



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V23 N33 August 15, 2021

NOT OF THIS WORLD "We're Not in Kansas Anymore" Hebrews 11:13-16

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Identity in Christ

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."
John 1:12



What is the Christian understanding of power?

In AD 410, the city of Rome was destroyed by barbarian tribes of Visigoths from the north. The Roman Empire, which had dominated the world for a millennium, was now in ashes. As thousands mourned the death of a civilization, many looked for a scapegoat, someone to blame for this tragedy. Many blamed Christianity for the Roman Empire's demise. Because Romans and their captives were no longer worshipping the pantheon of Roman gods, the Roman people were perceived to have become weak and the gods must have become angry, bringing judgment upon the empire for a people no longer worshipping them. In response to this charge against Christians, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa, wrote his *magnum opus*, *City of God*, Augustine's longest and most comprehensive treatment of all things theological.

"The *City of God* was written in response to pagan claims that the sack of Rome by barbarians in 410 was one of the consequences of the abolition of pagan worship by Christian emperors. St. Augustine responded by asserting, to the contrary, that Christianity saved the city from complete destruction and that Rome's fall was the result of internal moral decay. He further outlined his vision of two societies, that of the elect ("The City of God") and that of the damned ("The City of Man"). These 'cities' are symbolic embodiments of the two spiritual powers—faith and unbelief—that have contended with each other since the fall of the angels. They are inextricably intermingled on this earth and will remain so until time's end" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "The City of God," (britannica.com/topic/The-City-of-God).

City of God consists of 22 major divisions, each with multiple chapters. The first half of the work dealt specifically with the charges made against Christians by those who worshipped Roman gods. The last half of the work focused on the theme of Two Cities: a city or order organized by those of earthly interests versus a city organized on heavenly or spiritual values. Augustine supported this premise by considering angels both righteous and fallen, the state of Adam and Eve before and after the Fall,

and Cain and Abel and their differing perspectives. He referenced many of the Psalms regarding the "City of God" (Psalm 87:3), quoted Pauline epistles and made much of the contrast between Babylon and Jerusalem in the book of Revelation.

Augustine himself stated: "Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, 'Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.' In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, 'I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.' And therefore the wise men of the one city, living according to man, have sought for profit to their own bodies or souls, or both, and those who have known God 'glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise,' that is, glorying in their own wisdom, and being possessed by pride, 'they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.' For they were either leaders or followers of the people in adoring images, 'and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.' But in the other city there is no human wisdom, but only godliness, which offers due worship to the true God, and looks for its reward in the society of the saints, of holy angels as well as holy men, 'that God may be all in all'" (Augustine, *The City of God, Volume II*, Project Gutenberg, translated by Marcus Dods, 48). The words of the ancients speak volumes to our contemporary quandaries.

1

EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

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.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

Draw a line connecting all mentions of the name “Jesus” throughout this passage.

Circle each word marking time or a passage of time in this passage.

- Count the number of people mentioned in vv. 1-12. Write that number above the word “people” in v. 13.
- Underline the word “living” in v. 13 and draw a line to the word describing how they were living.
- Underline all of the remaining verbs in v. 13.
- Place brackets around the phrase identifying what these people admitted in v. 13.
- Circle the location of these people’s identity in v. 13.
- Draw a line connecting all of the geographic references in vv. 14-16.
- Double underline the ongoing repetitive actions listed in vv. 14-16.
- Draw a circle around the phrase “a heavenly one” in v. 16 and draw an arrow to the phrase it contrasts with in v. 13.
- Underline the phrase that shows God’s pleasure in v. 16.
- Double underline the word “city” in v. 16.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, “This text is about _____.”



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Who are the people referenced by the phrase “All these people” in verse 13?
2. What is tragic about those who died in verse 13?
3. What was the perspective of those who did not receive the promises made to them according to verse 13?
4. What does admitting that you are a “foreigner and stranger on the earth” look like?
5. For what kind of country were “these people” looking?
6. How does verse 15 clarify the type of “country” we should or should not be seeking?
7. What does it look like in the life of a Christian to long for “a better country – a heavenly one”?
8. What is God preparing for those who are his people? How is this different from that which they are longing?
9. Some would say that verses 13-16 encourages Christians to be “so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.” How would you answer this critique?
10. How does longing for a “heavenly country” (v. 16) change your daily perspective?

Commentary On The Text

The Book of Hebrews reminds us that the Christian faith marshals a dual apologetic. Most of the New Testament focuses upon presenting Jesus to the Gentile, non-Jewish world. But even Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, knew that the Gospel must also answer and challenge the Jewish world. Paul's missionary strategy was always, where possible, to present the Gospel to Jews in a synagogue before expanding to a Gentile audience. Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), the early church apologist, wrote a number of defenses of the faith to Greek and Roman audiences. But he also wrote a long defense of the Gospel to a Jewish audience in his work called "Dialogue with Trypho." The Book of Hebrews, along with the Gospel of Matthew, is uniquely equipped to answer the objections of Jewish thought toward Jesus. Both books show how Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises and the "better" alternative to traditional religious accretions.

