

Hebrews 11:8-10 "Abraham's Eyes of Faith"

This morning we come to the life of a man who is regarded as the father of a nation and the father of all who believe on the Lord. We're told in MAT 1:2 "Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,..." It was through Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, that the nation of Israel came into being.

But the promise given to Abraham to have descendants as numerous as the stars went well beyond physical offspring. In fact, it is all of those Jews and Gentiles who have believed in God, as did Abraham, who are regarded as his true spiritual descendants.

ROM 4:16 "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all."

GAL 3:6-7 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Gen. 15:6) 7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham."

Abraham is seen as the stellar example of what it is to live by faith, and yet we should never forget that Abraham was not a super-human, nor had a monopoly on spiritual things. Abraham was an ordinary man who had a supernatural encounter with the living God.

And as we take a look at Abraham this morning we'll see that that same supernatural encounter is the one you and I enjoy in Christ today, which assures us of an eternal relationship with our God who loves us and desires our fellowship.

HEB 11:8-10 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

To the Jew of Christ's day, as well as today, Abraham is regarded as their father. The Jews have traditionally seen Gentiles as Pagan dogs, not worthy of the God who called Israel out of Egypt. And

yet ironically the man they regard as the father of their nation was one who came from a pagan family and may have himself served other gods prior to the Lord coming to him.

Joshua 24:2-3 ² Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, *namely*, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, ***and they served other gods.*** ³ 'Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.

Abraham was not looking for God at the time the Lord came to him. Abraham was content to follow in the steps of his father and live out his life worshipping false gods, placing his hope in what he could see in this world.

But what does our writer in Hebrews tell us?

HEB 11:8 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."

It was not Abraham who called out to God, it was God who, in His mercy and grace, called Abraham. The call was to follow. And the only response that affords one to follow is one of faith.

Now we're not told how this call was made manifest in Abraham's life. We don't know the details of how God approached Abraham and got his attention, but one thing is certain, He did. We are given some insight to the fact that Abraham recognized this God as the one true God.

ACT 7:2 ".....The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran."

Abraham recognized the glory of God and bowed in submission as God gave him the ability to believe. God spoke to Abraham and the response of Abraham was to trust that God would do just as He said. Abraham took God at His word when He told Abraham in GEN 12:1-2 "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing."

The question, however, how is Abraham to demonstrate his belief in God? Is it enough for him to recognize God's promise, but then

continue to stay in Mesopotamia? No, that would not be an act of faith. Faith would not only listen to the promise, it would then act on it as shown in obedience.

This is exactly what Abraham did.

HEB 11:8 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, *obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*"

Evidently, when God called Abraham He didn't tell him where he was going. Can you imagine what this would be like for you and me today? Suppose God came to you and said, 'leave your home, leave behind all the ties you have to friends and family. Don't look back. Your response might be, 'Lord where am I going?'

And when He says, 'I will tell you where you need to go,' what are you going to tell your family and friends? 'God called me to follow Him.' 'So, where is this God going to take you?' 'I don't know.' 'You don't know?' 'No!'

'Why in the world then would follow Him?' 'Because, I know He is my creator and Lord and how can I say no to One who has called to me and revealed His glory and allowed me to taste and see that He is good.'

Abraham discovered that God is good. His former gods and idols gave him no eternal promises, no indication that they were merciful, loving, caring, and wanting a personal relationship with him. And the reason is that no idol is alive and no false god is real.

Abraham met the living God with living promises and the hope of meeting his Creator face to face one day to live with Him forever. The only response to such a revelation would be to do whatever this awesome God said. God said, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

There's no indication that Abraham hesitated. And yet there is an indication that Abraham, the father of all who believe, may not have complied completely. In Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin, shortly before he was stoned to death, he said this in ACT 7:2 "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran."

Mesopotamia is the area also referred to as Ur of the Chaldeans, which today would be in the Northwest part of Iraq. It is here where God first appears to Abraham and calls him to leave his country, his people, and his father's household. But, what do we notice after this call? He leaves his country, he leaves his people, but he does not leave his father's household.

Remember, Terah was Abraham's father. God came to Abraham, not Terah. God told Abraham to leave all ties in Ur. God gave Abraham the promises, not Terah. But we read in GEN 11:31-32 "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran."

It is Terah who leads the way. It is Terah who binds himself to Abraham's promise and it is Terah who settles his family in Haran. A.W. Pink makes the comment: (Abraham) "left Chaldea, but instead of separating from his kindred, he suffered his nephew Lot to accompany him; instead of forsaking his father's house, Terah was permitted to take the lead; and instead of entering Canaan, Abraham stopped short and settled in Haran. He yielded to the affections of the flesh.....

