

Homesickness

“If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 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.” Hebrews 11:15-16

Leaving one's homeland is a difficult thing to do, as any displaced person will tell you. To visit another country, often for vacation or business, comes with an initial adrenaline rush from the novelty. The duration of the visit and the duration of the novelty last about the same amount of time. To live in another country, however, is a different matter altogether. The initial adrenaline rush still occurs, but the one who moves is left to make sense of things after the novelty dissipates. It is after the dissipation that what we call *homesickness* sets in. Of course, there are many different reasons for leaving one's homeland – youthful travels, careers, wars, political persecutions – and each reason comes with its own degree of homesickness. But homesickness will set in nonetheless.

In Hebrews we find ourselves in a unique situation. The author is referencing people like Abraham who didn't leave their homelands because of careers or wars or famines. They left because God called them. And so, in our passage, the author is dealing with leaving one's homeland in connection with faith, because Hebrews 11 is the famous chapter on faith.

In writing what he wrote, the author gives us more than we might expect when it comes to responding to God by faith. We expect faith to be what Abraham did initially: He had confidence in God's ability to take care of him when he obeyed Him, as if God's instructions were the only bridge from one side of the cliff to the next – and after he crossed the bridge, his faith had served its purpose. But the author tells us something different. The reason Abraham had such great faith was not only because he left when he was called, but because, after he crossed the bridge, he didn't think to return. The author writes that if those like Abraham considered returning, they would have been given the opportunity to return. But they didn't return. Even after the novelty faded, Abraham's faith endured and persevered through homesickness. Because home wasn't where Abraham had lived. Home was where Abraham was going.

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