

I saw a cartoon in a 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul, A: 101 More Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit by Jack Canfield & Mark Victor that had a picture of a man with a backpack high up on a mountain ledge speaking to the bearded guru and he is saying:

“You mean I do the Hokie Pokie and I turn myself around, and that’s what it’s all about?”

p. 300

We laugh at this but this is often the explanation of what is needed to be made right with God or what we have to do discover wisdom or truth.

(The Christian in Complete Armour by William Gurnall)

If he still haunts you with fears of your spiritual condition, then apply to the throne of grace and ask for a new copy of the old evidence, which you have misplaced. The original is in the pardon office in heaven, of which Christ is the Master. And if you are a saint, your name is on record in that court. Appeal to God, and hear the news from heaven, rather than listen to the tales your enemy brings from hell. If you would argue less with Satan and pray more to God about your fears, they would soon be resolved. Can you expect truth from a liar, or comfort from an adversary? Turn your back on him and go to God. Try not to worry. Sooner or later you will receive your certificate of assurance.

(February 16)

(Holiness by J. C. Ryle)

Too many among those who believe begin doubting and go on doubting, live doubting and die doubting, and go to heaven in a kind of mist.

p. 107

(When God Whispers Your Name by Max Lucado)

I sit a few feet from a man on death row. Jewish by birth. Tentmaker by trade. Apostle by calling. His days are marked. I'm curious about what bolsters this man as he nears his execution. So I ask some questions.

Do you have family, Paul? I have none.

What about your health? My body is beaten and tired.

What do you own? I have my parchments. My pen. A cloak.

And your reputation? Well, it's not much. I'm a heretic to some, a maverick to others.

Do you have friends? I do, but even some of them have turned back.

Any awards? Not on earth.

Then what do you have, Paul? No belongings. No family. Criticized by some. Mocked by others. What do you have, Paul? What do you have that matters?

I sit back quietly and watch. Paul rolls his hand into a fist. He looks at it. I look at it. What is he holding? What does he have?

He extends his hand so I can see. As I lean forward, he opens his fingers. I peer at his palm. It's empty.

I have my faith. It's all I have. But it's all I need. I have kept the faith.

Paul leans back against the wall of his cell and smiles. And I lean back against another and stare into the face of a man who has learned that there is more to life than meets the eye.

For that's what faith is. Faith is trusting what the eye can't see.

Eyes see the prowling lion. Faith sees Daniel's angel.

Eyes see storms. Faith sees Noah's rainbow.

Eyes see giants. Faith sees Canaan.

Your eyes see your faults. Your faith sees your Savior.

Your eyes see your guilt. Your faith sees his blood.

Your eyes see your grave. Your faith sees a city whose builder and maker is God.

Your eyes look in the mirror and see a sinner, a failure, a promise-breaker. But by faith you look in the mirror and see a robed prodigal bearing the ring of grace on your finger and the kiss of your Father on your face.

pp. 100-1

v. 7 By faith Noah, being warned [by God] about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household by which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Whereas we see in

ABEL--FAITH WORSHIPPING,
 ENOCH--FAITH WALKING, and
 NOAH--FAITH WORKING.

This is:

BIOGRAPHY #3: NOAH

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

That God does reward those who seek Him is suggested by the career of **Noah** who became an heir of righteousness by faith. What he inherited was, in fact, the new world after the Flood as the readers might inherit "the world to come" (cf. 2.5).
 p. 808

Noah magnifies the obedience of faith as he is warned by God. He is immediately obedient:

“IN REVERENCE [he] PREPARED AN ARK [the reason he did is] FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS HOUSEHOLD [which was his mission field] BY WHICH HE CONDEMNED THE WORLD AND BECAME AN HEIR OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS ACCORDING TO FAITH.”

Genesis 6:9

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

Just like Enoch walked with God, so Noah walked with God.

Bruce observes:

The next example of faith illustrates this willingness to believe that what God has promised he will certainly perform. Noah was a righteous man, like Abel; he walked with God, as did Enoch; but what is emphasized here is that when God announced that he would do something unprecedented in the experience of Noah and his contemporaries, Noah took him at his word, and showed that he did so by making practical preparations against the day when that word would come true.

p. 287

Kistemaker points out:

The heroes of faith who preceded Abraham were true pioneers: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. These men stood virtually alone in their contest of faith; unbelief and disobedience surrounded them and a believing community to support them did not exist.

p. 319

Genesis 6:5

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

The times of Noah are so similar to the times of today.

