

David Hrechuk - Hebrews 11, Part 1

Recently I was listening to a podcast by a professor of biblical studies and ancient languages. He was asked by an audience member, "I don't read Hebrew and I don't read Greek, but I want a deeper knowledge of the Bible itself. What is your advice?" The scholar replied, "Slow down! Read slowly. And ask yourself questions as you read. In other words, have a discussion in your own mind as you study. "

During this convention I would like to share with you MY attempt at this style of Bible study. It will of course be a one-sided conversation! But I have found that by continuously ASKING questions, READING the scriptures has taken on a new dimension.

Both today and tomorrow I would like to look at as much of Hebrews, chapter 11 within the allotted time. In addition to exploring the account, I would also to extract the intended lessons. In the past, I admit, I have viewed Hebrews 11 as a separate section, with no context. And so let us begin with putting Hebrews, chapter 11 in some sort of framework.

First of all let us ask ourselves, What type of writing is the book of Hebrews? To what genre does it belong? Well, we notice immediately that it doesn't sound like a letter. There is no salutation and greetings at the beginning of this book as in the other epistles. It has been suggested that while this writing was SENT to a group of brethren, it was more formal than a letter. It seems to be a discourse that was to be read by proxy in the meeting. It is a "synagogue sermon" commonly called by the phrase, "A word of Exhortation" as is found in Hebrews 13: 22 and Acts 13:15.

Now let us ask ourselves, "to whom was this discourse given? Well, it turns out that that is a hard question to answer. Here is what we know and can guess. These brethren are not what we would call the early early church. They are second generation brethren. In chapter 2:3 we are told that they had been taught the truth from those who had actually witnessed it. In addition there is a distinction made in the discourse between "the early days" of these brethren, when they had demonstrated love and service to the brethren, while they endured public abuse, and the confiscation of their property, to the "present day" where the brethren are in danger of drifting way. They are described as at present as having drooping hands and weak knees. There is a suggestion that these brethren have either broken away from the main ecclesia or are abandoning the meetings all together.

The phrase "To the Hebrews" does not appear in the body of the discourse and it is a later addition. The book never tells us whether these brethren are of Jewish descent or of gentile descent. And it doesn't really seem to matter, because upon a close reading of the book, the crisis which this discourse addresses is NOT a return to Judaism or ANY doctrinal heresy. Instead it was a community crisis. These brethren were so discouraged and lethargic that it threatened their ecclesia existence and their own. Exactly what was the cause of this discouragement we are not told.

The next question that presents itself is, "Who wrote this sermon of encouragement?" We all know that traditionally it has been ascribed to the Apostle Paul. However, modern scholars as they compare vocabulary and the way in which the sentences have been constructed, to letters that they know the Apostle wrote, do NOT believe Hebrews was written by the same man. In addition, the author speaks of Timothy's imprisonment. This is something that took place after the events recorded in Acts, and after the Apostle Paul's last letters from prison which were addressed to Timothy. The book of Hebrews is the only place we learn of Timothy's own imprisonment. Upon a first reading of Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 34 we might get the

idea that the author himself was in prison at one point. It says in the KJV, "For ye had compassion of me in my bonds." But most modern translations correct this to read, and this is from the ESV, "For you had compassion on those in prison."

Aside from these clues, we know the author of Hebrews is obviously known to his audience and he hopes to be reunited to them. So instead of trying to identify the author, let us stop and ask ourselves the question, "why?" "WHY DIDN'T the author give his name? Even if it was the Apostle Paul, why did he leave his name out, when he had never done that before in his own letters?"

To my mind, the author wanted to keep his identity in the background. He is undoubtedly in a position of authority over them. He is also their superior in knowledge as he says, "I have so many things to tell you but you are not ready for them yet." But in keeping his identity in the background he is NOT using his authority or his superiority to bring them back into his way of thinking. He is not using his credentials to enforce compliance. Instead the tenor of this beautiful comforting discourse is persuasion. First, he appeals to their minds and their hearts by presenting the BETTER things in Christ. Secondly he touches lightly on the negative results and emphasizes the positive by saying, "I'm confident though you will turn it around." And thirdly, he puts himself on the same level as these poor discouraged brethren by saying, "but WE are not of them who draw back into perdition."

