

IN GOD WE TRUST
A Study in Hebrews Chapter 11
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FAITH AND ASSURANCE

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Look at that definition in view of its two parts: *“Faith is the substance of things hoped for.”* Various translators have brought that from Greek into English with statements like these: “Faith means that we are confident of what we hope for (Moffat); “Faith is being sure of the things we hope for” (Beck); “Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for” (Montgomery). I prefer the wording in the New English Bible, “And What is Faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes.”

Each definition includes the idea of assurance. It means “we are confident,” “sure” and our hope has “substance” when faith becomes “the title-deed” of our hope.

But be careful of your understanding of the word “hope.” We use it commonly today to mean wish. We say, “I hope it does not rain tomorrow,” and we mean, “I prefer (or wish) it would not rain.” Hope is used in the Christian Scripture to refer to confident expectation, assurance that the good thing desired will be received. It is based in God, who is called *“the God of hope”* who will *“fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 15:13). Hope means confident trust (faith) in God for things yet future. It is a strong, victorious word in the Christian vocabulary.

The second part of our text reads. *“Faith is...the evidence of things not seen.”* The meaning of that statement is made clear in these various translations: “a conviction of the reality of things we do not see” (Weymouth); “the proof of the reality of the things we cannot see” (Williams); “the proof of the things (we) do not see and the conviction of their reality - faith perceiving as real what is not revealed to the senses” (Amplified). Faith, then is confidence (being sure) that we shall receive those things we do not and cannot now see. I like the translation of Hebrews 11:1 recorded in the New English Bible. “And What is Faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes and makes us certain of realities we do not see.

The nature of faith

Faith is not self-deception, nor wishful thinking, not pretending to be real a thing which can never be. No! Faith is assurance, positive conviction, based on the person and promises of a God who will never fail.

Faith is related to “things” - *“the evidence of things not seen.”* That means it is practical, specific, tangible, concrete. It is not an other worldly thing which has no practical use here in this life. Faith is needed and effective in the daily affairs which concern us in living in our world today.

I must underscore that the basic nature of faith is confidence in a person. Theologians have discussed for generation whether Christian faith is agreement with doctrine or personal confidence in the person of God. The Bible makes it quite clear that we have faith when we trust God with all our hearts and lean not unto our own understanding. To agree with the doctrines of my church is not to have faith. To trust God for all things in all circumstances is to have faith.

Look at the spelling of the word. “F-A-I-T-H.” Use it as an acrostic and make a sentence giving a definition: “Forsaking All I Trust Him.” That’s it! Faith is personal trust in God.

But there are exercises of faith more than a trust in God. There is a natural faith we exercise everyday. We become ill and may go to a physician we do not know. He runs tests which we do not understand. He writes a prescription which we cannot read. We go to the pharmacist and he mixes drugs which we cannot name. Then we go home and drink that mixture. That is faith in man! We trust the physician, we trust the chemist. So we risk our lives in taking the medicine. (It could be poison to our bodies as well as helpful to our bodies.) Such a personal trust in man indicates the personal trust in God which is Christian faith.

Occasionally you hear a person speak of "blind faith." He might say, "I go as far as I can understand, and from there I go on blind faith." But there is no such thing as blind faith. Faith is based on knowledge. The more we know the more we can trust.

Romans 10:17 reads, "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" That means Christian faith is awakened as one hears the message about Christ. No one can believe what he does not know. Romans 10:13, 14 reads, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of who they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*" The order is evident.

One preaches about Christ. People understand the person and work of Christ. They respond with personal faith in Christ. They call upon the name of Christ. And they are saved. But it all begins with hearing and understanding. There is no faith without knowledge. In fact, without knowledge, faith is an impossibility. That is who Christians are commanded to "*Go...and teach all nations*" (Matthew 28:19). Through such teaching men and women can understand the truth and come to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The safety of faith

How safe is it to trust? The safety of your faith is dependent on the object of your faith. The great Prophet Elijah confronted ancient Israel with the challenge. "*How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him*" (I Kings 18:21). Then he offered a challenge. They would build two altars, one to the pagan god Baal and one to the Lord God. Four hundred prophets of Baal would pray to their god. Elijah would pray to the Lord God. The God who sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice on the altar would be the God of Israel. The prophets of Baal spent hours praying, crying out, and cutting their flesh with knives, seeking an answer from their god. Nothing happened. Elijah prayed a simple prayer and the fire fell from the Lord God.