Much in Hebrews is made of how "better" Jesus is compared to all the essential elements of the Old Testament. Jesus is *better* than the prophets (1:1-3). He is *better* than the angels (1:4-14). He is *better* than Moses (3:1-6) and even the giving of the Law (12:18-24). Jesus is *better* than Joshua and promises of Sabbath rest (4:6-11). Jesus is *better* than the High Priest (5:1-10) and the Aaronic Priesthood (7:11-19). He is even *better* than Father Abraham (7:1-10). Jesus is *better* than the Old Covenant (8:6-13) along with its Tabernacle/Temple (9:2-12) and its sacrificial system (10:11-18).

The "betterment" of Jesus compared to all things Old Testament is not so much a replacement as it is a fulfillment. Jesus is better not because the Old Testament landmarks were bad or decrepit. Jesus is better because all the Old Testament luminaries pointed to him. Jesus is the fruit of the Old Testament's flower. Jesus is the ultimate object of all Old Testament faith. The "Hall of Faith" (Heb 11) provides a crowded room of witnesses to the superiority of the promised Messiah. They all believed God and in faith looked for something more. "And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect" (vv. 39-40).

Much of the Old Testament finds the people of the Promise, wandering to and from exile. Even when Israel came into its Promised Land, its kings and priests looked for the coming of the Messiah for ultimate fulfillment. Hebrews 11:13-16 describes this "desire" as a longing for a "better country" or a "better homeland." God is described as identifying with these

people of faith by providing for them not just an undeveloped land, but a fully resourced city (v. 16). This "longed for" and God-built city (v. 10) is heavenly and not of this world (v. 16). This "city" with Jesus as its better sovereign and even its very temple (Rev 21) is future. As a result, we, like our Old Testament brethren, are "foreigners and strangers on the earth" (v. 13). We live in this world, yet are longing for another.

"Foreigners and strangers" (NIV, NET) provides a wide array of descriptive interpretations from other translations: "strangers and pilgrims" (KJV, ASV), "strangers and exiles" (ESV), "foreigners and temporary residents" (CSB). The statement is based on Abraham's declaration when negotiating with the Hittites over the field of Machpelah, "I am a sojourner and alien among you" (Gen 23:4). Hebrews here replaces "sojourner" with "stranger" . . . Both indicate that someone is not a full participant in civic rights in this place, and suggest that they do have such rights elsewhere" (see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, TNTL, 292).

If we are "foreigners and strangers" on the earth like our forefathers, how are we to live in this world while longing and loyal to another? How do we pursue the "City of God" while living in the "City of Man"? We should review and welcome the expectation (v. 13) of the complete fulfillment of all our hopes and dreams only when Jesus returns and establishes on earth his kingdom, accepting that we will never see full or complete justice until he returns. Living as "foreigners and strangers on the earth" also means we can serve as examples of peace, hope, love and righteousness to those struggling in the "City of Man." Christians should live day to day with a loyalty to a higher law and ethic. We can work to improve laws and systems, and we can live as people of love, hope and righteousness who are citizens of heavenly country.

The Old Testament patriarchs and the first Christians did not have the rights and privileges we have in a modern democracy. Yet they still had hope in the promises of God and his coming with justice and peace. The care and compassion of Christians in the Roman Empire brought social change even though political channels were limited. Emperor Julian said of Christians, "It is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism [refusal to worship idols] . . . I believe that we [i.e., the pagans] ought really and truly to practice every one of these virtues" ("*To Arsacius, High-Priest of Galatia*," *The Works of the Emperor Julian, III*, translated by Wilmer Cave Wright, 69). We would do well to live in hope of what God is bringing while we sojourn and serve as foreigners and strangers in this current world.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 13 *all these* “Most commentators understand the phrase ‘all these’ to refer only to the patriarchs since Enoch did not die. But the summary nature of this phrase makes it more likely the author is making a general comment on all the heroes of faith mentioned to this point” (David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC, 553).

v. 13 *promises* “The promises in view were those concerning possession of the land, the foundation of a great nation, and the blessing of the people of the earth through Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:2-3, 7). The tension between the reception of the promises and their realization was unresolved throughout the course of their lives. Yet these early exemplars of faith did not allow even the event of death to call into question the validity of the promises” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 356).

v. 13 *welcomed* “The patriarchs died as they had lived, in agreement with the standards imposed by the faith life. Waiting to receive the promised inheritance did not discourage them, death did not daunt them, for they looked beyond and saw their ‘homeland’ just on the edge of the horizon . . . As nomads travel along, the towers of their home city shine in the setting sun. Although they are not able to reach it on that day’s journey, they gaze at the welcome sight and then contentedly encamp for the night” (Neva F. Miller, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Analytical and Exegetical Handbook*, Section on Hebrews 11:13-16).

