

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 11, Verses 13-16
Notes From Class on March 2, 2010
Last Revised on (March 4, 2010)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

If you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV") then you may also wish to have the handout we have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews,

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you want and, then, let's get started.

Introduction

In this class, as you know, we are studying the New Testament Book of **Hebrews**.

Last week our discussion took us to Verse **12** of Chapter **11**

Tonight we will continue reading, starting at Verse **13** of Chapter 11.

But first let's begin, as usual, with a quick review.

Review

As we have continually noted,

Hebrews appears to be the text of a **sermon**,

written around the end of the **First Century**, A.D,

to be delivered to a group of **Christians**

at least some of whom were in danger of "**falling away**"

and needed to be encouraged to "**hold fast**."

The preacher reminds them of the **unqualified** supremacy of Christ **(1:1 - 3:6)**.

He then points to the history of Israel, mostly as an example of **mistakes** not to be repeated **(3:7 - 4:13)**.

He describes Jesus as being like a great **high priest**. (4:14 - 5:10)

And reminds them that to reject Jesus would be to reject **all** hope of salvation. (5:11 - 6:20)

Because the old **priesthood** and **law** have been replaced by something better (7:1 - 8:7).

The Old **Covenant** has been replaced by a **New** Covenant (8:8-8:13).

All of the **ceremonies** and rituals of the Old Covenant are obsolete. (Chapter 9)

The death of **Christ** has atoned for sin --- once and for all (Chapter 10:1-18)

So **all** may draw near to God with confidence (Chapter 10:19-22)

And if we **persevere** until the end, our souls shall be **preserved**.

But for those who fall away from Christ, **destruction** awaits.

This is a quick review of what we have studied to the end of **Chapter 10**.

Last week we began reading **Chapter 11**,

where we are given a series of examples of what "**saving faith**" looks like.

Interestingly, and importantly, all of these examples come from the **Old Testament**.

Q. **Why** do you think that is important? (i.e. that the examples come from the Old Testament?)

A. To Jewish Christians it argues against charges of innovation or apostasy--- the Christian call to faith is no different than the Jewish call to faith; it is a call to faith in the one true and living God, who has now been revealed to us more clearly in Jesus Christ.

A. To All Christians it is a stern admonition. If the Fathers could remain faithful with only a glimmer of Christ and his kingdom, then the Christian who falls away is truly without excuse!

A. Others?

OK. Chapter 11 is a series of Old Testament examples of what "saving faith" **looks** like,

but it is not a **random** assortment of examples.

Q. Can you see how the examples are **arranged**?

A. There is at least a sort of **chronological** arrangement --- i.e. with a few minor exceptions the examples are arranged in the order in which they occurred in human history.

Q. What is significant about that, do you think?

A. The true and living God has been working **progressively** toward his end or purpose.

A. God has revealed himself to man **progressively**, and now **ultimately** in Jesus Christ.

A. Our salvation has been an **historical** process, **culminating** in the work of Christ.

Q. The end or purpose of this process is, among other things perhaps, to make you and me **like** Christ.

So the right way to read our Bible is from front to back and that is how the author of Hebrews picks his examples.

As we saw last week, he begins with a picture of faith which would have been true of Adam and Eve and other men and women of faith of all times and places, even now.

It is by **faith** that we understand that the universe was **created** by God. **(Chapter 11:1-3)**

But this cannot be just **any** God that we might possibly imagine.

So **next** our author looks at the story of Cain and Abel.

Abel, unlike his brother Cain, had faith in the one **true** God. **(Chapter 11:4)**

Then he looks at **Enoch** who maintained a right **relationship** with the one true God **(Chapter 11:5-6)**

Then **Noah** who **obeyed** and **trusted** God through very great tribulation **(Chapter 11: 7)**

Then **Abraham**, **Isaac**, and **Jacob** who obeyed God and trusted his **promises** despite never having received most of the things that they had been promised **(Chapter 11:8-10)**

Finally last week we looked at Sarah, Abraham's wife, who did receive that which she was promised, despite first laughing in the face of God, because she was given faith to look beyond the **impossibility** of what she had been promised. **(Chapter 11:11-12)**

And of course she rejoiced, but without living to see fulfillment of any of the promises made **to** her descendants.

These people had only God's **word** for it --- that great things would happen sometime in the far **future**.

So as we have been discussing, people of faith are patient, because most of what they have been promised exists beyond their own **lifetime**.

This theme **continues** as we read on in tonight's lesson.