The author's method of encouragement is critical in our understanding of Hebrews Chapter 11. He is not asking these brethren in a crisis of despondency to do the impossible. How would it be AT ALL encouraging to set before them an unattainable standard? How would it be AT ALL encouraging to set before them superheroes of faith and then say, 'go and do likewise!'"? If the author's goal is to strengthen the drooping hands and weak knees of these brethren, then he will be showing them examples of what faith looks like in the midst of crisis, doubt and discouragement. With this background in mind, let us turn to Hebrews 11 and examine the examples given.

In verse 4 we read, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Let us begin by asking ourselves some questions. WHY was Abel's sacrifice "more excellent?" I've always JUST looked at this from a doctrinal perspective. We contrast a sacrifice of grain to a sacrifice of a sheep. Only one requires a death and the shedding of blood. This foreshadows the principle referred to in Hebrews 9:22 "without the shedding of blood is no remission." And this is a valid interpretation of Abel's more excellent sacrifice. But if we ask ourselves questions in respect to the text we find an added perspective. Turning to the account in Genesis 4, we ask ourselves is there any indication that it was the TYPE of sacrifice that made Abel's MORE excellent? We notice that there is no mention of blood. Cain is not told to bring a different kind of sacrifice. In fact, God says to Cain, "Why are you so angry? If you do well, you'll be accepted." Looking closely at how the two sacrifices are described we notice Abel brings not just any part of his flock, but a firstling. In other words he brought the choicest, the best. Cain did not. The sacrifice was more excellent not because of WHAT was offered but because of WHY it was offered. Also when we read of Cain's reaction to his rejection it is not the anger of embarrassment. Instead his extreme reaction can only be traced to jealousy and resentment. He does not have in his heart the same love for God as his brother, Abel. The secret of his heart has been exposed for all to see.

Verse 4 of Hebrews 11, says that Abel "obtained witness that he was righteous." My first thought is, "if I had written that sermon I would have worded it differently. I would have said, "Abel obtained witness that he should have been the seed instead of Cain!" Why didn't the author of Hebrews say this? I realize that I always

framed this incident as a contest as to who was more worthy to receive the promise of “your seed should bruise the serpent’s head.” But that is nowhere suggested in the Genesis account. Nothing is offered to Abel. Cain is the firstborn. He is the inheritor by right. So we ask ourselves, “What prompted Abel to offer a sacrifice?” Well, certainly it came from his heart. His appreciation of God’s righteousness prompted him to righteous action. But we also read in verse 6 of Hebrews chapter 11 that faith means believing God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. So Abel did look to God to reward and bless him for his sacrifice **in some way**. But did that happen? No, the very reverse. Abel’s life was cut short with no descendants. So who was this witness for? Let us keep this in mind as we continue in Hebrews 11.

Verse 4 also says, “he being dead yet speaketh.” We know from Genesis that God told Cain that Abel’s blood was crying out to him from the ground. In other words, Justice demanded that that crime needed to be dealt with. Interesting, isn’t it, that the God who claimed, “life for life” only banished Cain leaving the crime only partially dealt with. But what does it mean in Hebrews that it “YET speaketh?” Well at the time of the writing of Hebrews the murder of Abel had not yet been fully dealt with. We know from Matthew 23:35 that Jesus declared that all the righteous blood that had been spilled from Abel to Zecharias would be dealt with or expiated by the trouble coming upon the nation of Israel at the close of the Jewish age. In that trouble, their temple would be destroyed, they would lose any vestige of self government, they would be thrown out of the land of Israel and forced into a diaspora condition. Put yourself in the place of a brother or sister listening to the sermon “the book of Hebrews” for the first time. You would be saying to yourself, “It’s been over 3,000 years since Abel was murdered and justice has not yet been served and Able has not yet been rewarded and yet I know he was righteous. Abel is therefore a witness to me!”

So what did the author of Hebrews want these discouraged brethren to take away from the example of Abel’s faith? I will suggest the following: 1) Faith in God prompts you to serve him with your whole heart knowing he will bless you. 2) Faith will result in persecution just because your actions reprove the darkness of others. 3) Faith understands that justice can be a long time coming, but it will come.

So what do I, at this stage of the Gospel Age Harvest, take away from the example of Abel’s faith? What strikes me the most is the need to train my mind to not think on a human scale. It is very human to want to see cause and effect. We want each action to have an immediate result. But that is not how God does things. Only Jehovah God can see and plan the end and the beginning. Having faith that all is going according to plan is a great test on us brethren. We also know there is still blood crying out at our own day. This time though it is our brethren’s blood which cries to God from under the altar saying, “How long, O LORD, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” And the answer comes in Verse 11 of Revelation 6, “until their fellow servants also and their brethren should be killed as they were.”

