

The righteous person will live by his or her faith. That is the passage from Habakkuk that the author of Hebrews challenged the Hebrew church to remember. Then he began sharing a list of those who had endured to the end of their earthly lives, testimonies that declare God can see us through anything we face (Isaiah 41:10). We've already considered Able, Enoch, and Noah. Today we'll consider the person often referred to as the father of faith. Faith in this sense means our belief and trust in God to redeem us. Abraham's title as father of faith comes from the Romans chapter four passage that I read a moment ago.

It is very important to our theology to understand that passage. Paul is making it clear that it is faith in God that makes us right with God for both Jew and Gentile and in both the Old and New Testaments. In other words, for all people and in every age those who believe God and place their trust in Him for salvation will be saved. Abraham was the first person in the Biblical record of whom it was said, "His faith (belief in God) was counted to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Of course that is granted to him through Jesus' work on the cross (Romans 4:24-25). He believed God's promise that his descendants would be so numerous as to be uncountable (Genesis 15:5). Everyone who believes God is following the footsteps of our father Abraham.

We read in Romans chapter four that Abraham is the father of all who believe. Paul explained later in Romans that God was referring to spiritual descendants (Romans 9:6-8). That includes us! His descendants are the ones who walk in his footsteps (Romans 4:12). Those footsteps are described in our passage from Hebrews.

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. Hebrews 11:8 Abraham was a pagan living in the city of Ur. Archeology has established that such a city existed, as well as other cities to which Abraham traveled. In addition, the names of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have been discovered in ancient tablets. Ur was a port city where the Tigris and Euphrates enter the Persian Gulf. This location made it prosperous and more comfortable than other cities of the time. It held a great three story ziggurat dedicated to the moon god. Burial grounds reveal that human sacrifice was involved in sealing royal burials. It was in this comfortable setting with well-established paganism that Abram heard God's call (Acts 7:2-3).

Genesis chapter twelve tells us of God's call to Abram. *¹ Now he LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* Genesis 12:1-3 The voice of God spoke to Abraham. The passage doesn't tell us if it was the still small voice in his heart or an audible voice. I don't think it matters. What we need to know is that he knew it was God's directive and promise to him. Why Abram? We aren't told, but we can surmise from this account and that of other Biblical

Commented [PW1]: Habakkuk 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith."

Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Commented [PW3]: Genesis 15:6 (ESV)

⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Commented [PW4]: Romans 4:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Commented [PW5]: Genesis 15:5 (ESV)

⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Commented [PW6]: Romans 9:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Commented [PW7]: Romans 4:12 (ESV)

¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Commented [PW8]: Acts 7:2-3 (ESV)

² And Stephen said: "Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.'

heroes that it was because God sovereignly chose him and by Abram's free will and the grace of God, he heard, believed, and obeyed.

Imagine what that would be like today. I think we might compare it to being called to a mission field. We are quite comfortable living in the USA. But what if God spoke to your heart and told you to go live in a different culture? Not only that, but God did not tell Abram the destination, just pack up and go and leave your loved ones behind. It's not as big a challenge now with airlines traveling the globe, but missionaries of just a century ago did as Abram did. They would say goodbye to their families with tears at the dock knowing they would likely never return. Some even had their belongings packed in a casket because they knew they would die in that foreign land of which they had only heard of hardships and disease. These are the footsteps of Abraham. It doesn't necessarily mean a change of physical location. It is total surrender to God right where you are. It is a heart determined to do God's will and put Him first. **Are we willing to hear, believe, and obey? Are we willing to walk in Abraham's footsteps?**

Abraham was willing to go out, not knowing where he was going. I read Pilgrim's Progress on my vacation and couldn't help but notice how it was drawn from this passage. Christian went out because he was warned that the city he was in was destined for destruction. So he set out for Zion, not knowing what was before him. On the way he met many challenges. Unlike Abraham, he knew the destination, but he certainly didn't know all the difficulties he would face. He was met by a man who was returning to the City of Destruction, the city Christian left behind. The man told him it wasn't worth it, that the journey was too hard and that Zion was a myth. He told him to turn around now and not waste his time, and that it would only mean unnecessary hardships to go forward (Romans 8:18).

I've told you this before, but it bears repeating. Life is full of hardships, whether you follow Jesus or live for this world. What looks like a life of ease is usually a mirage. If worldliness is so much easier, why do some of the wealthy and famous people end their lives? Why do the rich and famous go through multiple marriages? **The world can't satisfy us because it was never meant to satisfy us.** Abraham's faith told him there was more. He could be a blessing to the families of the whole earth. And he did bless the world through his descendant, Jesus. A life of faith does not eliminate hardship. It may even increase the trials of life, but where we end up is the great difference. Living for the world ends in disappointment. Living by faith, - hearing, believing, and obeying, ends in the fullness of a relationship with God (Psalm 36:7-9).

