

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16)

Strangers Waiting for Home

He could see that life was good where he was at. He could see his family and friends that he grew up with and loved. He could feel their support. This is what he could see and knew. Then he is called and he obeys. He packs up his immediate family, his house, his nephew who he's close with, and leaves for a promise he had heard to a place he knew nothing about.

He could see that he's a foreigner in this place. He's different. He's an outsider. He sees that nothing actually belongs to him except the stuff that he moves from one place to the next. In tents he lives with his family while he is a stranger in this land. But it was okay because he has the spoken promise.

You could see that she is just too old. In her younger years many probably wondered why she didn't have her own kids; plenty probably asked about it too. Now she's old and her husband is even older than her; as good as dead. You could see that. But they had the promise. So despite all the supposed facts and know-it-alls pointing the other way they do what married couples do who try to have children. They act on the promise. Isaac would not be borne by Immaculate Conception. Trusting the one who promises is faithful she becomes pregnant. He becomes father with descendants as many as the stars in the sky and innumerable as the grains of sand by the seashore.

How do Abram and Sarah do this? **“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”** (Hebrews 11:1). The writer of this letter called Hebrews has been working toward this point for the last 10 chapters. Here’s the reality, your foundation, certainty, your hope. Faith is more than just believing or knowing. Faith stands on the reality, the sure foundation, of what is to come. It is confidence in things not currently being seen. Faith comes from hearing the message of promise, grabs onto it, and makes it your personal possession.

But what is faith? The writer takes us back to the beginning. How do you grasp creation by a Creator Being? Sure, there is a point to know the various scientific discoveries that supposedly “prove” creation. Yes, there’s good wisdom in knowing the evidence that Christian scientists use to explain how this world came to be. But how do you grasp this to be true and not the Big Bang or string theory? None of the scientists were there and neither were you. You didn’t see it before everything was formless and empty. They didn’t either. You didn’t see it when the Word spoke and light came into being for the first time. You didn’t see it when earth was set in empty space or the sun, moon, and stars were set in their proper places. You didn’t see it as plants sprung from the ground and the waters swarm with sea creatures while the sky fills with birds. You didn’t see beasts of the field take their first run across the open plains or man pluck his first fruit from the trees. You didn’t see the six 24 hour days that God spoke and it came to be. So how do you grasp it?

It’s the same way that Abram decides to leave what he sees, knows, can touch and feel and go to a place that he has never been and hasn’t seen. **“Abram was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God”** (v.10). Abram knew he was a stranger in the land. He knew he was different. He knew he was an outsider. But even if he had built a huge mansion, settled the land, and planted his crops, he would have still been a stranger and it’s okay. Why? Because he was expecting something better, something greater. And it’s this promise of heaven with God as the designer and builder that Abram could not see that gave him hope and confidence to leave what he could see and to live as a stranger in this world.

It’s that same promise that God has given to you that is waiting for us that gives us hope and confidence as we live as strangers in this world. And maybe that’s why I’m easily frustrated, grumpy, irritable, and annoyed with many things. I have to admit that I don’t think about heaven all that often. I must confess that I don’t take a lot time to consider what is waiting for me after my time in this world. Thank God my place with him is not directly correlated to how much I daily yearn and am excited for it. Maybe you are better. Maybe you are more like me.

After all, it’s hard to keep your mind on things above and to consider heaven. Our thinking power is quickly swallowed up with tomorrow’s plans and next week’s possible headaches. Even with food in the pantry and clothes on our back we still might worry

about what's next. You can see the prices go up on everything. You can see the temperatures rising and the ground staying dry. You can't see how the money coming in is going to keep up. You can't see heaven as clearly as that.

You can see that she is sick and not getting better. You can see that she is frustrated with life and how everything seems to be working against her. You can see she's trying to hide something but you can see it clearly with your own two eyes. You can't see heaven in the same way.