Hughes says:

The world is still very much as it was in the early 1960s when the Kingston Trio used to sing:

*They're rioting in Africa
They're starving in Spain.
There are hurricanes in Florida
And Texas needs rain.*

*The whole world is seething
With unhappy souls.
The French hate the Germans.
The Germans hate the Poles.*

*The Poles hate the Yugoslavs,
South Africans hate the Dutch,
And I don't like anybody very much.*

p. 92

Wiersbe observes:

There is a frightening contrast between Noah and Lot (Genesis 19) when it comes to their influence on their family. Because Noah trusted God and walked with God, he was able to win his own loved ones to the Lord. Lot was a believer, but he didn't walk with God. When he tried to warn his family of the coming judgment, they only laughed at him (Genesis 19:14). Lot's wife disobeyed God and was judged instantly. Lot's daughters involved their drunken father in incest and gave birth to the two great enemies of the nation of Israel, the Ammonites and the Moabites. Lot's compromise destroyed his family; Noah's conviction and consecration saved his family.

p. 51

English says:

The record of Abel tells us of his worship of God; that of Enoch reveals his worship of and walk with God; in Noah we see one who worshipped God, walked with Him, and witnessed to or worked for, Him. These are progressive steps in our relationship to the Lord; the second is dependent upon the first, and the third upon the second. There must be worship before there can be a worthy walk; and there must be worship and fellowship before there can be witness that is pleasing to God.

p. 353

G. Campbell Morgan says:

Noah and his three sons could never have built that ark with their own hands. What became of the workmen who helped them: those who prepared the gopher wood, fastened it together, and carried out the instructions? As Jesus said, they were swept away. They went on building the ark, and they were eating, drinking, marrying, and carrying on their occupations. I have no doubt they were laughed at for building the ark. What a stupid thing! What a ridiculous idea! For one hundred and twenty years Noah was preaching righteousness. They had not listened. They had not noticed. They had turned a deaf ear to the preaching, because they believed a madman was building the ark. When the flood came, the builders of the ark were swept away because of what they were in themselves, in spite of the fact that they had been workmen preparing that which was to be God's vantage ground for His movement in history.

That is a terrible thought. It reacts upon us. It may be possible today that we are helping to build the ark, and we are so busy here and there, doing all sorts of things that are contributory to the divine purpose, and yet ourselves are corrupt, evil, every imagination of the thoughts of the heart only evil continually.

p. 73

Morgan says further:

That is what He is wanting us to do: to witness by faith, when all things seem contradictory; when all the circumstances of the hour seem to show that the things we are doing are supremely futile. Believing in God, hearing His voice, believing His word, we march on; and by our obedience condemn the world; and carry on the great march of righteousness toward its consummation.

p. 75

Macaulay says:

“In Abel we see how faith makes death the path to life. In Enoch, how faith conquers death. In Noah, how faith saves others from death by the work it does for them.” Thus excellently does Andrew Murray sum up the relation between these men of faith. The worship of faith blossoms into the walk of faith, and fructifies in the work of faith.

p. 177

Set us afire, Lord,
 Stir us, we pray!
 While the world perishes,
 We go our way,
 Purposeless, passionless,
 Day after day.
 Set us afire, Lord,
 Stir us, we pray!

p. 179

DeHaan summarizes it in a similar way when he says:

These three men illustrate the three steps or stages in the growth of faith. They are in their order:

1. Abel--Worshipping by faith.
2. Enoch--Walking by faith.
3. Noah--Working by faith.

Abel worshiped God at the appointed altar. It was a picture of Christ as the Lamb of God, dying upon the altar of the Cross. Here all faith must begin. The next man mentioned is Enoch, who walked with God for three hundred years. In addition to the worship of Abel, and as a result of it, we now walk and fellowship with God, living a life of separation with God, and prove to the world that it is possible to walk with God in the most wicked age of the world's history. And then the last of the antediluvian heroes is a man who "worked" for God. He was Noah who built the Ark, and who put his faith in action.

pp. 157-8

(The Book of Virtues by William J. Bennett)

Mr. Meant-To

Hear the famous words of Benjamin Franklin: "Work while it is called today, for you know not how much you may be hindered tomorrow. One today is worth two tomorrows; never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today."

Mr. Meant-To has a comrade,
 And his name is Didn't-Do;
 Have you ever chanced to meet them?
 Did they ever call on you?

These two fellows live together
 In the house of Never-Win,
 And I'm told that it is haunted
 By the ghost of Might-Have-Been.

p. 364

v. 8 By faith Abraham, obeyed by going out to a place which he was about to be receiving for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Whereas:

“Abel offered to God a better sacrifice” and

“Noah prepared an ark”

we read here that

“ABRAHAM OBEYED.”

We are coming now to:

BIOGRAPHY #4: ABRAHAM

In the remaining 5 BIOGRAPHIES we are focusing on FAITH IN THE PATRIARCHIAL TIMES.

In

Abel,

Enoch, and

Noah

we have been focusing on:

FAITH IN THE PRE-PATRIARCHIAL PERIOD OF TIME.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

That the readers should look forward to "the world to come" and treat their present experience as a pilgrimage is a lesson enforced by the life of Abraham.

p. 808

In Abraham we see FAITH WAITING.