It's easy to see the great difference if you do this exercise suggested by Peter Kreeft in his book *Heaven*. Take some time to come up with your perfect conditions with anything being acceptable. We usually think of physical pleasures. Muslims think of 72 virgins and all the wine you can drink. We might think of home by the sea with good friends and great books. Whatever you come up with, imagine that God tells you, "You can have that and more, but you can never see my face." When we hear the first part we feel all warm and imagine the delight, but when we hear the second part, a sense of dread comes over us. That's because we instinctively know that eventually we will

Commented [PW9]: Romans 8:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Commented [PW10]: Psalm 36:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

⁹ For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

become bored. It may take ten years or a thousand, but eventually we will want it to end. The hole in our hearts is way too big to be filled with the things of this world. It is the heavenly city and intimacy with its King that we ultimately long for. The next verses will tell us this was the city Abraham was really seeking. Faith resulted in stepping out on that journey.

His journey of faith would take him through the loss of his father, separation from his nephew (Genesis 13:9), famine (Genesis 12:10), fear (Genesis 12:12), almost losing his wife (Genesis 12:15), separation from his son (Genesis 21:10), anxiety of not having an heir, and more. He would never possess the promised land during his lifetime (Acts 7:5). But it would belong to his heirs. His Descendant did bless the earth. His descendants passed on to us the Holy Scriptures. And his title became one of the greatest to ever live, father of the people of faith.

⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Hebrews 11:9-10 In the fifth century, one of the early church fathers, Augustine, wrote *The City of God*. Rome was in ruins and many blamed it on the change from polytheism to Christianity. Augustine defended Christianity by showing them that they had been defeated before while the nation was polytheistic, and laid out the benefits that the nation had experienced from Christianity. He went on to explain that the history of the world was really the tale of two cities, the city of man and the city of God. Cain represents the city of man. The Bible tells us he went out from the presence of God and built a city (Genesis 4:16-17). Able was the child of God seeking Zion by faith.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tents, like sojourners in a strange land on their way somewhere. This was the best way for herdsmen to live, but it also symbolized their attitude toward this world. It kept them from being too comfortable here. It reminds me of our missionary in Mumbai, P.T. Babu. He is flooded out of his little home every June and has to find someplace for his family to stay for months at a time while he evangelizes. Yet, his joy is evident on his face. He hears, believes, and obeys. He is a man of faith.

Abraham's son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, were the heirs of his promise. Through them the families of the earth would be blessed. The line of the Messiah did flow through them. But they did not possess the land either. Jacob's name was changed to Israel and after 400 years the prophecy was partially fulfilled under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. In fact, they never fully possessed the entire area that was promised (Genesis 15:18-21). But amazingly, after 1900 years of exile, the nation was re-established. The boundaries are still not the fullness of what God promised. We don't know if they will be before the return of Christ, but they certainly will be after the Second Coming. In other words, what God promised Abraham was really Zion, the City of God, New Jerusalem.

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⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

Commented [PW12]: Genesis 12:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

Commented [PW13]: Genesis 12:12 (ESV)

¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.

Commented [PW14]: Genesis 12:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

Commented [PW15]: Genesis 21:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."

Commented [PW16]: Acts 7:5 (ESV)

⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

Commented [PW17]: Genesis 4:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

Commented [PW18]: Genesis 15:18-21 (ESV)

¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,

²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

It's a city that has foundations. That leads us to the passage in Revelation that tells us the foundation has the names of the twelve apostles (Revelation 21:14). That means that Abraham was also seeking the Gospel, the good news of how God would redeem us. Listen to how Peter describes it in 1 Peter 1:10-11, ¹⁰ *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully,* ¹¹ *inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.*

"Foundations" also implies that it is not transitory like their tents. It is eternal. If you've camped in a tent many times, you know the tents quickly wear out. The wind and sun pull at the seams. Our bodies are also referred to as tents in Scripture for the same reason (2 Corinthians 5:1). Our bodies, homes, and cities are short lived. Unlike the constantly changing things of this world, God's kingdom is forever. Nothing can threaten it. No one who experiences it would want to change it. Those that would desire it to be different will not be there. And yet it will never be boring.