And so, instead of being strangers in this world, we can feel ourselves drawn to that which we can feel and touch here. We find ourselves caught up with working so hard to fit in with everyone else. Instead of living as strangers, being different, we ignore certain sins while seeming to condone others. Instead of building up treasures in heaven we seem to be trying to build up treasures here or producing some type of heaven on earth. After all, this is what we can see. So, we want to live in a place where the government is your political party because they have it figured out and the other clearly doesn't. We expect relationships to not be hard and for people to get along—at the very least our close ones. We want our house to look a certain way with certain things in them. We would like our life to look like something else with certain experiences in it. Sounds vague, but that's because your paradise on earth probably looks differently from your neighbor's paradise on earth.

But it's all chasing after the wind. Then what happens if life doesn't look this, or we aren't as comfortable as we would like, or we don't reach the goals like we want to achieve, or people are bound to disappoint and hurt us, what do we do? We ask why. We might be angry with God. We might wonder how we angered God. It's easy to start questioning if God really cares. We might wonder when he will start keeping his promises.

It seems like an innocent thing to demand God would prove it. Show us something. Let me see more clearly what you are up to, then I can be sure. But until then, we feel like have every legitimate reason to question: what if? We almost hedge our bets, don't fully trust, and keep in the back of the mind that possibility— what if— so that you are not disappointed. But doubting is not believing. When we doubt God and His promises we are saying that he is untrustworthy or that he lies. But God will not be mocked.

That's what everyone else does. But you are different. Yes, you are in this world, but you are not of it. You are a new creation washed in the water of baptism and cleansed with Jesus' blood. Yes, you live in this world, but we too are aliens, strangers waiting for something better. In those waters God named you his child and made you an heir to the place that he is designer and builder. From that time on you we wander through this world not really fitting in; after all we are different. But it's okay because we trust that God was thinking of you when he made that promise in the Garden of Eden to crush Satan's head.

In fact, he chose you to have a share in that promise so he sends this Promised One so that you would have a place with him.

And because he is faithful he did what he promised. The one to bless all nations came from Abraham's line, just as he said. He too was a stranger in this world as he made his dwelling amongst us. He took on your flesh and blood to share in your weaknesses, was tempted like you to doubt and to worry. And, yet, this same Jesus who feels the same temptations tells you, "Do not worry. Have no fear little flock. Why worry about clothes or food or bills or paychecks? The Father has chosen to give you the kingdom! Do not worry what tomorrow will bring or what your future holds. He has prepared for you a city. He's not ashamed for you to call him God and Father. He claims you as his child. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

Oh it can so difficult to see this; Jesus knows. So he lifts up your eyes to the cross. There we see him trusting his Father's will as he drinks the entire cup of suffering for your doubting heart. There you see him trust his Father's plan as he endures the pain of the cross and fires of hell. Without a worry on his mind he cries out, "It is finished," when he knows the work to save you is done. When he dies, he rests in his Father's faithful hands trusting what will happen in three days. Here is your proof God loves you, of Jesus' work for you, that there is a city prepared and waiting for you—the tomb is empty. And because Jesus lives, you too live. When our time on this earth is done, finally we will be home with him. There we can rest and relax without any sadness, sickness, pain, frustration and feeling like we should be doing something more. No more feeling of loss or missing or disappointment. We will be with the Lord forever.

But we aren't there yet. We are still strangers in this world; so seek first his kingdom he has prepared for you. Because we know what is waiting for us, now we can see the suffering, the hard struggles, the evil and death, the groans and pains, sometimes God uses to remind us he has something better waiting for you. And even those things he works for your eternal good. We may not see it today or tomorrow, but God promises and he does not lie. Even those good things, wonderful things we enjoy and cherish, he works to show us, "Just wait, this is just a small taste of what's to come." So seek first his kingdom. See him in the same life-giving, life-creating, life-sustaining Word that gives us peace that surpasses understanding. Don't worry—he knows what you need and gives it at your proper time. Taste and see the Lord is good as you receive his really present body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Don't you see, there's the food you need that he works to keep you in this one true faith until life everlasting? Right now we don't see it very well, but one day you will and what we believe in faith will be our reality. Until then, we are strangers waiting in faith for our eternal home. Amen.