It was 25 years between the PROMISE and the BIRTH OF THE PROMISE SEED.

God maybe slow but He is never late.

In John 11:17-44 in the story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus Jesus came to Bethany four days after Lazarus had died and both of the girls said, "If You had been here my brother would not have died." In other words, You are late. However, God had a greater purpose in mind which is revealed in the cemetery shortly thereafter as He gives that command, "Lazarus come forth!" Lazarus is restored to life.

Morgan, in addressing the biography of Abraham, says:

In the story there are three great movements referred to, and they are indicated in the texts. They reveal a widening experience, or rather, a deepening experience in the life of Abraham. First, faith obeying: "By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed." Faith, onlooking, sojourning in the land of promise," by faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise." Faith offering: "By faith, Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac." We may thus gather the whole story and consider the revelation of the force of faith in the life of this man Abraham.
p. 77

English points out:

There are five illustrations in this chapter of Abraham's faith and his exercise of that faith: (1) by faith Abraham, called of God to go out, obeyed; (2) by faith he went out to an unknown destination; (3) by faith, arriving there, he became a sojourner; (4) by faith he looked for a celestial city; and (5) by faith, when he was tested, Abraham offered his son, Isaac, to God. The first four events, mentioned in verses 8-10, come before us now; the last, referred to in verses 17-19, will be discussed in its proper place.
p. 360

v.10 for he was looking for the city having foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Wiersbe in Run With the Winners says:

You can always tell one of God's pilgrims by his or her eyes. They are not fixed on the artificial glory of the world around them, but on the heavenly glory of the world before them. Their attention, affection, and ambition are fixed on the things of God in the heavenly realm, not the things of man here on earth (see Colossians 3:1ff). As we have seen from Abraham's example, this kind of posture didn't make them so "heavenly minded they were no earthly good." Abraham and Sarah were not distracted from life by their heavenly vision; they were directed in life.

p. 62

He says further:

As George Morrison said, "The important thing is not what we live in but what we look for."

p. 65

According The Bible Knowledge Commentary, "THE CITY" referred to here in verse 10 is:

. . . a reference to the heavenly and eternal Jerusalem.

p. 808

Revelation 21:2

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

v.11 By faith even Sarah herself received power to establish a posterity, even beyond the normal time of life, since she considered Him faithful who promised;

We looked together at FOUR BIOGRAPHIES:

1. ABEL,
2. ENOCH,
3. NOAH, and
4. ABRAHAM.

And now the focus is upon:

5. SARAH.

With Sarah involved in this study we now have our FOCUS AWAY FROM THE LAND and UPON THE SEED.

The reminds us of:

Hebrews 10:23

Let us constantly be holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

J. Vernon McGee says:

When God told Sarah at ninety years of age that she was to have a child, she laughed because it was ridiculous--it seemed utterly preposterous. She couldn't accept it, but God gave her the strength and power to believe Him. Many of us need such strength. Do you remember the man who brought the demon-possessed boy to the Lord Jesus? The Lord Jesus told the man that He could help him if he would believe. The man said, "I believe. Help thou mine unbelief." The man recognized that he had a weak faith, but the Lord Jesus must have given him the faith because He healed the boy (see Mark 9:17-27). Sarah had a little boy named Isaac. Why? She "received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." Sarah represented the *power* (or strength) of faith.

p. 588

(Mountain of Spices by Hannah Hurnard)

"Why," she said to herself with a start of surprise, "just see what the King has done. He has made that which seemed the greatest torment and weakness and despair of my life, the thing I most dreaded and suffered from, into the best thing of all. I was always afraid that I must be Craven Fear because of the Fear which so tormented me. He, by his wonderful grace, has changed me into something I could never have hoped to be, a fearless witness. Oh, how wonderful the King is! Oh, what lovely plans and purposes he has, that our greatest torments and failures should become the strongest and best things in our lives. 'Out of weakness he makes us strong to wax valiant in fight and overcome.'"

p. 247

v.12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, [as many descendants] as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

“Descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore” comes from:

Genesis 22:17

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,

Delitzsch says:

It is a consequence of Abraham’s faith, and Sarah’s, that their long fruitless marriage was crowned with such a reward. Faith brought them the thing hoped for.

p. 242

v.13 All these died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In an impressive summary of his discussion thus far, the writer pointed out that people can be still living by faith when they die, even if by that time they do not receive the things promised. By faith the old saints saw the promised realities from a distance and persisted in their pilgrim character, looking for a country of their own and refusing to return to the land they had left. So too the readers should renounce the opportunity to go back to any form of their ancestral religion and should persist in longing for a better country, a heavenly one.

p. 808

“ALL THESE” is a reference to the previous FIVE BIOGRAPHIES that we have looked at.

