

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 6 March 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **They Sought a Country**

### **Hebrews 11:11-16**

During my years at Pensacola Christian College, I once had a discussion with some friends about the meaning of the word “home.” The friends that I was talking with were brothers, and they had grown up in a military home—which meant that they were constantly moving from one place to another, whenever their dad was reassigned to another military base. They had been all over the U.S., and in Germany. To them, “home” was wherever they happened to be living at the time. For example, they called their dorm there on campus their “home.”

Now, I could never bring myself to call my dorm room “home.” At that time in my life, “home” was, in my thinking, the place where I was born and reared. I grew up in the same house all my life. I had never experienced a move *anywhere*. I had deep sentiments about my hometown, and about my parents’ house, which they themselves had built. I thought that I would always regard my parents’ homestead as “home,” no matter in what corner of earth I may live in the future.

As a single man at the time, I had no idea how my concept of “home” would change after leaving my father and mother, and cleaving to my wife! After I was married, I began to think of “home” as a little mobile home near West Baden Springs, Indiana. Then, a year later, I began to think of “home” as a house called “Knockmulrooney” just outside of Leixlip, Ireland. A year later, “home,” to me, became a house in Athlone, Ireland; then it changed to a house in Kiltoom; then to a house just south of Brideswell. My new philosophy of home became: “Wherever my wife and I live, that is home!”

However, my concept of “home” is now taking yet another radical turn. Actually, it is arriving at the place where it *should* be. As I keep drawing nearer to the Lord in my personal walk of faith, I find that “home,” for me, is nowhere on this earth. More and more, I think of Heaven as my real “home”—even though I’ve never been there. Now, I don’t have a “death wish.” I have no thoughts of “checking out” of this life. I simply view this life as a “sojourn” on the way to my real home.

This morning we will take yet another look at the faith of Abraham; but we will also look at the faith of Sarah, his wife, and of his son Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob. The “camera” will first focus in on Sarah, then on Abraham and Sarah, and then on all the patriarchs: and as we view all of them together, we will see the nature, object, and results of their faith. The title of this message is *They Sought a Country*.

### **Read Hebrews 11:11-16.**

#### **I. Sarah’s faith (vv. 11-12)**

Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was greatly beloved of God for her faith and godliness. She is honoured with being one of three women in the “Hall of Faith” here in **Hebrews 11**. She is the only woman in the Bible whose age at the time of her death is recorded. In **Galatians 4**, Paul likened Sarah, allegorically, to a “freewomen,” whose “children” (in other words, all who

placed their faith in Christ) are “free.” In that same allegory, Paul also likened Sarah to the city of New Jerusalem. Paul likened Sarah to Heaven because Heaven is the ultimate “home” of those who are “free in Christ. In **1 Peter 3**, Sarah is held up to Christian women as a model of meekness, godliness, and submission; and all believing women who follow her example are called her “daughters.” By the way, Sarah is the only woman in the Bible who is called our “mother” in any sense of the word. Mary is never called the “mother of us all”; but *Sarah* is! Of course, we are not to worship Sarah, or pray to her (just as we should not worship or pray to Mary); we should simply look to her as an example of a life lived by faith.

Now, lest you think that Sarah is one of those “super-believers,” to whose faith you could never attain, let’s take a look at *her* faith, as it is recorded for us in the Scriptures. First, we will examine **the nature of Sarah’s faith**.

There is something about faith that you must understand: *God doesn’t force faith upon you*. If God forced faith upon you, you would be a robot, and not a being with a free will. God wants us to *trust* Him enough to *submit our will* to Him. Now, make no mistake about it: submitting to Him does *not* come naturally: and it is *not* easy. However, the good news is that God is patient with us; and He helps us to grow in faith. As we trust Him more, and allow Him, step by step, to take control of more areas of our lives, we begin see Him do through us what we could *never* could have done in our own strength.

As you look at Sarah’s life, you will find that although she had faith, it was often far from perfect. Of course, her walk of faith began with salvation. We don’t know *when* she placed her personal faith in Jehovah; but we know that at some point in her life, she placed her personal faith in God’s promise that the Redeemer was coming to take away her sin. She also believed God’s promise that God would give her and Abraham a son. *However, she struggled with letting God do it His way*. For the longest time, she thought that she needed to “help God out.” Let’s take a look at the state of Sarah’s faith about 14 years before God finally fulfilled His promise.