Our next example of faith is found in verse 5 of Hebrews 11. It reads, “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

The obvious question to ask ourselves is “What in the world does this mean?” Looking at the account in Genesis 5:24 we find we have even less than we do in Hebrews. There we are told merely that he “was not; for God took him.” “He was not” in Genesis, corresponds to “was not found” in Hebrews. And “God took him” in Genesis, corresponds to “God translated him” in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews has added the phrase, “that he should not see death.” Looking at other Jewish literature written around the same time as Hebrews, we see that this odd phrasing in Genesis, coupled with the fact that Genesis does not state “and he died” like it does for everyone else in the genealogical list, was meant to be understood that Enoch did not die. This would have been the default thought in the minds of the brethren listening.

And because this verse in Genesis is so cryptic, it engendered an incredible amount of speculation. This speculation was written down and became part of the culture and general knowledge about Enoch. For instance, after the last book of the Old Testament was written, devout people continued to write about God and his dealings with his people both on a national and individual scale. These books are known as the Apocrypha. These books were translated into the Greek language. Together with the books of the Old Testament, they made a collection called the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament. This was the version of the Old Testament that was predominately used by the early Church. Incidentally it is what the author of Hebrews uses when he quotes the Old Testament. And in two books of the Septuagint, the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach, Enoch is mentioned with additional details. So the brethren listening to this sermon would have been familiar with those details.

Enoch was such a fascinating character to the Jewish people that he became the archetype of an intercessor with supernatural wisdom. When you were writing a story or a poem and you needed someone to convey a message from God, Enoch was the one you chose. Using Enoch to impart Heavenly Wisdom was so standard that there are three books written as if from his own pen, called the Books of Enoch 1, 2 & 3. The brethren of the early church were very well acquainted with them. In fact, the first book of Enoch, chapter 1, verse 9 is quoted by Jude in Jude 14 and 15, where we read, "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these saying, (and here is the quote) "Behold the Lord cometh with 10,000 of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

It is therefore very interesting to see how hesitant the author of Hebrews is when discussing the faith of Enoch. As we have seen, except for a clarification of what is meant in Genesis, he does not go outside of the Genesis account. In OUR versions of Genesis we are told Enoch "walked with God." But in the Hebrews author's account, the Septuagint, the word is not "walked" but "pleased." And so in Hebrews 11:5 our author says, Enoch pleased God and you can't please God unless you have faith and so Enoch is an example of faith. In other words, even though we don't know what Enoch did, he was faithful. It is very interesting to speculate on the carefulness of this brother in composing this sermon. He did not want to include anything that could distract them from his message of encouragement.

Three times the Author mentions that Enoch was "translated" or "taken" off the scene. And in the common understanding at that time he was assumed to be in a good place with access to the Heavenly Father. Let us contrast this with Abel's experience as the brethren listening no doubt did. Abel was cut down, with no children and his blood was still crying out. Enoch on the other hand had in some way his faith partially rewarded ahead of the others. The same Lord in his wisdom dealt with each of these men in polar opposites.

So what did the author of Hebrews want these discouraged brethren to take away from the example of Enoch's faith? I will suggest the following: Faith trusts that the God we serve is able to remove you from all trying circumstances. So remember, when you do suffer, it is for wise, though sometimes unknowable, reasons.

So what do I, at this stage of the Gospel Age Harvest, take away from this example of Enoch's faith? What strikes me the most is how much we aren't given. The Lord has withheld from us full understanding. We cannot put all of the pieces together. But our human minds want it! We want to see all the facts and figures laid before us so we can believe. But faith is merely the substance of things hoped for. Our human minds would not even be able to COMPREHEND the behind-the-scenes spiritual workings of the universe. And so we

must be content with training our minds to expand and see as much of the spirit as we are capable of. And the rest we take by development of faith.