They “DIED IN FAITH” and there is a NEGATIVE and POSITIVE STATEMENT.

[NEGATIVELY] “NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES, BUT [in contrast, POSITIVELY]”:

1. “HAVING SEEN THEM”
2. “HAVING WELCOMED THEM FROM A DISTANCE”
3. “HAVING CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS AND EXILES ON THE EARTH.”

This reminds us of Hebrews 11:39 that we will look in our next study.

Hebrews 11:39

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Bruce titles this section:

4. *The City of God the Homeland of the Faithful (11:13-16)*
p. 297

Richards says:

Faith enabled all (11:13-16). Sometimes we have a difficult time identifying with great men of faith like Abraham. How good then to know that countless unnamed men and women looked ahead, and lived, and died, assured that the promises would yet be theirs. These may remain unknown --but not to God.
p. 119

Griffith Thomas says:

These verses sum up the present section, and point out that all the Patriarchs died full of faith, though they never actually received the promises, but having seen them “afar off” were persuaded that God would be true to His Word, and they welcomed the blessed assurance of certitude by, as it were, “embracing” the divine word of promise, meanwhile confessing that they themselves were “strangers and pilgrims” because their hopes were fixed on something infinitely greater than an earthly inheritance (v. 14).
p. 146

Pink says:

Having described some of the eminent acts of faith put forth by the earliest members of God’s family, the apostle now pauses to insert a general commendation of the faith of those he had already named, and (as is clear from vv. 39, 40) of others yet to follow. This commendation is set forth in v. 13 and is amplified in the next three verses. The evident design of the Holy Spirit in this was to press upon the Hebrews, and upon us, the imperative need of such a faith as would last, wear, overcome obstacles, and endure unto the end. Even the natural man is capable of “making good resolutions” and has flashes of endeavour to please God, but he is entirely lacking in that principle which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7).
p. 221

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

Death, as the end of human life, marks the point beyond which human faith can no longer operate. Death is faith's final test; and a life of faith is crowned and completed by faith's acceptance of death, especially when, as in the case of the patriarchs, the fulfilment of God's promises has not yet taken place. They had not yet witnessed the universal blessing that God was to accomplish through them.

p. 195

Westcott says:

The life of the patriarchs was a life of faith to the last, supported by trust in the invisible which they had realised, resting on complete surrender, directed beyond earth (13). They shewed that the true satisfaction of human powers, the 'city' which answers to man's social instincts, must be 'heavenly' (14-16).

p. 361

Lane says:

In vv 13-16 the writer suddenly interrupts his recital of Abraham's acts of faith in order to analyze the strands of the tradition he has woven together. The insertion of his own comments at this point is surprising. A retrospective glance over the patriarchal period at the conclusion of the unit in order to summarize the significance of the development might have been expected.

p. 355

English says:

They lived in the sphere of faith.

"Not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off." It would not have been faith otherwise, for "faith is the substance of things *hoped for*, the evidence of things *not seen*." They looked ahead, far into the realm of time, and heavenward in hope, and counted that which they had not yet received as their own by faith.

p. 376

CAN YOU DRINK THE CUP?

“No man is fit to preach the gospel, seeing the whole world is set against it, save only he who is armed to suffer.”

--John Calvin
(quoted in Leadership, Fall 1993)

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

DEATH BENEFITS

The 18th-century English pastor Rowland Hill lived to a ripe old age. In fact, he outlived most of his friends. Missing them very much and anxious to join them on the other side, he grew more homesick for heaven with each passing day. It seemed so long since some of them had gone to glory that he would often jokingly say with a wink, “Do you think they’ll remember me?” It was not unusual for him to go to some other believer well along in years with this request: “If you should go before I do, give my love to everyone. Be sure to tell them that old Rowley, although staying behind a little while, is coming on as fast as he can.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

LAST CHANCE

The preacher was dangerously ill and couldn’t have visitors. But when an agnostic called to pay his respects, the preacher asked that he be sent in anyway.

“I sure appreciate this,” said the agnostic. “But why did you ask to see me, when you denied admission to your close friends and church members?”

“That’s easy to explain,” gasped the dying preacher. “I’m confident of seeing them in Heaven. But this is probably the last chance I’ll ever have to see you.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

GETTING WORRIED

After a funeral a minister posted this notice on the church bulletin board:
 “Brother Peterson departed for heaven at 3:30 a.m.”

The next day he found the following written below his announcement:
 “Heaven--8:00 p.m.: Mr. Peterson has not yet arrived. Great anxiety.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

(Just As Long As I'm Riding Up Front: More Stories I Couldn't Tell While I
 Was a Pastor by Bruce McIver)

What you gonna do when the river overflows?
 I'm gonna sit on the porch and watch her go.
 What you gonna do when the hogs all drown?
 I'm gonna wish I lived on higher ground.
 What you gonna do when the cow floats away?
 I'm gonna throw in after her a bale of hay.
 What you gonna do with the water in the room?
 I'm gonna sweep it out with a sedge--a broom.
 What you gonna do when the cabin leaves?
 I'm gonna climb the roof and straddle the eaves.
 What you gonna do when your hold gives way?
 I'm gonna say, “Howdy, Lord! It's Judgment Day!”

p. 149

SHOULD WE GO FIRST

Should you go first and I remain to walk the road alone.
 I'll live in memories' garden, dear, with happy days we've known.
 In spring, I'll watch for roses red when fades the lilac blue.
 In early fall when brown leaves call, I'll catch a glimpse of you.

Should you go first and I remain for battles to be fought,
 Each thing you've touched along the way will be a hallowed spot.
 I'll hear your voice, I'll see your smile. Though blindly I may grope,
 The memory of your helping hand, will buoy me on with hope.

Should you go first and I remain to finish with the scroll,
 No lengthening shadows shall creep in to make this life seem droll.
 We've known so much of happiness. We've had our cup of joy.
 But memory is one gift of God that death cannot destroy.

Should you go first and I remain, one thing I'd have you do
 Walk slowly down that long, long path, for soon I'll follow you.
 I want to know each step you take, that I may walk the same;
 For some day down that lonely road, you'll hear me call your name.

(From Parson's Bible Illustrator 1.0)

Jon Cody Waters, the son of Charlie and Rosie Waters, died unexpectedly on December 4, 1995 at the age of 17 years. Cody wrote the following words on September 23:

“Don’t be anxious about anything or scared because He loves you, (me) and will protect you (me). You just have to have faith and trust and love Him with all your heart. He loves you, so just relax and hang on tight. It’s awesome!”

Cody Waters, Leadership Retreat, September 23, 1995

v.14 For those who are saying such things are making it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Westcott says of verses 14-16:

These verses develop the last clause of v. 13, and define the grounds of the statement which has been made that the patriarchs ‘died in Faith.’ Their language shewed that they continued to the last to look for that which they had not attained.

p. 363

Draper says:

The Old Testament saints also sought a country (11:14). They knew they did not belong, so they looked ahead. They looked to a better country, a heavenly one (11:16). Their eyes were set to the future. They saw what was ahead with the perceptiveness of faith: . . .

p. 312

Hewitt observes:

Within the hearts of these patriarchs there was a deep longing for a permanent settlement. Had their longing been for Mesopotamia they could at any time have returned to their native home. Their longing was higher and greater, reaching out to that unseen city 'whose builder and maker is God'.

p. 176

“NOW HE’S WAITING FOR ME”

Pastor Maynard Belt told of an elderly Christian couple who were parted after more than 50 years of marriage when the husband finally succumbed to a fatal disease. When their pastor went to call on the bereaved wife, he found her sorrowing, yet triumphant. “I’m pleased to see you doing so well,” he commented. “But I’m sure you miss your husband.” “Oh, yes,” she replied. “I miss him more than I could ever say. But I think of it this way: For years and years I would wait all day for Bill to come home from his job. I’d work busily around the house, and I’d look forward eagerly to the time he’d come through the door. I’d have his dinner ready, and we would enjoy being together. All these years I waited for him to come home, and now he’s waiting for me to come home!”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

“WHEN I AM GONE”

Barbara C. Ryberg has written a beautiful and consoling poem in which she pictures a soul in Glory voicing these words of comfort to the grieving relatives here on earth:

“When I am gone, remember I’m with Jesus;
 then do not mourn because I’ve passed away.
 Life holds so many griefs and disappointments,
 and will you cry because I did not stay?
 ‘Tis only for a spell we must be parted;
 not many years on earth to us are given.
 And when my Savior tells me you are coming,
 I’ll go with Him and welcome you to Heaven.
 Grieve not because the eyes that looked upon you
 shall never see your face on earth again;
 Rejoice, because they look upon the Savior
 who gave His life to ransom sinful men.
 Weep not because I walk no longer with you;
 remember, I am walking streets of gold.
 Weep for yourselves that you awhile must tarry,
 before the blessed Lord you may behold.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

v.15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Kistemaker says:

Had the patriarchs indeed contemplated returning to their native country, they would have broken faith with God and would have lost the promise God had given them. Abraham had been called away from the land of his father and forefathers, who “worshiped other gods” (Josh. 24:2). He could not return because he had responded in faith to God. Therefore, for Abraham and his son and grandson to retrace their steps to the land of Abraham’s origin was unthinkable. In obedience to God’s call, the patriarch had entered Canaan, and in full reliance upon his God, he stayed in the Promised Land. Isaac and Jacob showed the same obedience, for Jacob, after spending a number of years in Paddan Aram, returned to the southern part of Canaan. Also, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were buried in the land of the promise.