**Read Genesis 16:1-6.**

**Read Genesis 21:9-14.**

Sarah believed God’s promise: but not enough to let *God* carry it out by His own means. It had been 11 years since God had given Abraham and Sarah the promise of a son; and by now, she was about 76 years old. Now, in those days, 76 wasn’t as “old” as what it is today, since people still lived decades past age 100; but it was definitely too old to have a child. Sarah knew that her body couldn’t conceive and bear a child; and as time went on, Sarah became so desperate to “help God along” in the fulfilment of His promise, that she did something that no wife in her right mind would ordinarily do: she urged her husband to marry a second, younger wife! She passionately desired to do God’s will; but she became convinced that she had to do it *her* way. After all, God wasn’t coming through; so she had to do her part, right? She fell back on her own wisdom; and she thought she had it under control. But she *didn’t* have it under control. It turned out to be a disaster. It caused deep hurt and animosity in her family; and to this day, there is an ongoing war between the descendants of Ishmael, and the descendants of Isaac! Many of Ishmael’s descendants (the Arabs) claim to be the descendants

of the true “son of promise”; and the Jews rightfully claim to be the descendants of the true son of promise, Isaac. Sarah wanted to do right; but she did it in the wrong way.

Now, let’s fast-forward about 13 years from the time of Abraham’s marriage to Hagar, and see where Sarah’s faith was at *one year* before God finally came through with His promise.

### **Read Genesis 18:1-15.**

It had now been 24 years since God had made His promise to Abraham and Sarah: and they were well past child-bearing age. Had Sarah’s faith *improved* since that time, years earlier, when she had tried to help God out? It doesn’t appear so. As we read this account in **Genesis 18**, it is evident that Sarah still didn’t really believe that God could (or would) cause *her* to conceive. As she eavesdropped on this conversation between Abraham and his guest, she surely must have realised that this guest was either an angel, or the LORD Himself. (This wasn’t the first time that the LORD had appeared to Abraham in human form; so she shouldn’t have been surprised by this!) As the conversation unfolded, it became so obvious that this strange guest was the Lord Himself, that it was beyond all doubt. Yet, when Sarah heard the Lord say that she would have a baby one year from that day, *she laughed!*

Now, the LORD wasn’t going to allow Sarah’s unbelief to continue unrebuked. It had been 24 years since He had given Abraham the promise of a son; and it was time for Sarah to start trusting Him. The LORD directly confronted Sarah about her laughter; and when she lied and said that she hadn’t laughed, He simply replied, **“No; but you did laugh.”**

Ouch! Can you imagine the look that the Lord must have had as He said this? (It was probably something like the look that He gave to Peter just after Peter had denied him for the third time!) Imagine if Christ Himself were here in the flesh, speaking with *you* face-to-face, and He had to rebuke you because you had inwardly laughed at His Word! Would that have an impact on you? I’m sure it would. It definitely seems to have had an impact on Sarah! Those rebuking words, **“Nay; but thou didst laugh,”** as well as that question, **“Is anything too hard for the LORD?”** must have haunted her for a long time.

I believe this was the turning point for Sarah. Somewhere in the next three months before she conceived, her faith underwent a great transformation! Her faith ascended to a plain where it had never been before. How do I know this? Because Paul says that it was **“through faith”** that she received strength to conceive. This doesn’t mean that faith is some kind of “cosmic power” that Sarah tapped into. Faith isn’t some kind of “magic” that we can wield like a wand: *God* is the one who performed this miracle. When Paul says that Sarah conceived **“through faith,”** he is simply saying that God was delaying to perform this miracle *until* Sarah truly believed, in her heart, that nothing is too hard for Him! God could have “just done it,” regardless of whether Sarah believed Him or not; but God doesn’t work that way. **God works His will in His people as they trust Him.** Sarah had to get to the point of *simply trusting* God’s plain word, and not trying to put her own interpretation or spin upon it. She had to come to the point where she **“judged him faithful who had promised.”**

We’ve seen the nature of Sarah’s faith. The nature of her faith is that it was weak for a long time; but by God’s grace, her faith finally increased: and God honoured her faith. With this in mind, let us now consider **the object of Sarah’s faith.** (Read Hebrews 11:11.)