Before we read on, does anyone have any comments or questions?

Hebrews, Chapter 11, Verses 13-16

OK. Would someone please read Hebrews Chapter 11, Verses **13-16**, in **Japanese**.

Thank you. Now would someone please read that same verse in English (ESV).

13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Thank you.

Verse 3 reads...

(Verse 13)

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Adam, Eve, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, and ...

all such men and women of faith who have ever lived, have **died** in faith, **not** having received the things promised.

Q. Is this because God does not keep his promises?

A. **No**. Certainly that is **not** the point our preacher wishes to make.

His **point** is that people of faith die without having received the things promised, because the things promised, have been promised, for a time **beyond** their lifetime.

This is **especially** true for the Old Testament heroes being examined here!

They have, **however**, had their **faith**,

through which faith they have seen and greeted the promises from afar.

Faith is what we have **now**, in place of the things promised **later**.

Throughout their lives and in death these Bible heroes acknowledged that they were **strangers** and **exiles** on the earth.

This is a **consistent** teaching of the **whole** Bible, whether it be Abraham or Moses or David or others in the Old Testament or Paul or Peter or John or others in the New Testament, even Jesus Christ himself:

God's people are "citizens of **heaven**" and do not properly belong in this world.

Remember **Jesus** saying to Peter, "put your sword away...if my kingdom were of this world...etc?"

We just don't **belong** here. We long for a **better** country. We are citizens of heaven in **exile** on earth.

Q. Does this seem **strange** to you or **depressing**?

Q. Do you actually **feel** this way?

If so, you should take **comfort** from the fact that this has been the experience of **all** people of faith for all time, up until the present, even and especially Christ himself.

Verse 14 reads:

(Verse 14)

For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

The **patriarchs** sometimes described themselves to **others** as being strangers and exiles, and it seems that most of the time they **thought** of themselves this way, too.

People who **speak** this way, says the preacher, make it clear that they are **not** at home **presently**.

They are not where they **belong**.

There are lots of words which describe not belonging: refugee, alien, stranger, traveler, visitor, homeless, orphan,...

These are usually sad words.

At least some of these words may be used to describe people who are **temporarily** displaced, presently traveling away from whatever home they have gone **out** from.

But Verse 15 rules that out...

(Verse 15)

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

As we know from reading the Old Testament, the Patriarchs **did** have opportunities to return to Mesopotamia, which they rather studiously **avoided**.

They had been **called** by God **away** from that place and only **He** could establish their **new** home.

Occasionally in the history of Israel someone made the mistake of **trying** to settle without God's help,

Abraham's nephew, **Lot**, for example, seems to have made a **mistake** in settling at Sodom

But for the most part, they refused to **make** themselves at home anywhere on Earth.

Verse 16 reads,

(Verse 16)

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

God has given faith to some to desire a home with **him**, and this cannot be an **earthly** home, so God has prepared a **heavenly** home for them.

And God is not ashamed to be **called** their God...

Here the author of Hebrews is thinking of how God sometimes **described** himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This is a pretty amazing **compliment**, when you think about it.

As we have discussed in past weeks, **none** of these people were without **sin** or, even, demonstrated a perfectly consistent and unwavering **faith** in God.

But they had been given **enough** faith, so as to desire to make their **life** with God, and so as to evidence a general pattern of trust in and obedience to God, which marked them as **his** people in exile in the world.

 So God identifies **himself** as being **their** God.

 He identifies **himself** with **them**!

 This reminds me of the words of Christ spoken to Paul on the road to Damascus: "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting **me**!"

Jesus is not ashamed to identify himself with his **church**.

 This may even be one way of thinking about what it means to **be** person of faith:

 People of faith are those with whom God **has** identified himself, those to whom God has **given** faith.)

(n.b. this is where we ran out of time on March 2 --- there was a lot of discussion)

 Let us pray.

 Dear God.

 Please give us faith.

 Faith to look beyond this world.

 Faith to resist Satan and to overcome the temptations of the Flesh.

 So that our gaze rests only and always upon Christ.

 And so we know that he has truly save us.

 And so we know that his Spirit lives in us.

 And so we know that you will bring us safely in the end to the home which you, O God, have prepared for us in heaven.

 Please help us to hear your voice.

 Please help us to understand your words.

 Please help us to obey you and to trust you, through each passing moment, until the end.

 Please, O God, do not let us fall away from you, but renew our faith.

 And please make this a living faith that is trusting and obedient,

 So that you are not ashamed to call yourself our God.

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen