

LESSON 2

Abraham Looked for a City

Hebrews 11:8-16

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the one who had promised was faithful. Therefore, from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore. These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth. Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. But they now desire a better place—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them, Hebrews 11:8-16.

Class Overview: This lesson explores Abraham's life of faith as described in Hebrews 11:8-16. Though called to an earthly land, Abraham lived as a pilgrim, dwelling in tents while longing for a city with foundations, designed and built by God. His perspective teaches us to see ourselves as strangers and exiles on the earth, pressing forward toward the better country God has prepared. Abraham's example challenges us to obey without full details, endure with heavenly perspective, and live with hope in God's eternal promises.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Describe Abraham's obedience in leaving his homeland without knowing his destination.
 2. Explain how Abraham's tent-dwelling points to the temporary nature of life on earth.
 3. Recognize the significance of Abraham looking for a "city with foundations" built by God.
 4. Apply the idea of being "strangers and exiles" to the Christian life today.
 5. Reflect on how Abraham's hope for a better country motivates our own perseverance in faith.
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Introduction: Abraham Looked for a City

When we think of Abraham, we often picture the great promises: *“I will make you into a great nation . . . all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you”* (Genesis 12:2-3). But what stands out in Hebrews 11 is not just the promises Abraham received, but how he lived while waiting for them.

God called Abraham to leave his homeland, his family, and everything familiar, and go to a place he had never seen. Hebrews 11:8 says, *“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going.”* That one verse summarizes his life: he obeyed without seeing, he trusted without knowing.

And how did he live? Verse 9 tells us he “stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob.” Think about that: God promised him a land, but all he owned of it in his lifetime was a cave he bought to bury Sarah. He lived in tents his entire life.

Have you ever moved into a new house and had to live out of boxes for a while? Maybe the furniture wasn’t delivered yet, or you were waiting on a closing date, so you couldn’t fully unpack. Everything feels temporary. You can function, but it doesn’t feel like home. You tell yourself, *“This is fine for now, but it’s not where I’m settling.”*

That’s how Abraham lived, not just for a few weeks, but for his whole life. He pitched his tent, moved when God told him, and never really “settled down.” Why? Because he knew Canaan wasn’t the final home. He was looking for something more permanent: “a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

And that’s our situation, too. No matter how stable our homes or lives may feel, we are still “living out of boxes” in this world. This is not where we truly settle. Like Abraham, we are waiting for God’s city.

What do you think it felt like for Abraham to live his whole life in tents, yet keep trusting God’s promises?

Abraham’s Obedient Faith (Hebrews 11:8-9)

The story of Abraham begins with a call. God told him, *“Go from your land, your relatives, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you”* (Genesis 12:1). Hebrews 11:8 reflects on that moment:

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going.”

Notice two key truths here:

1. Faith obeys even without full details

Abraham left, not knowing where the journey would end. He didn’t have a road map, he didn’t know the geography, and he had no idea what awaited him. But he trusted the One who called him.

2. Faith accepts living as a stranger

Verse 9 says, *“By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise.”* Abraham lived in the very land God promised—but as a

foreigner, never as an owner. His faith was content with tents, because he trusted the promise of something greater.

Application:

- Faith is not just believing; it's moving when God says move.
- Like Abraham, we often have to obey without knowing all the details; trusting the character of God more than the clarity of the path.
- Our willingness to live as "foreigners" here shows that we believe this world is not our final home.

What do you find most challenging about obeying God without knowing all the details? How can Abraham's example encourage us when our faith feels uncertain?

Abraham's Heavenly Perspective (Hebrews 11:10, 13)

Hebrews 11 explains *why* Abraham was willing to live in tents his whole life:

- **Verse 10:** *"For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."*
- **Verse 13:** *"These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth."*

What We Learn from the Text:

1. **Heaven, in contrast with tents**
Abraham's tents were temporary. The city of God has foundations—solid, permanent, eternal. Faith allowed him to look past the temporary to the lasting.
2. **He saw promises from a distance**
Abraham never saw the whole picture in his lifetime. Yet he "greeted" the promises as though they were already real. That's faith—treating unseen promises as certain.
3. **He embraced being a foreigner**
Instead of settling down, Abraham openly admitted he didn't belong here. His very lifestyle was a confession of hope in God's city.

Application:

- A heavenly perspective means refusing to treat this life as if it were permanent.
- It means believing God's promises enough to endure, even when we don't see them fulfilled right away.
- It means embracing the identity of a stranger here, not clinging too tightly to this world.

What are some “tents” we live in today—things we treat as permanent but are really temporary? How does looking ahead to heaven help you endure seasons where God’s promises feel “far off”?

God’s Better Country (Hebrews 11:14-16)

Hebrews 11:14-16 explains what Abraham and the faithful were really seeking:

“Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. But they now desire a better place—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

From the Text:

1. Seeking a Homeland

- Abraham could have gone back to Ur; but he didn’t. His eyes weren’t on the past. His faith pressed him forward.
- Faith always looks ahead. It refuses to return to its old life.

2. A Better Place

- The “better country” is heaven itself. It is better because it is eternal, because it is perfect, and because it is God’s dwelling.
- Every earthly homeland, no matter how good, eventually disappoints. Heaven will not.

3. God’s Commendation

- *“God is not ashamed to be called their God.”*
- Their faith honored Him, and His response was to honor them. He prepared a city for them, and for us.
- What greater approval could we ever seek than to have God gladly call Himself our God?

Application:

- True faith is forward-looking. It does not go back to the old ways, even when things get difficult.
- Our deepest longings for security, belonging, and permanence are fulfilled only in heaven.
- When we live as pilgrims, trusting in God’s promises, we bring honor to His name.

What does it mean for us today to “seek a better country”? How does this passage challenge the way we think about security, comfort, or belonging in this life?

Conclusion: Living Like Abraham

Abraham’s life was marked by trust in promises he could not yet see. He left his home without knowing the destination. He lived in tents while waiting for a city with foundations. He embraced life as a stranger because he knew God was preparing a better country.


That's the lesson for us: faith doesn't cling to what is temporary. It steps out in obedience, endures with hope, and keeps its eyes fixed on the eternal. Like Abraham, we live in "tents" now —fragile bodies, unstable circumstances, and passing possessions. But like Abraham, we believe God has prepared something better.


Hebrews 11 reminds us that this way of life honors God: *"God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them"* (v. 16). If we keep walking by faith, if we confess with our lives that this world is not our home, then one day we will enter that city: not as strangers, but as citizens.


Faith endures because it looks beyond tents to a city built by God.


For Discussion

1. What do you find most striking about Abraham's willingness to obey God without knowing the destination?


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2. How do Abraham's tents serve as a picture of the temporary nature of our own lives today?


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3. Hebrews 11:13 says Abraham and others "saw the promises from a distance and greeted them." What does that teach us about faith?

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4. In what ways are we tempted to “return” to old securities instead of pressing forward like Abraham (v. 15)?

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5. What does it mean to you personally that “*God is not ashamed to be called their God*” (v. 16)

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