The other side of the proverbial coin is that the patriarchs sought not an earthly heritage but a heavenly one. Says the writer of Hebrews, “They were longing for a better country.” They had their sight set, in faith, on a heavenly country. They looked for life eternal with God who had given them the promises.

p. 326

Owen says:

That they had no desire to return is proved by the possibility and facility of such a return. They had opportunity of returning. From the call of Abraham to the death of Jacob was two hundred years, so they had time enough for a return; beside, it was no great distance; Abraham sent his servant thither, and Jacob went the same journey with his staff. It is evident that no opportunity could draw them to think of a return to their own country, and therefore it could not be that with respect whereunto they professed themselves to be strangers and pilgrims.

p. 226

“KEEP ME FROM TURNING BACK!”

A missionary to Thailand named Miss Hammer faced many obstacles in her work, and she saw few visible results despite her earnest endeavors. Her confidence was in the Lord, however, so she refused to yield to despair. Her only desire was to “plow out her furrow for God,” no matter how stony the field or how difficult it might be to sow the seed. In 1962 this gallant servant of Christ suffered a cruel death at the hands of a heroin addict. In her last letter to a friend she quoted a poem which not only told of the great trial of her faith, but revealed her holy determination to go on serving God without flinching or retreating in the face of overwhelming odds. This bit of verse, which so aptly expressed her feelings, is a touching commentary on a life completely dedicated to the Lord:

My hand is on the plow, my falt’ring hand;
 But all in front of me is untilled land.
 The wilderness and solitary place,
 The lonely desert with its interspace.
 The handles of my plow with tears are wet;
 The shares with rust are spoiled, and yet,
 Out in the field, ne’er let the reins be slack;
 My God! my God! keep me from turning back!

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

v.16 But as it is, they are longing for a better [home], that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He prepared a city for them.

“BUT” forms the CONTRAST.

And these, instead of thinking about going back “ARE LONGING FOR A BETTER [HOME], THAT IS A HEAVENLY ONE.”

1 Peter 2:11

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.

Philippians 3:20

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Colossians 3:2

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

“THEREFORE GOD IS NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED THEIR GOD; FOR HE PREPARED A CITY FOR THEM.”

John 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Bruce says:

This ideal has proved too high for many Christians throughout the centuries of our era; yet there has never failed a distinguished succession of men and women possessed of this pilgrim attitude who have sung with Henry Francis Lyte:

It is not for me to be seeking my bliss
And building my hopes in a region like this;
I look for a city which hands have not piled,
I pant for a country by sin undefiled.

p. 300

Wiersbe reminds us once again of that statement:

Dr. George Morrison, a great Scottish preacher, once said, "The important thing is not what we live in, but what we look for."

p. 124

Lange quotes Heubner who says:

Never has the pious man completely realized on earth the longing of his heart; he is always hoping for something better.--The crown of all hopes is the city of God, where God in the most glorious manner will dwell among His saints.--Faith makes us strong to offer up that which is dearest to us.

p. 189

Hughes quotes that little chorus that we often sang:

*This world is not my home
I'm just a passing through
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore.*

p. 101

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v.17 By faith Abraham, while being put to the test, offered up Isaac; and he who received the promises was offering up his only begotten [son];

The word “OFFERED UP” takes us back to the word “obeyed” in verse 8.

We now return to Abraham to see this test of his faith.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The theme of testing emerges here as the writer returned to Abraham. The readers can learn from that supreme test in which the patriarch was called on to sacrifice his . . . son.

p. 808

Isaiah 48:10, 11

See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

1 Peter 1:6, 7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Kistemaker observes:

Genesis 22 contains the story of Abraham’s greatest test of faith. This story reveals Abraham’s readiness to obey God at the expense of Isaac, to cling to God’s promises even though obedience to God’s command would nullify it, and to believe that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

p. 327

Westcott says:

The trial of Abraham was not so much in the conflict of his natural affection with his obedience to God, as in the apparent inconsistency of the revelations of the will of God which were made to him.

Thus the greatness of Abraham's Faith was shewn by the fact that he was ready to sacrifice his only son, though it had been before declared that the fulfilment of the promise which he had received was to come through him. His obedience therefore included the conviction of some signal and incomprehensible work of God whose promise could not fail. At the same time the nature of the trial left an opportunity for the right exercise of Faith.
p. 365

(Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance by Bob Buford)

I remember walking along a limestone bluff perhaps two hundred feet above the muddy and treacherous river, as frightened as I've ever felt. *Here's something you can't dream your way out of*, I told myself. *Here's something you can't think your way out of, buy your way out of, or work your way out of.*

It was all too clear in this maddening solitude on the river bluff. *This is*, I thought to myself, *something you can only trust your way out of.*

The incomprehensible was breaking out all around me, and there was no way I could understand it apart from an eternal perspective. Albert Einstein once said that "what is incomprehensible is beyond the realm of science. It is in the realm of God." This was truly in the realm of God.
p. 56