..... Though Abraham had settled down in Haran, God would not allow him to continue there indefinitely. The Lord had purposed that he should enter Canaan, and no purpose of His can fail. God therefore tumbled him out of the nest which he had made for himself (Deu.32:11), and very solemn is it to observe the means which He used: "And Terah died in Haran (Gen.11:32; Acts 7:4) -- death had to come in before Abraham left Halfway House. He never started across the wilderness until death severed that tie of the flesh which held him back."

God did not abandon Abraham. He called him out and placed His love and grace upon him. And despite Abraham's weaknesses the Lord was faithful to His promises. Abraham's faith was intact. But like all of us, he was still prone to wander. It is a tribute to the grace of God who perseveres with His children to the very end.

This is not to suggest that the faith of Abraham, though weak at times, did not exist. His faith took him out of Mesopotamia. He did leave when God called him. But just as you and I have ungody influences in our lives, from the flesh, the devil and the

world, Abraham too had to contend with spiritual warfare from the outset. But again, God did not leave Abraham floundering in Haran, He called him out of there as well, and then in His sovereignty ordered his steps.

This is the promise we have from the word of God.

1CO 1:8-9 "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

But there is something to be learned of this incident with Abraham in Haran. When God calls us to Himself, He always calls us out of Ur in a sense. Ur represents the old ways of the flesh, the world and its desires.

God calls us out of the darkness of sin. He does not want us going back.

ROM 6:6-7 "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

ROM 8:8-10 "Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. 9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness."

We have been given new life in Christ and our Lord has called us to a new land. He expects us to obey by following Him, just like Abraham, who went out and did seek the Lord and did go where God desired.

But Abraham understood something of his journey which must not be overlooked. Abraham understood that the land God to which called him was not a land where he would settle down for the rest of his life.

HEB 11:9 "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise."

Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans by faith in God. He would continue to walk with God by faith. We're told here in verse 9 that

Abraham actually reached the Promised Land. In fact, he lived in the Promised Land. But he did not possess the Promised Land. "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country;"

Pink points out that the force of this statement in verse 9 "will become more apparent if we link together two statements in Genesis.

GEN 12:6 "Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land."

GEN 13:14-15 "The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring; forever."

Pink then makes the point, "Here was the ground upon which Abraham's faith rested, the plain word of Him who cannot lie. Upon that promise his heart reposed, and therefore he was occupied not with the Canaanites who were then in the land, but with the invisible Jehovah who had pledged it unto him."

He goes on to say, "How different was the case of the spies, who, in a later day, went up into this very land, with the assurance of the Lord that it was a good land. Their report was "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.

33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Abraham dwelt with these people in confidence because he knew God would give this land to him and his descendants. Again, he looked to the future with hope founded in the promise of God. And isn't that what faith is.

HEB 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Why then, if Abraham dwelt in the Promised Land, did he live there as though he were a stranger in a foreign country? Because God did not give permission to Abraham to possess the land. Does this mean the promise of land to Abraham was null and void? Of

course not! But, keep in mind that the promise to Abraham was much bigger than a relatively small piece of real estate.

The promise to Abraham was eternal in nature. Of course, there were certainly physical aspects to the promise God made to Abraham. The promise of a son to a couple who were barren. The promise of being a father of many nations. The promise of the land which would be possessed by Abraham's offspring. But, it's interesting that Abraham, though in the land, does not regard the land as being the most important aspect of the promise of God.

He assumes that the promise of God is yet future and not seen. He regards it as worth waiting for with great patience because he understood it was greater than anything else one could see with physical eyes. This is why Abraham dwelt in tents. He had no intention of settling in the land of promise; at least until God gave clear indications to do so.

Instead, he travels around the land, not putting down roots. In a sense, he bore witness to the inhabitants of the land that it was not worthy of being a part of God's fulfillment, as He intended, in its present spiritual condition.

But more than that, he bore witness to the inhabitants that the ultimate prize from God is not this present physical world under the curse.

F.F. Bruce says, "Year after year he pitched his moving tent amid the settled inhabitants of Palestine, "in them but not of them," commanding their respect as a "prince of God," but owning not a square foot of the country until he bought the field of Machpelah near Hebron from Ephron the Hittite as a family burial ground."

That is what Abraham thought of the physical part of the promise. He saw it was good enough to bury the dead, but it was not a place which would ultimately be the residence of his eternal life.

Again, it's not as though he despised the Promised Land, he simply had put it into an eternal perspective. And with that eternal perspective he lived accordingly, by faith in the promise of a greater land.

Notice in verse 9 that both Isaac and Jacob are introduced. But they are introduced to show the nature of Abraham's faith which was accepted on a promise from God. But it also shows that their faith was personal. They couldn't simply rely on their father or

grandfather to get them to this Promised Land. They must trust God, and like Abraham, they must obey as they follow the Lord.