v. 14 *country* “The fact that the patriarchs regarded themselves as ‘strangers and sojourners in the land’ made explicit [*hoti patriada epizētousin*], ‘that they are expecting intently a homeland.’ The metaphorical representation of the promised inheritance as a [*patriis*], ‘homeland,’ is governed by the confession in v 13c. The ‘homeland’ is, of course, identical with ‘the city which has foundations’ of v 10 and ‘the better country, that is, a heavenly one’ of v 16. This is the only case in the Bible where [*patriis*] has a religious meaning” (Lane, 358).

v. 15 *had left* “It is equally plain that, although they spoke of themselves as pilgrims in a foreign land, they did not refer to the land they had left as being their true home. In that case, they could easily have gone back there. But in fact they had no

thought of doing so. When Abraham’s servant suggested to his master that Isaac might have to go to Mesopotamia in person to persuade his bride to come to Canaan, Abraham said: ‘See to it that you do not take my son back there’ (Gen. 24:6). In the following generation Jacob had to flee to Mesopotamia from the anger of his brother Esau, but his vision at Bethel on the first night of his journey there made it impossible for him ever to think of Mesopotamia as his home; Canaan, to which his returning steps were directed twenty years later, was now the ‘land of his fathers’ (Gen. 31:3), even if in it he had no settled abode” (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, 299).

v. 16 *heavenly* “This is another of Hebrews’s favorite terms, used of the call (3:1*), the gift (6:4*), or the reality to which Christ’s sacrifice has permitted access. Although the precise nature of the ‘heavenly homeland’ and its relationship to Christ have not been specified, the use of these evocative terms, so closely associated with earlier developments of Hebrews’s soteriology, is significant, as is the verb used of the patriarch’s desire, ‘yearned for’ [*oregontai*] . . . a common classical term for an intense longing, including desire for spiritual or heavenly things” (Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester, *Hebrews*, Hermeneia, 331-332).

v. 16 *city* “This passage serves the author as another example of how God is the rewarder of those who seek him (11:6). God has, in fact, ‘prepared a city’ for the patriarchs. The use of the verb ‘prepare’ (*hētoimazein*) echoes scriptural language for God’s care of the people (Pss 22:5; 64:9; 77:20; 88:4; 118:73; 131:17) that is continued in New Testament passages speaking of eschatological realities (Matt 25:34, 41; 1 Cor 2:9; Rev 12:6; 19:7; 21:2). The city that God has prepared for the patriarchs is not an earthly one, but is located in the very homeland they seek; it is God’s own city, toward which the author’s hearers are themselves streaming in their faithful pilgrimage (Heb 12:22). Again, the pilgrimage of the people of faith is continuous, having from beginning to end the same structure of obedience and loyalty, the same goal of the presence of the living God” (Timothy Luke Johnson, *Hebrews*, TNTL, 293-294).

4

APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

In faith, embrace the promises God has made to you, reminding yourself that this life is not your final destination and that you're here to represent and serve a loyalty to a better reality that will be fully realized with God's return.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

People are fascinating. I love sharing a cup of coffee and peeling back the layers of a person’s story. Hearing how they grew up and how they got to the place they are at that very moment is so intriguing. When I sit down with someone, I always start by saying, “I want to know everything!” Usually, they share their spouse’s name, kid’s names and ages, and their work or school history. This is all valid information and typically my jumping point when I meet a new person as well. Thinking about this today had me wondering, “What if?” What if, instead of all this earthly information, the first thing out of our mouth was who we are in Jesus? What if we started with how we came to know Christ and what a difference that made in our lives? Our story reflects a holy and amazing God. He has made us ambassadors on this earth and, as His emissaries, we have a special mission to spread His light in a dark and depraved world. Parents, we have daily opportunities to share our story and be the light in our kid’s schools, sports teams and dance classes. We can be the light to their teachers who might already be counting down the days till the first break. We can be the light to our kid’s friends who may not have stepped foot in a church before. Let’s take hold of every opportunity this year! Our citizenship is in heaven, and we have a home to look forward to. In the meantime, let’s light up this city as we proclaim the good news of a great God!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Hebrews 11:13-16.

1. What people is the author talking about (Hint: read vv. 1-12 and list the people)?
2. How are these people described?
3. What is the better country they were looking for?

What Do You Think?

How is it that the people didn’t receive what was promised?

What Do You Do?

Of the list of people, pick one and read their story in the Bible. Share three interesting facts about that person.

CORE COMPETENCY: Identity in Christ

I believe I am special because I am a child of God.

MEMORY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 5:21

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light.”

KidPIXCOUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week’s verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD’S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for 12 years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Central Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

Eric Wright (Th.M. Dallas Theological Seminary). Guest Author.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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**CENTRAL
BIBLE CHURCH**

8001 Anderson Boulevard
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817-274-1315
wearecentral.org