Our next example of faith is found in verse 7 of Hebrews 11. It reads, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Compared to the first two examples of faith, there is much more meat to the story of Noah. And so the first question we want to ask ourselves is, "What particularly does the author of Hebrews focus on? Taking out the dependant clause we could read this verse, "By faith Noah moved with fear..." As a note, this word "fear" is rarely used in the New Testament. In this verse it is actually a verb, moved-with-fear is one word. The author uses this word in its noun form in chapter 12 verse 28 where it is translated godly fear or awe. Here too it has the thought of reverent fear. So while the author does mention that it obviously took faith to build an ark before there was any sign of needing it, the emphasis seems to be placed on Noah's motivation. Noah was moved by reverent fear to prepare the ark.

Let us ask the obvious question, how do we know what Noah's motivation was? It is not told to us in the Genesis account. How then could the author have reached this conclusion? It seems that in this case we must read between the lines, as it were. Looking at the account in Genesis 6 and 7 we see that the Lord spoke twice to Noah. The first time he gave the instructions to build the ark, to bring 2 of every kind of animal and provisions for them, and to bring his family with him. The second time the Lord speaks to Noah he tells him to take his family and go into the ark, and to also include 7 of every clean animal, 2 of every unclean animal and 7 of every bird. At the end of each of these instructions there is a statement that Noah did according to All that the Lord had commanded him." In fact in Chapter 6:22 Noah's scrupulousness in obeying the instructions is emphasized, "Thus did Noah; according to **all** that God commanded him, **SO DID HE.**" Interestingly these exact same words are applied to Moses when he comes down from the Mount with the instructions for the Tabernacle and its sacrifices in Exodus 40:16. I believe we are to infer from these statements that Noah's carefulness is evidence that he was obeying. He was obeying **IN ORDER** to please God.

In doing so, he saved his household as we are told in verse 7 of Hebrews 11. To illustrate the importance of Noah's motivation in the saving of his family, I think it is very helpful to compare him to another bible figure, namely Lot of Sodom. **LIKE** Noah, Lot is warned of God of coming destruction that was unperceived. **LIKE** Noah, Lot is told to bring his family: his sons, sons-in-law and daughters in order to be saved. But **UNLIKE** Noah, Lot's family doesn't listen to him. They think he is mocking and joking. And **UNLIKE** Noah, Lot himself hesitates so much that the angels must pull him by the hand out of Sodom and even then his fear of the wilderness impedes his deliverance. His own wife does not heed his instruction and is destroyed. Lot comes across as a man that has not been in the habit of putting God first in his life. His resultant weak character had dire consequences for himself and his family. Unlike **LOT**, Noah was not acting out of character when he prepared the ark. He would have acted to please God whether there was a coming flood or not. And so it was Noah's integrity, his life of faith, that enabled his family to be saved and it also made him an heir of righteousness.

This act of faith had an additional result. We are told in verse 7 of Hebrews 11 that "by the which he condemned the world." Now what does this phrase mean? We understand this to mean that Noah's actions were an **EVIDENT** judgement against the old order of the first dispensation. Noah stands as a witness that God's judgement was true and righteous. With this phrase the author of Hebrews leaves the account in Genesis in order to introduce a new thought not found in Genesis. The question naturally arises, "Why?" What **DOES** this idea of condemnation add to his sermon of encouragement? I would like to suggest that the

author intends for this to set up a train of thought in the minds of his listeners. Let us turn to Isaiah 54 where Noah and the flood, condemnation of the wicked, and the eventual deliverance of the righteous are combined in a message of encouragement and comfort.

We know from the book of Acts that scriptures which speak of the gentiles coming to the knowledge of God were applied by the early church primarily to themselves. Gentiles coming into this new thing called Christianity. This of course is because they could not see the length of time of the Gospel Age. So think of how these scriptures in Isaiah would sound to this community in crisis. Isaiah 54 is speaking to them! Because of time, I will just pick and choose verses and I will be reading from the Septuagint which is what these brethren would have been using. Beginning with verse 2 of Isaiah 54, "Thy seed shall inherit the gentiles..." Verse 4, "Fear not because THOU hast been put to shame, neither be confounded because THOU wast reproached..." Verse 9, "From the time of the water of Noe THIS IS MY PURPOSE: as I sware to him at that time, saying of the earth, I will no more be wroth with thee, neither when thou art threatened shall the mountains depart nor shall thy hills be removed: so neither shall my mercy fail thee, nor shall the covenant of thy peace be at all removed: for the Lord who is gracious to thee has spoken it." Verse 17, "I will not suffer any weapon formed against thee to prosper; and every voice that shall rise up against thee for JUDGEMENT, thou shalt vanquish them all; and thine adversaries shall be CONDEMNED thereby. There is an inheritance to them that serve the Lord and ye shall be RIGHTEOUS before me, saith the Lord."

