

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrews 11: 8-16

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we are going to read Hebrews Chapter 11, and today we will read verses 8-16.

The author of the book of Hebrews lists the heroes of faith from the Old Testament, using the testimony of their lives to help readers understand the true meaning of faith and to verify the definition the author gives of faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Yesterday, we read about the stories of faith from the patriarchal age: Abel, by faith, received revelation and offered a sacrifice that was accepted by God — his offering was better than Cain's. Enoch, by faith, saw God's judgment and lived a life of walking with God. He was taken up and became one who received God's. Noah, by faith, worked together with God to build the ark. Not only was he and his household saved, but he also condemned the sin of that generation.

Today, we are going to read about the story of Abraham's faith. Abraham is called the father of faith. The record of Abraham in the book of Genesis starts from the end of chapter 11 and continues all the way through chapter 25. Abraham died at a good old age, and nearly 15 chapters are devoted to detailing his life of following God in faith. Every step Abraham took in following God serves as an example for us and is something we can also experience. Every believer should spend time carefully reading through the life of Abraham, as I believe it will surely bring help and encouragement. Of course, here we cannot revisit every step of Abraham's journey of growing in faith, but we can try, according to the author's line of thought, to understand the true burden he intended to convey.

Verse 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.”

Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldeans, a place where idols were worshiped. In Acts 7:2–3, it is mentioned that the God of glory appeared to Abraham, and told him to leave his land and kindred, and go to the land that God would show him. After receiving this calling, Abraham obeyed and went out, heading toward the land he would later receive as an inheritance.

Abraham’s faith was built upon the appearance of God’s glory. People don’t easily leave their comfort zones unless they see a more glorious vision. Faith is not blind confidence, nor is it an unrealistic ideal—faith comes from seeing the glorious manifestation of God. Perhaps while the people around him were busy worshiping idols and pursuing earthly pleasures and false glory, Abraham grew weary of all these things. And when he saw the appearance of God, he saw true glory—so he obeyed God’s command and left Ur, heading toward the land he would later inherit.

What’s special here is that he responded to God’s call without knowing where he was going. God did not give Abraham a map in advance, telling him the exact destination. If He had done that, then faith would not have been required. For example, if you’re going to New York and you have GPS and transportation, you can arrive in New York without needing faith. The walk of faith is a journey taken step by step through following. We call Abraham the father of faith not because he had a strong faith from the beginning, but because even without knowing where or how to go, he was still willing to follow.

In Genesis 11:31, we see that although it was Abraham who saw God’s appearance and received God’s calling, it was actually his father, Terah, who took the first action—he led the whole family out of Ur and arrived in Haran. But they settled there. Haran was not yet across the Euphrates River, and was not the land God had promised. It wasn’t until after Terah died that God appeared to Abraham again, as recorded in Genesis 12:1–3, where God promised Abraham that he would become

a great nation, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. It was then that Abraham personally followed God for the first time, entering into the beautiful land of Canaan that God had promised.

Verse 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;”

After Abraham entered the promised land, he moved from place to place, and each location became a milestone in the growth of his faith. However, the author’s emphasis is not on the stages of Abraham’s faith development, but rather on the distinct characteristics of Abraham’s life of faith. No matter where Abraham went, he always did two things: Built altars to offer sacrifices and lived in tents. Abraham lived the life of the altar and the tent.

Let’s first look at his tent-dwelling life. It says that by faith, he lived as a stranger in the land of promise, as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents. Strictly speaking, this seems illogical. If that land was the one promised to him, shouldn’t he have made plans to settle permanently, building a large, solid house to be passed down to future generations? But Abraham lived like a sojourner, setting up tents in the land of promise, and he continued living in tents. Tents are temporary, always ready to be moved. Not only did Abraham live in tents, but even his descendants Isaac and Jacob—to whom God also gave the same promise of inheriting the land of Canaan—also lived in tents. This became a legacy in their family—three generations without settling down, all continuing to live the tent-dwelling life.