What was the object of Sarah's faith? It was the LORD! Paul points out that "*she judged him faithful who had promised.*" Sarah was no longer trusting in her own reason. She was no longer trusting in her little schemes in order to make God's promises come true; rather, her faith was now completely resting in God. He had called her to this task, and He would perform it. **First Thessalonians 5:24** says, "*Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*" **Lamentations 3:22-25** says, "*It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*"

Why does God allow us to be confronted with obstacles which make the fulfilment of His promises seem impossible? Because He wants to bring us to a place where we are no longer trusting in things that we can see and touch. He doesn't want us to trust in natural processes. Yes, God often does work through normal, natural processes to accomplish His will; but He doesn't want us to *trust* in them. He wants us to trust in *Him*. What is the object of *your* faith, Christian? Do you truly judge *Him* faithful?

There is one more aspect of Sarah's faith to consider: and that is **the result of Sarah's faith**. What was the result of Sarah's faith? Well, let's read **verse 12** again. (**Read Hebrews 11:12.**)

The word "*therefore*" at the beginning of the verse is very important. "*Therefore*" is a "cause and result" word; and it refers back to Abraham's *faith*. The word "*therefore*" tells us that the springing forth of a great nation was the *result* of Abraham's faith! In fact, not only was it the result of Abraham's faith: it was the result of Sarah's faith, as well! God was waiting to set His plan in motion until both of them, together, had their faith in the right place!

Now, I'll admit that this truth is somewhat mind-boggling. When God reaffirmed His covenant to Abraham in **Genesis 15**, *He Himself* took the responsibility to fulfil all that He had promised to Abraham. God made it clear that *He* was going to do this thing; and He put no condition upon Abraham. There was no "if" attached on Abraham's end of the covenant. *God Himself*, and not Abraham, walked through the carcasses of the animals, and thus promised that the full weight of the covenant responsibility would fall on Himself. *Nevertheless*, God chose to use Abraham and Sarah *according to their faith*, to accomplish His plan. His purpose was not only to bring the Saviour into the world through them: it was also to bring them to the place where they were *totally surrendered to His plan*. Of course, God, being all-knowing, knew that they *would* come to that place of implicit trust; but He would not proceed until their faith was in the right place. God is God, and He can do anything He wants, regardless of whether man believes Him; yet, He chooses to make His plan "dependent," in a sense, upon hard-headed, slow-to-believe people like us! That' mind-boggling, isn't it?

Think about the impossibility of this situation. In **verse 12**, Paul says that Abraham was "*as good as dead.*" In other words, as far as having children was concerned, Abraham may as well have been dead. That is how incapable his body was of producing children. Yet, *Abraham* didn't regard his body as dead. As far as he was concerned, he may as well have been 30, and his wife 20. The all-powerful, ever-faithful God had *promised* that a son would issue forth from *his* body, and from *Sarah's* womb; and Abraham believed it.

## Read Romans 4:19-21.

God knows what His plan is for you; but there are things that God will not proceed to do through you until you fully trust Him. How is *your* faith, Christian?

## II. The patriarchs' faith (vv. 13-16)

**(Read Hebrews 11:13-16 again.)** Paul is now pulling the camera back from Abraham and Sarah, and is focusing in on *all* the “patriarchs” (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). There are several observations that Paul makes about their faith, which we would do well to learn.

First, let's look at the **nature of the patriarchs' faith.** **(Read verse 13 again.)** The first thing about the patriarchs' faith that stands out is that they all died **“*in faith.*”** The Greek word translated as **“*in*”** is *kata*; and it has the idea of “in accordance with.” In other words, they died in a manner that was *in accordance with* the way that they had lived their lives: and the way that they had lived their lives was by *faith*.