I can imagine this well known prophecy of Isaiah 54 would have been mentally associated with the words of the sermon. And in the days that followed as the brethren thought on what they had heard these promises of mercy and deliverance would be presenting themselves to the minds of those whose hearts were open to its message. So what did the author of Hebrews want these discouraged brethren to take away from the example of Noah's faith? I will suggest the following: Faith means having a living or vital reverence for God. It will motivate you to continue to serve him even when you don't see the point. Faith trusts that righteousness will eventually be rewarded and justice will be served.

So what do I, at this stage of the Gospel Harvest, take away from this example of Noah's faith? Due to the time in which WE live, OUR natural word and scripture association when WE hear "Noah" is the Lord's great prophecy speaking of his return, his Parousia. We read in Matthew 24:37-39, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be."

Brethren for us, the test of time is very real. The Parousia has taken on a different tone than any of us from the time of Bro. Russell onward has expected. We almost feel as if we are shut up in the ark and waiting and waiting for the prophesied rain to fall. Our minds must grapple with a SPIRITUAL understanding of the Lord's return. We can't fully comprehend WHAT is involved in spoiling the goodman's house. We can't fully comprehend WHAT events need to be set in motion centuries in advance in order to bring down this old order and prepare the way for the new heavens and the new earth.

But it is inevitable that a feeling of discouragement will set in amongst the brethren. You know, my parents met each other at a meeting in the late 40s. They were the young ones in a class of older brethren. They decided to get married in 1952. This was met with much opposition from the brethren in the class who were convinced that the Church would be complete in 1954. They were told in no uncertain terms that getting married would be the action of the great company. Well, they ended up married for 52 years and both have been gone for some time now and the Church is not yet complete. Brethren we have to be very careful not to

be agents of discouragement during this test of time at the end of the harvest. Let us take the example of Noah and live a life of reverent faith whether the flood comes in our lifetime or not.

Our next example of faith is found in verses 8-10 of Hebrews 11. It reads, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles (or tents) with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God."

The stories of Abraham, fill many chapters in Genesis and so the author of Hebrews had much to draw on for his audience. It is only natural that Abraham, the father of the faithful, would have more than one example of faith referred to. Let us look at the first instance, which is based on the call to go forth in Genesis 12. We are told in the book of Hebrews that Abraham left, "not knowing whither he went." And so we ask ourselves does that mean Abraham was directionless when he left Harran? Well, when we look at verse 5 of Genesis 12, we see that Abraham and his family "went forth TO GO to the land of Canaan and into the land of Canaan they came." In fact in Chapter 11 of Genesis, verse 31, we are told that Terah, Abraham's father, leaves Ur of the Chaldees with the express intention to take the family to the land of Canaan. On the way they stop in Harran and for whatever reason stay there for many years until Terah's death. It seems that Abraham resumes this journey NOT KNOWING what his final destination will be. In other words not knowing which land will be his. And so Abraham waits to be shown. He walks through present day Turkey and there is no sign. He walks through present day Syria and there is no sign. He walks through present day Lebanon and there is no sign. He walks through present day Northern Israel and there is no sign. Halfway through the land of Israel, at a city called Shechem the Lord appears to Abraham and tells him, "I will give THIS land to thy seed." But what a bittersweet statement! Yes, Abraham was finally in the land of promise. And yet, HERE he learned that it was not HIMSELF but his descendants that would possess it. This fractured fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 12 DEFINED Abraham's life. How DO you remain faithful to something you will never realize in this lifetime?

The author of Hebrews then states that it was due to his faith that Abraham would NOT allow himself to act like the promised land was his home. He says, "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, AS IN a strange country." Abraham's very lifestyle reflected his faithfulness to the promise. And so the question arises, aside from living a nomadic life how else did Abraham demonstrate this? What first comes to mind is that Abraham's own mental perspective was that he was a stranger. He considered his home to be Harran. When he told his servant to find a wife for his son he sent him there saying, "But thou shalt go unto MY country, and to my kindred and take a wife for my son Isaac."

