

Hebrews 11:13-16
“Pilgrims Progress”

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I. Introduction

The illustrations being offered by the writer are a historical testimony of the characteristics of faith as witnessed by specific people in the Hebrew ancestry. Each person illustrates a vivid picture and in verses 13-16 the writer uses the four he has just written about in verses 8-12 to bring out another characteristic of faith that they all testified of: The *persistence of faith*. Though these people by faith obtained much from God, the truth was they all died without obtaining the promise they looked for. What this suggests is that *what they longed for was eternal in nature and not temporal, they were not going to be satisfied with the “hear and now” of personal satisfaction.* What they longed for was to see God's purposes and plans fulfilled on earth, which was something none of them witnessed in their earthly life time! *They were NOT people satisfied with going to heaven they were looking for heaven to come to earth!* None of the patriarchs saw the complete fulfillment of God's promises, but only saw afar off what God was doing. A Scottish pastor once commented on this passage saying, “*The important thing is not where we live, but where we are looking to live!*” These saints of old were willing to live in tents because they were waiting for a city whose builder and maker is God, (verse 10). We must remember that, *God always fulfills His promises some immediately, most ultimately!*

Vs. 13 These all

Vs. 13 “***These all***” is a reference to the last five verses of 8-12 and Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob as they had all “*died in the faith*” and can not include Enoch of verse 5 as he walked with God and was not. These four lives were lived in deep conviction that God would fulfill all His promises and that death would not negate their fulfillment and in fact they continued to live life as if what God had promised was already their and indeed was by faith! To Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob; **Canaan remained a “promised land” even though they dwelt there**. This section is a summation of the above passage of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob; the point being made is that “THESE” all exhibited the same six characteristics of faith:

1. They all died full of faith
2. They all never received the promises
3. They all saw them afar off
4. They all were assured of them and embraced their acceptance
5. They all confessed that they were mere pilgrims and strangers in this world
6. They all fixed their hopes on the eternal and not on the temporal

They did these six things voluntarily and had opportunity to return to the world and trust in its rewards but were instead convinced that the promises of God were of far greater value than the temporary benefits of this world. Because of this the God in whom they trusted above this world was proud to be called their God. The writer will focus his attention upon Abraham through out the 11th chapter saying that he:

- Obeyed God
- Sojourned in the land of promise
- Obtained the blessing
- Offered his son

Throughout Abraham's life he lived in his own land as if it belonged to another and all of this was because of what was said in verse 10 that he was looking for a city whose builder and maker was God. His tent was a symbol of how he saw this life as temporary and transient. Faith as seen as Abraham didn't try to build permanent buildings while waiting for the city of God. It wasn't until 500 years later with Joshua that any Israelite began to truly possess the land of promise. Instead these four lived as the psalmist declared in Psalm 27:4 *"One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple."* Looked forward to the day that Jon spoke of in Job 19:25-27 when he said, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"*

The Greek words "in faith" are literally "according to faith" making this sentence, *"These all died **according to faith**, in as much as they did not receive the promises".*

They lived and died by faith and NOT by sight! The Greek word "***embraced***" is a word that means to "**greet or salute**" and in the context says that they "*saw the promises from afar and **greeted them**" **like a seaman waving at those upon the shore of a land they will not dock nor visit!** They accepted the fact that they were just "***passing through***" **this life gazing upon the landscape without making it their home!** In a 2nd century letter too Di-ag-netus, the writer describes Christians in a similar way saying that, "***They inhabit their own country, but as temporary resident, they take part of all things as****

citizens but endure all things as aliens, every country is theirs but in every country they are foreigners!”

II. Vs. 14-16 The city of God

Vs. 14 In Genesis 23:4 as Abraham sought to purchase a burial plot for Sarah from Ephron in the land of Canaan he said, “*I am a foreigner and a visitor among you.*” It is clear that **he accepted his status as a pilgrim in the land that was promised to him.** **The point the writer is making is that if Abraham used language like this saying that the land of promise wasn’t his home than it is obvious that his destination and home was somewhere else!** Canaan was no more Abraham’s home as Ur was which he left to go to a country that “**God would show him.**” **Canaan wasn’t the country God was showing him, instead it was the city of verse 10 whose builder and maker was God!** “**Such a declaration**”, the writer states, IS: “**Proof that Abraham realized that no earthly location was ever going to be his home!**”

Vs. 15 The Greek words “*called to mind*” mean “*habitually remembered*” and the meaning is that “**IF** **they were seeking a country they could have simply returned to the prosperous area of Ur (which was in modern day Iran Iraq) where they had left but that was not their home nor what they were seeking!** No one could claim that this was a reference to Mesopotamia **as they could have easily gone back there.** This point is further brought out in Genesis 24:6 when Abraham was looking for a bride for Isaac and it was suggested that they go back there to find a one and Abraham said, “*Beware that you do not take my son back there.*” Jacob as well had a vision at Bethel where God referred to Canaan as the “*land of his fathers*”!

Vs. 16 *The reason for this is that what they were longing for was not temporal but eternal and because of this God is proud to give them His surname as in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! So along with a city whose builder and maker is God He is proud to give them the identification of His name!* The truth is no land on this earth is our homeland; by faith we look like Abraham for a city whose builder and maker is God! and Because of this we follow the words of Peter in 1 Peter 2:11 view ourselves as “sojourners and pilgrims” or as Pau said of us in Phillip 3:20 “citizens of heaven”. This is why we see, as God said in 1 Samuel 2:30 that, “those who honor Me I will honor” as **He gives the highest honor any of His creations can ever have to be called their God!** To relinquish present things in view of future blessings is openly declaring that you have an eye for something far better. No one will ever let go of what they have now unless they are convinced that have something far better waiting for them! Because of this God is delighted to gave them a name to go along with a new home!