(The Christian in Complete Armour by William Gurnall)

Once a Christian experiences God's precious love he does not dread suffering or affliction; he knows the Father will not hurt His own child. I have often wondered about Isaac's peace and patience in submitting to be bound for a sacrifice when he saw the knife so near his throat. We know he was not a mere child because Abraham asked him to carry the load of wood. Some say he may have been more than twenty years old, certainly mature enough to be apprehensive of death. Yet the son had such complete confidence in the authority of his father that he did not struggle, but put his life into his hands. If anyone else had held the weapon he could not have trusted as he did. We must remember whoever may be the instrument of trouble to a saint, the sword is always in God's control. Because Christ saw the cup in His Father's hand He took it willingly.
(September 26)

(The Power of Suffering: Strengthening Your Faith in the Refiner's Fire by John MacArthur, Jr.)

Puritan Thomas Manton once said, "While all things are quiet and comfortable, we live by sense rather than faith. But the worth of a soldier is never known in times of peace."
p. 39

(When God Has Put You On Hold by Bill Austin)

The words of Bismarck are especially appropriate here: "Life is like being at the dentist. You always think that the worst is still to come, and yet it is over already."

To this can be added the realistic, and encouraging, words of Nietzsche: "That which does not kill me, makes me stronger."
p. 27

Ah, suffering my painful friend;
you take the bubble of comfort
I have so carefully built around
 myself
and in a seemingly cruel fashion
snatch it from my clinging
 hands
and dash it to the ground;
where it breaks into a hundred
 pieces
and leaves me exposed and
 trembling.
Again, I must make the choice:

Do I retreat or do I move on.

Pearl Anderson

v.18 with reference to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called."

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

Abraham's decision was so difficult because God seemed to be contradicting himself by giving an order which appeared to nullify a previous promise. In our author's view Abraham realised that God could not lie about a promise nor could God's command be disobeyed.

p. 199

v.19 He considered that God is able to raise [men] even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

Genesis 22:5

He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Ester 4:14

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Psalm 119:140

Your promises have been thoroughly tested,
and your servant loves them.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains this as:

Abraham . . . [rising above the trial and trusting] the resurrecting power of God. So also the Christian readers must sometimes look beyond the experiences of life, in which God's promises do not seem to be fulfilled, and realize that their resurrections will bring those promises to fruition.
p. 808

v.20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things about to be coming.

BIOGRAPHY #6:

ISAAC

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The patriarchs mentioned here likewise looked to the future in faith.
p. 808

Campbell Morgan says:

It is arresting that these three illustrations are drawn from that period in life when a man is approaching the end and is looking on. The writer of this letter says that in that hour, approaching the end of the earthly pilgrimage, by faith Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph demonstrated their faith.
p. 86

Kistemaker says:

In this verse and the next two verses, the author unfolds an interesting description of the patriarchal blessings. Note that in the case of Abraham's sons, not Ishmael but Isaac received the blessing. Isaac was the son of the promise. In the next generation, not Esau, the first-born, but Jacob received the covenant blessing that God had given to Abraham and his descendants. Next, not Reuben, Jacob's first-born, but Joseph received the blessings in his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. And last, not Manasseh, Joseph's first-born, but Ephraim received the choice blessing. God's electing love is independent of the rules and regulations concerning the right of the first-born (Deut. 21:15-17). The reason that the names of the patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph appear in the list of the heroes of faith is that they exhibited their faith in God.

p. 332

v.21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, [leaning] on the top of his staff.

BIOGRAPHY #7:

JACOB

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The readers too were to maintain their worship right to the end of life, persevering in faith in the future that God had foretold.

p. 808

They are being challenged to finish strong.

G. Campbell Morgan says:

I know there is an old saying that God helps those who help themselves; but God help anybody who is imagining that he can, in the last analysis, help the fulfilment of divine purpose in his life.

p. 93

v.22 By faith Joseph, when coming near to the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

BIOGRAPHY #8:

JOSEPH

Genesis 50:25

And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

Exodus 13:19

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In similar fashion all believers should, in genuine faith, have confidence in the future of God's people.

p. 808

Griffith Thomas says:

In these three instances the men were at the close of their days, and yet their hearts were full of expectation, their faith was indeed the “substance of things hope for.”

pp. 148-9

Bruce says:

Joseph also, at the end of his days, showed the same firm faith in the fulfillment of God’s promises. Joseph’s career certainly presents instances of faith in abundance, such as his steadfastness under temptation and his patience under unjust treatment: . . .

p. 306

Wiersbe in his little commentary, Be Confident, says:

We have to admire the faith of the patriarchs. They did not have a complete Bible, and yet their faith was strong. They handed God’s promises down from one generation to another. In spite of their failures and testings, these men and women believed God and He bore witness to their faith. How much more faith you and I should have!

p. 125

G. Campbell Morgan says:

Faith, and already you see gleaming through the story the fact that we have been looking at the natural outlook, and faith always looks beyond that; and if it does not, it is not faith at all.

p. 103

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Faith involves things hoped for and not yet seen.