Verse 10: “for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Although Abraham lived in the land God had promised, he knew that God's true promise was something better—a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Therefore, he was willing to wait for that which was better and would

not build a house with foundations for himself in the land of Canaan. He preferred instead to live a wandering life on earth by faith. How did he know that the true promise was in heaven, that it was God who was building that city with foundations? Because every time he came to a new place, he would build an altar and offer sacrifices; and in doing so, he realized that none of those places were permanent. Gradually, he came to understand God's intention—that everything on earth is temporary, and whatever man builds cannot withstand the test of time and will ultimately perish. Therefore, he chose to live in tents on earth.

In fact, this principle remains the same in the New Testament. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:11, "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims." Our home is not on earth; on the contrary, we are the materials God is using to build. We must all be transformed into living stones. In 1 Peter 2:5: "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house." This is what Peter saw. John went even further, telling us that a city has already been built. In Revelation 21:2, "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

The author of Hebrews connected the patriarchs in Genesis—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and their lives as sojourners to God's eternal purpose. It turns out that what they were hoping for was that city, the holy city New Jerusalem. Even the patriarchs over four thousand years ago had such a vision and lived lives corresponding to that revelation, waiting for the appearance of the holy city for a long time. Now that we have reached the end of the age, how can we still be indulging in the pleasures of this world?

Verse 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."

Abraham's faith was not only passed on to his descendants—Isaac and Jacob—it also influenced his wife, Sarah. Sarah was already very old and had long passed the age of childbearing. But because she believed in God's promise, God gave her

strength, and she was able to conceive. The author here seems to mention it in a rather understated way, saying she considered God's promise trustworthy. But in reality, regarding the matter of receiving a descendant, Abraham experienced God's leading step by step.

At the beginning, he could not fully believe; he placed his hope on his nephew Lot. Later, when Lot left him, Abraham then placed his hope on his servant Eliezer. Afterwards, God pointed to the stars in the sky and promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Abraham believed, and God counted it to him as righteousness. However, at that time, it was still an objective faith—this kind of faith had not yet become a testimony in his living experience. He even had a child through the maidservant Hagar, and Ishmael was born. As a result, God did not appear to Abraham for thirteen years. It was not until Abraham was ninety-nine years old, and Sarah's ability to bear children was completely gone, that God once again gave a promise to Abraham. This time, the promise was very definite: a son would be born from Sarah.

Abraham simply could not believe it—he fell on the ground and laughed. Then God said to Abraham that not only would Sarah bear him a son, but he was also to name him Isaac. Isaac means “laughter.” Later, God and two angels visited Abraham's house as guests and further told Abraham the time when Sarah would give birth to the son. This time, Sarah was behind the tent and overheard it. In her heart, she laughed silently, and she also could not believe it, saying, “How could this be?” God did not rebuke Sarah for her disbelief. Instead, He used the occasion to engage Abraham and Sarah in a humorous and lighthearted conversation. Of course, everything was fulfilled just as God had promised: Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

Here we see that the heroes of faith were actually just like us—they also began with unbelief and entered into fellowship with God. Through that fellowship, their faith grew a little more, and they were able to take another step forward. Step by step, in this way, they eventually became heroes of faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the things hoped for become real step by step. That is, in each encounter and fellowship with God, faith increases a little more, the hope becomes a little more tangible, until finally, the hope is fulfilled.

Verse 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.”

This section speaks from Abraham’s side—not only had Sarah’s ability to bear children ceased, but Abraham himself was also like a man who was as good as dead; he too could no longer produce offspring. Yet now, according to God’s promise, Isaac was born. From Isaac came Jacob, and from Jacob came the twelve tribes of Israel, ultimately becoming the nation of Israel.

Indeed, Abraham’s descendants became as numerous as the sand by the seashore.

Even more glorious is that, 2,000 years later, from among Abraham’s descendants came Jesus. Outwardly, Jesus was a man, but inwardly, He was God. He accomplished redemption according to the will of God the Father and promised that whoever believes in Him would have the right to become children of the Heavenly Father. Therefore, all those who believe in Jesus Christ are also descendants of Abraham by faith; they will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

Verse 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.”

