

Hebrews 11:8-22: Do You Have All Your Eggs in the Wrong Basket?

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I. Introduction

Is there something you wish you had, something you think would make life perfect and complete? Some wish they had someone to love and love them back. Some ache for better material things: car, house, etc. Others wish they had great wealth. Still others chase prominence and recognition through their career. Can any of these truly satisfy our deepest desires to feel happy and fulfilled? God says, "I'm the only one who can truly fulfill your life. Follow Me and I'll show you."

II. Hebrews 11:8-22: What if What God Promised You Won't Come True Until After You Die?

The author of Hebrews wants his audience to patiently endure (Hebrews 3:13-14; 4:2-3; 6:11-12; 10:23, 35-38) and he's confident they will (6:9-10; 10:39). So he wants them to see what it looks like when you trust God, especially when you know that His promises won't be fulfilled until after you die.

11:8-10, when Abraham was 75 years old, he had a complete life filled with extended family, possessions, and servants. Then God asked him to pick up everything and relocate. To where? God would show him later. In the original account, God promised him a lot more than a new place to live. He promised him great prosperity, protection from his enemies, and that he would be the means of blessing the entire human race (Genesis 12:1-3)! And Abraham went; he packed up and left. But he did it knowing that all his life he would live as a stranger in the Land God promised him, a stranger without a permanent home. In fact, he knew that everything God promised him would not come true until long after his death. Why did Abraham place such faith in God? Abraham knew God as the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth. The text says, "He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10, cf. Revelation 22:1-22:5). God had revealed to Abraham the Heavenly Jerusalem that would one day be his permanent home (he also knew that one day Messiah would arrive to fulfill all these promises, John 8:56).

11:11-12, the author of Hebrews introduces his first heroine: Sarah. Some think that this is again talking about Abraham's faith. But the end of verse eleven makes it clear that this is Sarah's faith: she had faith in God's promise that they would have a child in their old age. If you're familiar with the original account, you're wondering why it says that Sarah had faith. When Sarah first heard God make this promise, she laughed (Genesis 18:12, in fact Abraham laughed too when he first heard it, 17:17). Yes, Sarah doubted God at first (all she could see was the impossibility of a sterile man and woman having a child, Genesis 18:11-12—she was 90 yrs old; he was 100 yrs old, 17:17). But she later believed and named the child Isaac, meaning laughter (Genesis 21:1-7). Thus, from this sterile man came an innumerable number of people (in fact, after Sarah's death Abraham had other sons, Genesis 25:1-4—from these and Ishmael came the present Arab states).

11:13-16, what would you do if what God promised you wasn't going to come true until after you died? That was the fate of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah. His promise that Abraham would have innumerable descendants didn't come true until hundreds of years later; some of His other promises still haven't come true to this day. But they had faith that God would fulfill them.

They could see them afar off and were so certain of them that they saw themselves as strangers and pilgrims on this earth. That is, they sought a better homeland, a heavenly one (they saw a heavenly citizenship, cf. Philippians 3:20). They could have returned back home anytime, but they had left that home behind. They knew that God would not only fulfill His promise to give the nation of Israel their Promise Land, but one day the Heavenly Jerusalem would be their permanent home. This is why God was not ashamed to be called their God, why He prepared a better city for them.

11:17-19, Abraham's faith is tested once again, but this time the test is greater. God asks him to sacrifice his only son Isaac, the one that would produce all those descendants (Genesis 21:12). If Isaac dies, there go all those promises. But Abraham's faith didn't waiver a bit; he did as God asked him and was about to kill Isaac when God stopped him (Genesis 22:1-10). Why would Abraham do this knowing that the end of Isaac means the end of God's promises? Because Abraham knew that if God asked him to kill his son, then God would have to resurrect him in order to keep His word. In fact, Abraham received Isaac back from the dead in a figurative sense since in his mind once God asked him to kill Isaac, Isaac was as good as dead...until God stopped him from plunging the knife into his son.

11:20-22, though Isaac didn't bless the right son on purpose, Isaac had faith and knew that the blessings he prophesied about each son (Genesis 27:19-29, 30-40) were going to come true and they did. Jacob's descendants ended up ruling over Esau's (Edom's) descendants (e.g., 1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:14). Something to note: many see Jacob as a deceiver who swindled his brother out of his birthright. Though Jacob did perform one act of deception when he deceived his father at the time he pronounced the blessings on each son, the birthright and blessing were rightly his, not Esau's. Why? Because the Lord said so in Genesis 25:23 and because Esau, who despised his birthright, sold it to his brother Jacob for some red stew—which is where Esau got his name Edom—it means "red" (Genesis 25:29-34).

By faith Jacob pronounced prophetic blessings on Joseph's two sons (Genesis 48:12-20). Though he was dying, he knew the blessings he pronounced on Ephraim and Manasseh would come true and they did. Ephraim and Manasseh were legally adopted by Joseph (Genesis 48:16) and became part of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (their portion of the Promise Land symbolized Joseph's, Joshua 13-19). Also Ephraim's descendants became greater than Manasseh's (Numbers 1:32-35, Ephraim also became a key tribe, taking leadership of the Northern tribes and his name became a synonym for the nation of Israel, especially the Northern Kingdom: Isaiah 7:2, 5, 9; Hosea 9).

By faith Joseph knew that Israel would not remain in the land of Egypt forever. He knew God would deliver them from their future bondage and bring them to their Promise Land. So on his deathbed he gave instructions for Israel to carry his bones with them when they departed Egypt in order to bury him in the Promise Land...and they did (Genesis 50:24-26; Joshua 24:32-32).

When we base our life on what we have or wish we had, our life is as stable as the thing we're clinging to, that's why love, possessions, wealth, or honor don't satisfy. In fact, if they become our foundation, our life will be utterly unstable and fall apart as soon as those things are gone. Instead Christ says, "If you cling to Me, I'll give you the capacity to cling to everything else tighter than you can ever imagine without losing yourself or Me in the process." When we live like this, we have joy and peace whether we have it all or nothing at all (Philippians 1:12-18; 4:11-13).

III. Conclusion

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.