It says in verse 9 that they are "fellow-heirs with Abraham of the same promise." The importance of this statement is that it was not passed on to them through Abraham. They did not rely on Abraham for this promise. They did not receive an inheritance from Abraham where "he" passed this promise to them.

Rather, what we see is that it's the exact same promise given to Abraham from God, which is given to Abraham's son Isaac, and then the son of Isaac, Jacob. Though the promise can be tied to Abraham, it does not originate from Abraham. It originates with God.

Pink makes the observation that "they were heirs with him of the same promise." He says, "That is indeed a striking expression, for ordinarily sons are merely heirs and not joint-heirs with their parents. This is to show us that Isaac was not indebted to Abraham for the promise, nor Jacob to Isaac, each receiving the same promise direct from God."

This is the beauty of the promise from God even for us today. You don't have to have a special "in" with me or with anyone else to receive this assurance of eternal life found in the Messiah promised to the saints of old.

It's not a hereditary promise, but a promise that transcends all physical boundaries, for it is eternal in nature because it comes from God, and it's a message of hope for everyone. Like Isaac and Jacob we must exercise our own faith as God gives the gift. But just like Isaac and Jacob, as well as Abraham, we must walk in that faith through obedience as we follow Christ.

We must see with spiritual eyes, by faith, where we look beyond this world to that world which will last forever. That's where God wants our eyes. He's placed us in this world, but like Abraham, He does not want us to be of this world. Abraham walked among the giants of the land and by faith just followed God's lead who went before him.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob dwelt in tents, not putting down permanent roots and they too looked forward to the fulfilled promise of a greater land. That greater land is what is spoken of in HEB 11:10 "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Abraham could see the Promised Land all around him. In a sense he was on an extended journey surveying all that God promised in this world and yet his heart was placed on a promise in the future on something he could not see. But he knew it existed and was waiting for Him, because God said it was there for him.

Abraham looked forward by faith to a city which has foundations and whose architect and builder is God Himself. There is no question that what Abraham looked forward to is heaven in the presence of God. But it is not the present heaven where departed saints go when they are absent from the body, now present with the Lord. No. It is the eternal heaven that John and Peter and Isaiah speak of; the new heavens and the new earth.

Isaiah 66:22 ²² "For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "So your offspring and your name will endure.

2 Peter 3:13 ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

Revelation 21:1 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.

Abraham's entire life in Canaan was a life that looked to the time when he would receive the promise that he would embrace his God and be with Him forever. No more wandering, no more opposition, no more struggling and laboring in a world destined to perish. He had his eyes set on the prize which is not of this present cursed world.

This is not to suggest that he sat in a corner of his tent and just waited to die. He carried on with life, but it was a life of hope and promise. And it was that promise and hope, which he embraced by faith, that allowed him to live in this world despite such problems and trials which he, along with all of us, have to endure.

But our obedience and endurance must be found in the same promises from God. And they must be accepted by faith, that He is faithful. It's here where so many Christians stumble. They only see the giants in the land. They only see with physical eyes the problems and trials they encounter. <P>

You and I don't possess the land yet; that spiritual city of God. We're like pilgrims and aliens in a land which is not our home.

Paul speaks of this in PHI 3:20 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,"

This is why it's so important to keep our spiritual priorities in line with God's word. It's very easy to get caught up fighting the spiritual fight in the flesh. When our eyes become so earthly bound that we lose sight of God's promises by faith, we not only lose hope, we lose the zeal to go forward to God's glory.

Don't think for a moment that Abraham didn't grow weary at times. But God's promises kept taking him back to the strength which he found, by faith in God, who doesn't lie. He couldn't see this city of God with his physical eyes, but he could see it with spiritual eyes because God said it existed and that he would be a part of it, and that was good enough for Abraham.

God was with Abraham just as He is with you and me today; we who are in Christ by faith. Keep the city in sight. Don't let the giants of this world intimidate you into bowing to the things of this world. Instead, overcome the world through Him who overcame death for us. Keep the city in sight.

HEB 13:12-16 "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but *we are looking for the city that is to come*. 15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

That city to come is the New Jerusalem on the new earth.

Revelation 3:12 ¹² 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Remember too, that though we are in this world we are not of this world. This world is not our home. Let us live as though we are passing through, but let us pass through taking with us as many as will come to the light who is Christ Jesus. Let us encourage the world to reach out to the only wise God who has given us His Son for our eternal life, which is by faith through Him alone.

Consider Paul's encouragement to all of us as we're passing through.

COL 3:1-5 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."

COL 3:15-17 "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."