Even in death, the patriarchs' faith was plain to see. How so? Well, for one thing, Abraham and Isaac both *died in the land of Canaan*. Abraham had made Canaan his home at age 75; and for 100 more years, he lived in Canaan, without moving out of it (except for the brief time when his faith wavered, and he moved to Egypt during a time of famine). As for Isaac, he was born in Canaan; and he lived in Canaan, without moving, for his entire 180 years! The fact that they died in Canaan (and not in their old homeland of Ur, or Haran) shows that they thoroughly believed God's promise that this land would belong to their seed. As for Jacob, he lived in Egypt for his last 17 years, and died there: but it was only because God had explicitly commanded him to move there. Jacob had also lived in Haran for 20 years, earlier in his life; but that was because of the obligations that he had to fulfil to his crafty Uncle Laban. However, his heart was always in Canaan. Before he died, he commanded his sons to bury him in Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Isaac had been buried. Furthermore, Jacob gave a prophecy, just before his death, concerning the future of the tribes of Israel, and about their possession of the land of Canaan. God would not have given Jacob the honour of delivering this prophecy if Jacob had not believed that Canaan was the land of promise. These men died in a manner befitting the faith by which they had lived their lives.

How, then, can a *Christian* living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century “die in faith”? Let's see what Paul said.

## Read Romans 14:7-8.

“Dying in faith” is no different for us than it was for the patriarchs. The patriarchs died **“*as unto the Lord*”**; and we, too, should die **“*as unto the Lord.*”** Even in the hour of our death, we should be living **“*as unto the Lord*”**: and the way to live **“*as unto the Lord*”** is by *faith*.

A true child of God dies in faith, not in fear. I have heard many accounts from pastors, and other Christians, who have been at the bedside of a dying lost person, and who have witnessed that person struggling in fear in the last moments of his life, and sometimes even dying with a terrified look. True believers, on the other hand, die with a peaceful expression, and sometimes even report seeing the angels coming to take them to Heaven.

However, “dying in faith” goes much deeper than simply being prepared to go to Heaven, and not hell. “Dying in faith” means serving God faithfully, even in the last moment of your life. Take, for example, the Scottish Baptist preacher, John Harper, who died in the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. Many of the survivors reported seeing Harper, in the last moments of his life, swimming around in the deadly icy cold water, and imploring those who, like himself, were clinging to a piece of driftwood, to **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”** The very last man that Harper implored to believe on Christ *did*, in fact, believe on Christ; and later, in Ontario, Canada, this man (who managed to survive) testified that he was Harper’s last convert. He had seen Harper lose his grip on his piece of driftwood, and sink into the water; and the last thing that he heard Harper say was, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!”** That is what you call “dying in faith”!

Another thing that characterised the patriarchs’ faith is that with this faith, **they were able to “see afar off” the things that God had promised. (Read Hebrews 11:13.)** The patriarchs never, in their lifetime, saw the fulfilment of any part of God’s promise, except for the birth of Isaac. The rest of the promise—the promise of the land’s belonging to them, of the Messiah’s coming, and of all nations of the earth being blessed in Abraham—they had to simply receive by faith. They were fully **“persuaded”** of it. They **“embraced”** it.

When you are fully persuaded of God’s promises, and you embrace those promises, it changes your whole world view. It transforms every detail of your daily life. There is no corner of your life that belongs to you. It *all* belongs to God. Furthermore, this “faith” worldview enables you to see **“afar off.”** In other words, you see everything in light of eternity. When your faith begins to *wane*, and you start to live in the old manner that you did before you were saved (which was by sight), you *stop* seeing **“afar off.”**

**Read 2 Peter 1:2-9.**

We’ve seen the nature of the patriarchs’ faith. Now, what was **the object of the patriarchs’ faith**? I believe the answer can be found in **verse 13**, where Paul says that they **“confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”** This is a quote from **Genesis 23**. In that chapter, Abraham described himself with these very words, **“stranger and sojourner.”**

**Read Genesis 23:1-4.**

What did Abraham mean when he described himself as a **“stranger and sojourner”**? Paul answers that question for us in **Hebrews 11. (Read Hebrews 11:13-14.)** According to Paul, Abraham was, by calling himself a **“sojourner,”** confessing that his real home was Heaven.