But besides this perspective how else did Abraham demonstrate that he was a stranger in the land? We notice the emphasis placed on the odd word sojourned in verse 9. No doubt the brethren who heard this discourse for the first time understood the full definition of this Greek word in its biblical context. We on the other hand are unfamiliar with this archaic English word and need to ask what all does this word imply? We certainly know from the Levitical law that the stranger within the gate or the sojourner did not have to fulfil the laws of the land in the same way an Israelite did. Though a sojourner lived in the country he did not fully belong to the society of which he was a part, even if he lived there permanently. From study aids we understand a sojourner to be, in our modern terms, a resident alien, not a citizen.

This sojourning came at a cost to Abraham. It inhibited his actions and it placed him on a lower level of society than he should have been. We see this illustrated in the interesting account of the cave of Machpelah in Genesis 23. Sarah had died and Abraham needed to bury her. He needed land, but he didn't own any. How could he go about this transaction while demonstrating his faith in and loyalty to God's promise? Reading the

account we see he was reluctant to even say that he wanted to BUY land because in one sense the land was already his. And on the other hand he did not want to be GIFTED the land because that too would be an acknowledgement that the land was someone else's by right. What follows in Genesis 23 is an elaborate bargaining process in the presence of the Hittite council as it seems a sojourner was not able to buy land in a private transaction. Abraham ends up with the worst of the bargain, paying an exorbitant price, some commentators calling it a "kings's ransom". But in the details of this account we see Abraham's faith guiding his actions even to his own hurt.

Abraham was fiercely loyal to that fractured promise of inheritance to the full extent. He refused to even take any of his rightful part of the war booty when he rescued the King of Sodom, because to him, his refusal demonstrated his unswerving faith in that promise. We read in Genesis 14:23, "I will not take from a thread to even a shoe latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, 'I have made Abraham rich.'"

So what exactly was Abraham's social status? We are told in Genesis 12:5 that he brought from Harran much substance with him. We are told that when he is in Egypt he is considered wealthy, wealthy enough to interact with the Pharaoh. In Genesis 14, Abraham is treated as being on the same level as kings of city-states. Theoretically he would have been able to found his own city state in the land of Canaan. But his faith in the promise that God would give his descendants the inheritance, made him deny his status and prerogative.

The author of Hebrews wanted his listeners to draw the obvious parallel between themselves and Abraham. They too had received a call to leave their Father's house and go forth. At that time in the very beginning of the Gospel Age, they knew not whither they went. They too had received a fractured or prospective promise. They were begotten of the spirit but not yet born of the spirit. They too had to demonstrate their loyalty TO this promise and had to deny themselves their EARTHLY status and prerogatives.

All these thoughts laid the groundwork for the one parallel the author spelled out. And that is, "Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." This is the same hope that was in the hearts of his listeners. As the author references later in this sermon, "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." For Christians this city represents the New Covenant arrangements, in the which we will come into our possession as members of the Christ, the mediator.

But what could this have meant in relation to Abraham? How could he look for such a city? In his mind there was no concept of a New Covenant. The old law covenant was still centuries in the future. There was no typical city that represented something greater to him. Jerusalem as a capital city was still a thousand years in the future. So we really don't know how much Abraham grasped of the grandeur of the Abrahamic promise. What is obvious is that he did not deny himself SO MUCH, and go through SUCH tests of faith MERELY so that his descendants could found another city-state in the land of Canaan. His conception of his inheritance had to grow THROUGH TIME as he was tested again and again. Likewise to the Hebrew brethren listening to this sermon. The author invites them to expand their minds in contemplation of the Kingdom and their role in it, which is their hope and reward.

So what did the author of Hebrews want these discouraged brethren to take away from this example of Abraham's faith? I will suggest the following: Faith implies a life-long sacrificing of the present for the nebulous promise of the future. But those promises will be grander than your mind can even contemplate, because they are from God not from man.

So what do I, at this stage of the Gospel Harvest, take away from this example of Abraham's faith? What strikes me the most is how often I want part of my inheritance now. I want to live in a fortified city. What I mean by that is that I want my ecclesia to be known in my society as a solid, growing witness. I want to be part of a vibrant Bible Student movement that is on the cutting edge of Biblical knowledge and is comprised of people known in the community for righteousness. But that is human thinking. Spiritual thinking says the Lord takes the unlearned, the unwise, the ignoble and through their weakness shows HIS great strength, as they are transformed into an image of his son. In ways that we don't understand, our future must come at the expense of the present.

Brethren we will end our remarks here and take up the study of Hebrews 11 tomorrow morning.