Kreeft writes in his book *Heaven* (p. 97), "The life of heaven is the inexhaustible fountain of God's thought and God's love; how could it be boring? Time spilled out is the condition for boredom, and there time swallowed up in eternity. Here eternity is usually swallowed up in time. But when we touch eternity in time, we smell the salt air of the sea even here, far upstream in time's river. Whenever we touch wisdom or love, we swim in the salt water. Earth is God's beach, and when we are wise and loving, we are infants splashing happily in the wavelets of the 'that immortal sea'.¹ Boredom like pain, will be remembered only as a joke when we are 'drenched in joy'.²

Do you see how that quote describes us here in the borderland? Faith plants us in the borderland where the waves of eternity come up the river of time and we can sense that we are touching the eternal. When I dive where fresh and salt water meet, you can see the boundaries as a line between what appears clear beside what looks blurry. Interestingly enough, that line is called "halocline." The salt water is blurry until you completely enter it. It is because of the two different densities of the water. So it is when we touch eternity now. We realize God is at work in ways we can't explain and joy overwhelms our soul. We can't explain it in detail, we just know we have glimpsed the supernatural, something more substantial than our physical world. Only when we fully enter it will we see it clearly (1 Corinthians 13:12).

"Drenched in joy," what a great description! That's because the designer and builder of heaven is God. The more we look at the wonders in nature, the more in awe we are of God's amazing creativity, and yet we are seeing but a small part. We think we know so much about the world around us, and then a whole new layer is discovered. What about space and entire galaxies of which we know so very little? This designer is making our eternal home. The Bible tells us it is so wonderful we can't imagine it (1 Corinthians 2:9), but we can know *it will be as if our very being fits the lock to our own unique heavenly mansion within the very heart of God.* Philippians 3:20 tells us ²⁰ *(But) our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

Commented [PW19]: Revelation 21:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Commented [PW20]: 2 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV)

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Commented [PW21]: Wordsworth, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"

Commented [PW22]: C.S. Lewis, "Man or Rabbit?" in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 1970), p. 112

Commented [PW23]: 1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Commented [PW24]: 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—

It has been said that the most uncomfortable place for a Christian is a comfortable place (1 Timothy 5:6). That's because we know that feeling at home here is dangerous (1 Timothy 5:6). We should be living with a conscious dissonance like that of Abraham (Genesis 14:22-23). We should feel a disgust with the fallen condition of man and the world in which we sojourn. It is natural for the believer to long to be in the presence of Jesus, to see Him face to face (John 17:3). For us who live in such a beautiful place and with such pleasant conditions, we face a somewhat different struggle than the patriarchs. The challenge for us is to realize how far short the best of this world falls from the wonder of the home God has prepared for us. We must stir a deeper hunger within our hearts. **The enemy of our souls knows that comfort can do more to pull us from Christ than persecution.** Abram's departure from Ur foreshadowed Israel coming out of Egypt, and later coming out of Babylon, which all point to our hearts coming out of the world system to journey to our Promised Land, that city with foundations.

We have to remember a longing in our hearts that we may have suppressed, a longing for perfect love, thorough peace, joy unspeakable and full of glory. That is why it is so important for us to take time to encounter Jesus in prayer and His Word. We dive through the halocline, touch eternity, and enter into the joyful bliss of His presence. I always wonder afterwards why I don't spend more time there. James called Abraham the friend of God (James 2:23). Wouldn't you want to be with such a wonderful friend? But since we can't see Him, we must have faith to spend that time in the closet of prayer or meditating on how His Word is speaking to us.

There is one more thing I would add about that city we long for whose builder is God. It is a city made up of living stones (1 Peter 2:5). It is one of those places where we intersect with eternity. **When we fellowship with others who sense that dissonance with the world around us, we taste heavenly fellowship.** It is sometimes marred here with our imperfections, but that only reminds us that we aren't home yet. We will not only see Jesus face to face, but we'll see Him in one another's faces as well (1 John 3:2).

Is your faith like that of Abraham, demonstrated by hearing, believing, and obeying? Are you assured of this heavenly home before the face of God, and so convinced of what you cannot see that you are continually desirous of it? These are the footsteps of Abraham, the work of God in him, and in us, if we are willing.

Questions

- 1 Why is Abraham the father of faith?
- 2 Where did he come from?
- 3 Can you relate to his calling?
- 4 Why can't I "get no satisfaction?"
- 5 Discuss Kreeft's experiment.
- 6 Discuss the two cities and their differences.
- 7 Why didn't the patriarchs inherit the Promised Land?
- 8 What was Abraham really seeking?
- 9 Why won't heaven be boring?
- 10 Discuss the halocline.
- 11 Are you too comfortable here?

Commented [PW25]: 1 Timothy 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

Commented [PW26]: 1 Timothy 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

Commented [PW27]: Genesis 14:22-23 (ESV)

²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth,
²³ that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'

Commented [PW28]: John 17:3 (ESV)

³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Commented [PW29]: James 2:23 (ESV)

²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.

Commented [PW30]: 1 Peter 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW31]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.