

No Continuing City

Hebrews 13:14

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** The most important activity in which we can engage ourselves is Bible study (Rom. 10:17).

1 Tim. 4:13: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” (NIV; 2 Tim. 4:2)

Psa. 1:2-3: “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”

Psa. 119:97-104: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. 98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. 102 I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.”

2 Tim. 2:15-16: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

2 Tim. 3:14-15: “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Deut. 11:18-21: “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 19 You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 20 And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.”

2. ****** Point of fact: one cannot spend too much time studying God’s Word! Jn. 6:68

A. Our study must be coupled with “a noble and good heart” (Lk. 8:15); like the Bereans (**Acts 17:11:** “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”).

B. Job expressed the attitude we all should have towards Bible study: **Job 23:12:** “I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.**”

C. If that is our attitude, we will crave it each and every day! Jn. 6:68; Matt. 5:6

D. If you get nothing else out of this sermon; I hope you will be encouraged to study the Bible M-O-R-E!

(1) It requires not only a love for God and His word; it requires discipline.

(2) It is habit that is not necessarily easy to form nor easy to keep.

(3) We have so many things competing for our daily attention (family, job, internet, etc.).

(4) But I encourage you to develop the habit; spend just 30 minutes per day seriously reading and meditating on the God’s Word (You won’t regret it! Jn. 6:68).

3. My own personal habit: I try to spend ~half an hour reading the Bible just before I turn out my light and go to sleep.
 - A. This is in addition to the Bible reading I do for Bible class and sermon preparation.
 - B. I focus my reading on a particular book; often reading it several times over.
 - C. I even keep a sheet of paper stuffed in my Bible to write down passages, thoughts, etc.
 - D. Another thing I do is to write down passages that have words or phrases that I think would make good sermon titles or make connections with other Bible verses.
 - (1) Once I fill up a sheet of paper with such ideas, I transfer them to a MS Word file I keep on my computer.
 - (2) I have so many “sermon seeds”; I think I could preach for 10 years before I used up what I’ve already collected.
4. ****** Last week I was reading the book of Hebrews and many “sermon seeds” were written down.
 - A. One in particular really struck me; especially as I’ve been contemplating lately the untimely death of my former MSU-Extension colleague (i.e., Kathy Lee).
 - B. The particular verse is **Hebrews 13:14**: *“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”*
 - C. That passage succinctly and clearly states what our lives should be all about!
 - (1) Mostly we think and act as if our lives will just continue on and on and on (dangerous!).
 - (2) They won’t! Heb. 9:27; Jas. 4:14
 - (3) We have a great tendency to push our fragility, our own mortality, etc. out of our minds.
5. **3** Thus, as the basis of our lesson this morning let’s consider Paul’s statement in **Hebrews 13:14**: *“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”*

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **4** Background:

- A. We all know the Bible writers were inspired: 2 Tim. 3:16-17 (**2 Pet. 1:21**): *“for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*
- B. That means the very words they wrote down were selected by the Holy Spirit to express the thoughts on God’s mind: **1 Cor. 2:13**: *“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches,”* (Think precision! 1 Pet. 4:11)
- C. But, as I read Paul’s statement (*“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”*); I couldn’t help but wonder if he didn’t have Abraham in mind.
- D. ****** We are all familiar with the “Hall of Fame of the Faithful” in Hebrews 11.
 - (1) Paul mentions 15 faithful people by name (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and David).
 - (2) A study of anyone of these faithful people would be most instructive (recall Stacy Crim).
 - (3) It is interesting to note (at least to me) that even though Paul mentions 15 faithful people by name (and many more unnamed); he spends a good third of the chapter describing the faithfulness of one person: Abraham.
- E. It is true of any of the faithful in Hebrews 11 that they all recognized the truth of **Hebrews 13:14**: *“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”*

(1) ** When I contemplate that important statement; Abraham comes to my mind.

(2) Paul describes the faith of Abraham and the other patriarchs:

Heb. 11:13-16: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

F. 5 Abraham’s faith is the prototype (model) of what saving faith is all about! Romans 4; James 2
Four incidents stand out in Abraham’s life that demonstrated his faith:

(1) ** Called to leave his home: **Gen. 12:1:** “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee:’” (KJV)

(a) He didn’t know where he was going! **Heb. 11:8-9:** “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And **he went out, not knowing where he was going.**”

(b) I hate moving! Sherry and I have moved ~13 times in our married life...whew!