These people refer to the elders previously mentioned by the author, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah, among others. They all died, and their tombs are still in Hebron, Israel, to this day. However, they all died in faith. During their days on earth, they did not actually receive what God had promised. It seemed as if God’s promises had fallen through during their lifetime. But they did not lose hope—they died in faith. Faith is eternal; it is able to transcend the boundary of death. Though their bodies had to die, their souls saw God’s promises from afar through faith. Not only did they see them—they welcomed them joyfully. It’s like someone returning home after a long journey: the moment he sees his hometown from afar, he runs

toward it with eagerness and excitement. That, in fact, was their true homeland. Therefore, they all acknowledged that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth, waiting until they had finished their days on earth to truly return to the home of God the Father.

Verse 14-15: “For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.”

The ones who speak such words are those who can say that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Since they acknowledge that their time on earth is temporary, they do not find satisfaction in the temporary things; instead, they are hoping for that city with foundations. Throughout their years on earth, they were always searching for a homeland. This homeland is not what we typically think of, where one is born or where one has lived. If they truly longed for the homeland they left behind, they could easily return, but they did not go back.

What they were searching for was not a place they had left, but a place they had never been. This is truly marvelous. Though they had never been there, they called it their homeland. Even though they had never been, it felt so familiar because, in their spirits, they had seen it a thousand times. Dear brothers and sisters, when the day comes and we arrive in our heavenly home, will it feel familiar or unfamiliar? If it feels unfamiliar, how could it be your homeland? I hope that today, on earth, we can live more like we would live in heaven, so that we will long to return to our homeland all the more.

Verse 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.”

They all longed for a better homeland, one that is heavenly, and this homeland is what Jesus referred to in John 14:2-3: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if

it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." This is the Father's house, the place Christ has already gone to prepare, and He will come again to bring us there. Though we have not yet been there, we deeply know that this is our homeland.

This is not contradictory, because Christ is today serving as the High Priest in the heavenly tabernacle. Every time we come to the throne of grace through the blood of Jesus, we are able to approach with boldness. In the spirit, we have seen this heavenly home, and we have experienced its abundant supply. We know that when our bodies are redeemed, that place will be our dwelling. Though we still wear flesh, and are unable to reside in heaven at this moment, we can have a foretaste of it in the spirit. We long for the day when we will dwell permanently in this heavenly homeland.

During his time on earth, Abraham longed for this homeland, and in his hope, he saw Christ, even though Christ had not yet become flesh. There is a scripture that proves this. In John 8:56, Jesus said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Jesus said that Abraham had seen Him, even though at that time Jesus was only in His early 30s. Abraham lived 2000 years before Jesus, and the Jews, of course, could not believe this. They picked up stones to throw at Jesus.

Today, with the help of the author of Hebrews, we know that Jesus Christ, by offering Himself once, completed the eternal atonement. Abraham looked forward to Jesus, looking ahead in faith. We are much more blessed than Abraham because Christ has already come in the flesh, completed the redemption, and now sits in heaven, performing the role of the High Priest. Just as Abraham looked forward to Christ becoming flesh and gazed upon Jesus Christ, we too are looking forward to Christ's second coming. Since we have seen it, we should rejoice and be glad.

Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. They looked to God in faith, and they died in faith. God honors them, and He is not ashamed to be called their God. Not only is He honored by them, but He has also prepared a reward for them.

God has prepared for them a city, a city with foundations, designed and built by God Himself. It is also prepared by God for all His faithful children. Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that in our busy lives, we will often remind ourselves whether we are storing up treasures in heaven, whether we have a share in the glorious city in heaven.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You. Through the story of Abraham's faith, we see how he followed God's leading step by step in faith. He lived a life of altars and tents on earth, willing to wait for the heavenly city with foundations. He became the father of our faith. Not only that, but his descendants are also full of faith, all waiting together for that glorious city prepared by God. Lord, help us to often look toward heaven and not let the days of earth entangle us. Help us to continue on the path of faith, longing for that better homeland in heaven. Bless my life today. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!