LESSON #2: Abel illustrates for us the proper approach to God by means of the sacrifice.

LESSON #3: Cain was rejected because he refused to approach God in the proper way.

LESSON #4: Enoch walked with God in intimate fellowship. Are you in fellowship with the Lord today?

LESSON #5: The rapture of the church can take place at any moment and like Enoch and Elijah, we will be snatched home in the twinkling of an eye.

LESSON #6: Enoch was pleasing to God because he exercised faith.

LESSON #7: His walk by faith involved being teachable, obedient, and transparent.

LESSON #8: Noah walked with God and he “prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.”

LESSON #9: Abraham illustrates for us the obedience of faith.

LESSON #10: God may be slow but He is never late.

LESSON #11: God tested the faith of Abraham with the command to offer up Isaac.

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Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

(Turn Toward the Wind by Dale Hanson Bourke)

A newspaper article that appeared eight months after his diagnosis was titled "Religion Changes 'Bad Boy' of Politics" and included this summary:

Republican National Committee chairman Lee Atwater, once branded the "pit bull of American politics," is a changed man.

"I have found Jesus Christ. It's that simple," he said in an interview this week. "He's made a difference, and I'm glad I've found him while there's still time."¹

1. Lee Bandy, "Religion Changes 'Bad Boy' of Politics," *Orange County Register* (November 5, 1990).
p. 77

(The Seven Laws of the Harvest: Understanding the Realities of Sowing and Reaping by John W. Lawrence)

The contrast is not seen anywhere more vividly than that which exists between two poems which Dr. Alva J. McClain, former President of Grace Theological Seminary, gave in his theology class notes. The one is entitled, "Invictus" written by William H. Henley, who, by the way, died of suicide. The other is written by a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, Dorothea Day, and her poem is entitled, "My Captain." Observe, if you will, the difference in them.

INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
 Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the horror of the shade,
 And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishments the scroll,
 I am the master of my fate:
 I am the captain of my soul.

MY CAPTAIN

Out of the light that dazzles me,
 Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
 I thank the God I know to be
 For Christ the conqueror of my soul.

Since His the sway of circumstance,
 I would not wince nor cry aloud.
 Under that rule which men call chance
 My head with joy is humbly bowed.

Beyond this place of sin and tears
 That life with Him! And His the aid,
 Despite the menace of the years,
 Keeps, and shall keep me, unafraid.

I have no fear, though strait the gate,
 He cleared from punishment the scroll.
 Christ is the Master of my fate,
 Christ is the Captain of my soul.

(Heaven Help Us! Truths About Eternity That Will Help You Live Today by Steven J. Lawson)

Many people will miss Heaven by eighteen inches--the distance between their heads and their hearts. Make certain that Christ is in your heart by faith.

p. 117

(Broken in the Right Place by Alan E. Nelson)

A sort of reckless abandon comes over the attitude of the person with a tamed soul. This is not a thrill-seeking irresponsibility found in the world. It is more of a sense that "I don't have to survive. I don't have to control my own destiny; He does. I don't have to call the shots; He does. I am not able to accomplish all I need to accomplish; He is." We are more apt to respond as Esther did when God's people needed a clutch play to save the game: "And if I perish, I perish" (Es. 4:16). Our recklessness is a growing desire to do whatever God wants us to do, because we are not consumed with other tasks, like ego enhancement, reputation preservation, and making something of ourselves. Count Zinzendorf said, "I have one passion; it is He, He alone." We are like the bondservant in Exodus 21, who when freed to leave declares, "I love my master and do not want to go free."

p. 170-71

The River
by Garth Brooks

You know a dream is like a river
 Ever changin' as it flows
 And a dreamer's just a vessel
 That must follow where it goes
 Trying to learn from what's behind you
 And never knowing what's in store
 Makes each day a constant battle
 Just to stay between the shores . . . and

Chorus:

I will sail my vessel
 'Til the river runs dry
 Like a bird upon the wind
 These waters are my sky
 I'll never reach my destination
 If I never try
 So I will sail my vessel
 'Til the river runs dry

Too many times we stand aside
 And let the waters slip away
 'Til what we put off 'til tomorrow
 Has now become today
 So don't you sit upon the shoreline
 And say you're satisfied
 Choose to chance the rapids
 And dare to dance the tide . . . yes

And there's bound to be rough waters
 And I know I'll take some falls
 But with the good Lord as my captain
 I can make it through them all . . . yes

Yes, I will sail my vessel
 'Til the river runs dry
 'Til the river runs dry.