(c) Each time we knew **exactly** where we were going and **exactly** how to get there!

(d) Each time we had everything all packed up nice and neat in boxes and packed into a moving van.

(e) Each time as we moved, we had motels to stay in, restaurants to eat in, interstate highways to drive on, etc.

(f) Abraham had none of this! And, he was 75 years old! Gen. 12:4

(g) Ur to Haran: ~600 miles; Haran to Shechem: ~400 miles! Can we say, “Daddy, are we there yet?!”

(h) Would you and I have the faith to pick up our household and move it 1,000 miles?

☛ Not knowing the destination!

☛ Knowing there are no modern conveyances, no good roads, no services, and no accommodations!

☛ Knowing we are quite likely to run into hostile people with no protection other than what we can provide for ourselves.

☛ Not knowing what kind of environment we’ll find when we come to wherever we’re supposed to be going! **Heb. 11:8-9:** “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

(i) What did Abraham do when he got to Canaan?

☛ “Lord, I hate this place and want to go back to Ur!”

Gen. 12:7-9: “Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your **descendants** I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with

Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.”

- ☛ “Hold on a second, LORD! I thought You said You were going to give **ME** a land!”
- ☛ “LORD, I definitely want to go back to Ur!”
- ☛ Abraham’s faith was amazing!

(2) **** Family problems (Part I: Lot): Gen. 13:5-7:** “Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. 6 Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.”

- (a) “LORD, you’ve brought me all this way and now why are You causing me family problems? I don’t need this!”
- (b) Abraham remained calm, cool and collected: **Gen. 13:8-9:** “So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.’”
- (c) What a perfect time for Abraham to say, “LORD, this thing is just not working out. I’m going back to Ur!”
- (d) What would you have told the LORD? What would you have told Lot?
- (e) Abraham’s faith was amazing!

(3) **** The promise through Isaac:**

- (a) Abraham and Sarah had already tried to “aid” God’s plan by having a child with Hagar.
- (b) But God had a different plan! **Gen. 17:19-22:** “Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.’”
- (c) Isaac was the one in whom “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).
- (d) Abraham knows he and Sarah have a bit of a problem: **Gen. 17:17-18:** “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ 18 And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’”
- (e) God keeps His promise concerning Isaac: **Gen. 21:2:** “For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.”
- (f) I don’t mean in the least to be indelicate, but the birth of Isaac required Abraham and Sarah to have sexual relations!
- (g) Abraham is now 100 years old and Sarah is 90 years old! Can you appreciate the faith it required for them to proceed with God’s plan?!
- (h) Abraham’s faith was amazing!

(4) **** The offering of Isaac:**

- (a) All of God's plans hinge on Isaac! God said (concerning Isaac): "I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him." (Gen. 17:19).
- (b) And the LORD tells Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Gen. 22:2)
- (c) Can you see at this point most fathers frantically making the "time-out" signal?!
- (d) "Uhm, LORD, You want me to do 'what' with Isaac?!"
- (e) No, Abraham offers not one word of protest or doubt! **Gen. 22:3:** "So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."
- (f) How in the world was Abraham able to do that? **F-A-I-T-H!**
- (g) Three evidences of Abraham's great faith (in this specific incident):
 - ① **Gen. 22:5:** "And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.'"
 - ② **Gen. 22:7-8:** "But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' Then he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' 8 And Abraham said, 'My son, **God will provide** for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.'"
 - ③ **Heb. 11:17-19:** "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' 19 **concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead**, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."
- (h) Indeed, Abraham's faith was amazing!

