was a city about to be destroyed!* There were people in Jerusalem God wanted to spare. The Hebrew Christians ought to act like Rahab. Instead of blending-in with their fellow citizens by returning to Judaism they ought to all the more be proclaiming the scarlet cord of salvation through Jesus Christ! You are being shown there is satisfaction in being a stranger and pilgrim because you can be used to win others to Christ.

Both the writer and I were running out of time! So we summarize:

Hebrews 11:32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

Hebrews 11:33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Hebrews 11:34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Hebrews 11:35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Hebrews 11:36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

Hebrews 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented -

Hebrews 11:38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

The point here is in the contrast. **We see victors (v32-35a) and victims (v35b-38) depending on our assessment of their outward circumstances. God sees **only victors** among His strangers and pilgrims. Your satisfaction as a stranger and pilgrim does not depend at all upon your outward circumstances. Whether you "subdue kingdoms" or end up "sawn in two," **you are already victorious.****

Having been shown the satisfaction of living by faith as a stranger and pilgrim, the application in verses thirty-nine and forty is that,

#2 You Are Known By The Satisfaction Of Living By Faith As A Stranger And Pilgrim (v39-40)

Hebrews 11:39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

Notice that the writer refers to “the promise” in a singular tense. He’s talking about the promise of the city that is yet to come, whose builder and maker is God. These saints, and all God’s saints, do receive and experience the fulfillment of many promises. The promise, however, is yet future for all of us.

Focusing on “the promise” led them - and it can lead us - to “obtain a good testimony through faith.” Another possible translation of these words is, “all these were known for their faith.” The implication is that they were known for their faith in a “good” way. They had a good testimony.

You can tell people you are a Christian but then demonstrate a defeated, joyless, victim life and be known as a person whose faith is unsatisfying... Or you can be spiritually satisfied and known for your faith as one who walks in victory even though you are a stranger and pilgrim. That’s the idea.

We have even more reason to be satisfied than the saints who have preceded us:

Hebrews 11:40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

If these ordinary men and women could live by faith and be satisfied, so could the Hebrew Christians **and so can we**. The “something better” is everything the writer has been discussing thus far in this book. This does not deny the vitality of the spiritual experience of the Old Testament saints. But you must admit that you and I are at a spiritual advantage. We have the Holy Spirit permanently living within us; we have God’s law written on our hearts; we have the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an established fact of history; we have the completed Scripture. I could go on and on listing the greater blessings God has provided us.

Together we and those who have preceded us in faith will “be made perfect.” God is building the New Jerusalem in heaven. Jesus promised He would return for us to bring us to the place He was preparing for us. You can read all about it in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

You may have noticed how I skipped-over all the failures in the lives of these men and women of faith.

Actually the skipping-over of their failures is done purposely by God!

You see, God is looking back over the lives of these saints and, as He does, He “remembers no more” their sins! He looks back over **your** life and is only writing down in His heavenly record those victories that will remain for eternity.

Take your place in the ongoing “Hall of Faith” as an ordinary believer who is one of its heroes away from, but on your way, home.