Now, how do we know that this was what Abraham really meant? After all, Abraham didn’t actually *say*, outright, that his real home was “Heaven.” How do we know that Abraham didn’t consider his old homeland of Ur, or even Haran, to be his real “home”? How can we be sure that Abraham considered Heaven to be his real home? How can we be sure that Isaac and Jacob considered Heaven to be their home, as well? Well, for one thing, Paul said so here in **Hebrews 11**; and **Hebrews 11** is the Word of God! However, we also know this to be so because of their *actions*. Their actions spoke volumes. **(Read verse 15-16.)**

If the Patriarchs had regarded any *earthly* land (whether Ur, or Haran) as their real “country,” then they would have been “minded” to go back to it. They would inwardly have been looking for an excuse, and an opportunity, to go back; and you may be sure that, sooner or later, an opportunity to go back *would have* presented itself! How about when Abraham sent his servant Eleazar to find a bride for his son Isaac in “the old country” of Haran? Abraham himself could have gone back to “the old country” to seek a wife for Isaac; and he could have taken Isaac with him. In fact, that would have been the *logical* thing to do. Yet, he didn’t. He didn’t want to provide any opportunity for himself or his son to move back to the old land, because he knew that would not be God’s will. He wanted to remain in the centre of God’s will. His life was founded on *heavenly* values.

Many Christians walk through “open doors” of opportunity in their lives without truly consulting God. The situation just looks “so right”: yet, they haven’t really prayed about it. Many times, Christians *know* (or at least, suspect) that this thing that they wish to do is not God’s will; yet, in time, they convince themselves that it *is* God’s will, because that is what they *want* to believe. (And Satan is more than happy to provide an “open door” of opportunity for them!) Christian, don’t assume that something is God’s will merely because there seems to be an “open door”! Measure it in light of God’s Word, and seek God fervently in prayer! To depart from God’s will is to invite heartache into your life, and to grieve the Lord.

So, then, what was the object of the patriarchs’ faith? Well, perhaps the word “*country*” can give us a clue. The Greek word for “country” is *patrida*; and *patrida* literally means “fatherland.” The object of their faith wasn’t the “fatherland” itself: it was the *Father* who dwells in the “Fatherland.” The thing that makes Heaven “Heaven” is the fact that God dwells there with His people! *God* was the object of their faith: and they lived their lives in anticipation of moving to the land where they could live forever with their heavenly Father!

Now, in closing, I would like to point out the **reward** of the patriarchs’ faith. (**Read Hebrews 11:16.**) The reward of the patriarchs’ faith was that God was “*not ashamed*” to be called their God. He was not ashamed to greet them with, “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant.*” Make no mistake about it: those who will hear those words “*well done*” on that future day are those who are *truly saved*. The Bible makes it clear that those who will hear the words “*Thou wicked and slothful servant*” are those who were *never saved*!

None of us is faultless: but the mark of a true Christian is that, despite his failures, his life is, nonetheless, characterised by *faith*. By the way, God is called “*the God of Jacob*” more often in Scripture than He is called “*the God of Abraham*” or “*the God of Isaac*”: yet, of the three patriarchs, Jacob is the one who had the deepest spiritual failures. Though Jacob often grieved God, God nonetheless was not ashamed to be called His God, *because Jacob took God at his Word*: and he ordered his life accordingly. As we close, let’s examine one more Scripture.

### **Read Revelation 21:1-3.**

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their wives, lived in “tabernacles” during this lifetime on earth: yet, ironically, in the future day when God will make “all things new,” God will “tabernacle” (pitch His tent) with *them*! Life, for believers, is merely a sojourn on the way to God’s Country; and in the end, God will pitch *His* “tent” (the golden city of New Jerusalem) on the New Earth that He will create for us; and there, He will “sojourn” with *us* for eternity!

**Conclusion:** What is “home” for you? Yes, we have houses here on earth, which we call “home”; but what is your *real* home? Do you think of Heaven as your “Fatherland”? Do you think often of how wonderful it will be to spend eternity with your Father? Or are your thoughts more consumed with the things of this life? I would also ask the question, “**Is Heaven really your home?**” Do you *know* that you are on your way there? If you don’t, the way home is very simple. As Paul said, and as old John Harper said before he went home, “***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved***” (Acts 16:31)!