2. 6 Application:

A. Abraham's faith met both of the Hebrew writer's two definitions of faith:

(1) **** #1:**

Heb. 11:1: "Now faith is the **substance** of things hoped for, the **evidence** of things not seen." (NKJV)

Heb. 11:1: "Now faith is **being sure** of what we hope for and **certain** of what we do not see." (NIV)

- (a) Called to leave his home: only a man with this type of abiding faith would make such a move!
- (b) Trouble with Lot: only a man with this type of faith would put the welfare of others above his own!
- (c) The promise through Isaac: only a man with this type of faith would believe that both his old age and that of his wife were no obstacle to the fulfillment of such a promise!
- (d) The offering of Isaac: only a man with this type of faith could raise the knife fully intending to sacrifice his own son, the son of the promise! Heb. 11:19

(2) **7 #2:**

Heb. 11:6: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (NKJV)

Heb. 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (NIV)

- (a) Called to leave his home: only a man who believed in the reality of God and God’s promise to reward “those who diligently seek Him” would make such a move!
- (b) Trouble with Lot: only a man who believed in the reality of God and God’s promise to reward “those who diligently seek Him” would put the welfare of others above his own!
- (c) The promise through Isaac: only a man who believed in the reality of God and God’s promise to reward “those who diligently seek Him” would believe his old age and that of his wife were not an obstacle to the fulfillment of such a promise!
- (d) The offering of Isaac: only a man who believed in the reality of God and God’s promise to reward “those who diligently seek Him” could raise the knife fully intending to sacrifice his own son, the son of the promise! **Heb. 11:19:** “concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

B. 8 Back to our “seed verse”: **Hebrews 13:14:** “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”

- (1) ** It takes the faith of Abraham to believe that verse! It takes Abraham-like faith to fully adopt that verse as the credo by which one lives their life! (i.e., code, motto, principle)
- (2) ** Abraham, while living, received only a very, very small amount of God’s promises (Isaac).
 - (a) He didn’t receive the land (430 + 40 = 470 years).
 - (b) He didn’t become a “great nation” (not in his lifetime; Gen. 46:27: “seventy”→2,5 M?).
 - (c) All nations of the earth were not yet blessed when Abraham laid down his head for the last time (That took another ~2,000 years!).
- (3) **BUT** “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” (Heb. 11:13-16)
- (4) We know “The rest of the story”: Abraham’s descendants became a great nation (Israel), they received a “land” (Josh. 21:43-45), and all nations have been blessed by Abraham’s seed (Gal. 3:16, 29: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”).

C. 9 What evidence did Abraham offer in his manner of life that confirmed his belief in:

Hebrews 13:14: “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”

- (1) ** Despite not receiving the “promises” he “embraced them.”
 - (a) He fully and completely believed and accepted God’s promises!
 - (b) He held onto them tightly within his heart because he was totally confident in their fulfillment!

- (2) ** He “*confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Heb. 11:13). How??
- His manner of life was totally consistent with one who recognizes their life here on earth is but for a short time! Jas. 4:14; Heb. 9:27
 - His manner of life was totally consistent with one who “*waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb. 11:10).
 - His manner of life was consistent with one recognizing this life is not all about ME! **Phil. 2:3-4:** “*...in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*”
 - His manner of life was totally consistent with one who recognizes that “*the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*” (Jn. 5:28-29)
 - His manner of life was totally consistent with one who recognizes they will be held accountable to God for what they’ve done in this life! 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12

D. **10** What about you? What about me?

- Do you and I live by the credo of Hebrews 13:14? **Hebrews 13:14:** “*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*”
- Is it manifested in our lives like it was in Abraham’s? Our daily manner of life? Lk. 9:23
- Do you and I fully and completely “*embrace*” God’s promises to the faithful and to the unfaithful? (tightly cling to them! Matt. 5:6; 6:33)
- How is this manifested in our lives each day? How is it manifested by:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ What we think? ☛ What we do? ☛ Where we go? ☛ What we read? ☛ What we watch? ☛ How we entertain ourselves? ☛ What we spend (or don’t spend!) our money on? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ How (or if) we pray? ☛ How often we read our Bible? ☛ How we treat others? ☛ Our attitude towards attending services? ☛ How we approach our responsibilities to God, family, brethren, others?
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E. ** As he sums up the faith of Abraham and the other patriarchs, Paul says, **Heb. 11:16:** “*But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*”

- We must be brutally honest with ourselves! 2 Cor. 13:5
- Does that truly describe my (your) faith?
- Given the state of my (your) faith is God “*not ashamed*” to be called my (your) God?

III. CONCLUSION: I I

- What is your (my) goal in life? **Hebrews 13:14:** “*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*”
- Are you (and me) living your life in a way that is consistent with reaching that goal? 2 Cor. 13:5
- Invitation