What was the difference in the two? Did the prophets of Baal have faith in their god? Indeed, they did! Why was their faith not rewarded? Their faith was in the wrong object. The power of faith is in the object of faith. Their faith was in a god who was lifeless and powerless. Elijah's faith was in a God who is living and powerful. Baal could not answer, regardless of how much they trusted him. The Lord God could answer, regardless of how weak was the trust in Him.

The key to effective faith is not how much faith we have but who do we trust. Jesus said, "*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed...nothing shall be impossible unto you*" (Matthew 17:20). The power of faith is based on the power of the one we trust. So I counsel you, "Trust in the Lord."

Finally, I repeat this definition of faith given by H. A. Ironside, "Faith is absolute assurance and firm conviction of the reality of things the natural eye has never seen."

FAITH AND WORK

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report" (Hebrews 11:1,2).

As we have discussed the meaning of faith (as "*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*") and concluded that faith is absolute, assurance and firm conviction in God concerning the reality of things

the natural eye has never seen, let us turn our attention to the work of faith indicated in the statement, "*By it the elders obtained a good report.*"

Faith is ancient

Faith is ancient. *By it the ELDERS obtained a good report.*" Who are those "elders" to whom reference is made? They are the forefathers of the nation of Israel. The word was commonly used to refer to those who are wise, great in age or who had authority without regard to age. It is used in this text to refer to those who lived in ancient times. We call them "forefathers, patriarchs, ancestors." The reference to them in Hebrews 11:2 points out that faith was essential and exercised in generations of ancient times, the same as today. Faith is no new thing. "*By it the ELDERS obtained a good report.*" The faith which is as current as today's news is also as ancient as the human race.

Faith is productive

Faith is productive. Never think of it as static. It is never passive. In the Bible, faith is always moving. It is going out toward God, receiving from God and serving God. The New Testament warns us that "*as the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*" (James 2:26).

By faith "*the elders obtained a good report.*" That means either that a good report was borne to them, or that they bore a good report by their faith. Interpreters are not in agreement between those two options. Perhaps both meanings may be given the statement without doing violence to it. We speak well of the elders because of their faith. And God's evident approval was extended to them because of their faith.

The "*good report*" means a good testimony, and approved record, to be well-attested. They were approved because they were men of faith.

Abraham is viewed as one of the great prophets of God in ancient times. Why is he so revered by Jews, Christians and Moslems? Because he was a man of faith. Genesis 15 reports how God made a promise to Abraham. Verse 6 reads, "*He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*" Abraham's faith became the distinguishing mark of his life. He is called "the father of the faithful." The New Testament reads, "*They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*" (Galatians 3:9). "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus...And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (Galatians 3:26, 29).

That same principal is true today. Faith makes a difference in your relationship with God. You can receive a "good report" before God and men if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

Faith is enduring

Faith is enduring. It continues from generation to generation. Look at the list of names in Hebrews 11. It goes from Abel (who was the second generation of human history) to David (who lived multiplied centuries - even millenniums - after Abel). From generation to generation, through the uncharted ages of millenniums, faith was present and profitable.

Further studies in Hebrews 11 will show how faith is profitable to all persons and in all conditions. Abel shows faith effective in giving meaning to rituals of worship. Enoch shows faith's power to preserve one in the midst of apostasy and sin. Noah shows faith at work to save one from God's judgment on sin.

Abraham demonstrates the obedience of faith and the blessing that brings. Sarah shows the place of faith in the begetting and rearing of children. Isaac speaks of the blessing of the faith of parents when passed on to their children. Jacob pronounced a blessing on his sons and grandsons because of his faith that God would do all He had promised. Joseph gave instructions concerning his burial because of faith that God's promises would be fulfilled.

It was by faith a Hebrew couple saved their son from Pharaoh's death sentence. And that lad, whom we know

as Moses, followed their faith in delivering his nation from bondage. Their greatest indication of faith was when they walked down into the Red Sea with a wall of water on either side, following the direction of the Lord.

Joshua captured the great military fortress called Jericho because he believed obeyed the Lord. A prostitute named Rahab came to faith in God and was spared from death when Jericho fell, because she believed in Him. Do you remember the exploits made possible by the faith of judges like Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah?

Do you remember the beautiful songs which speak of David's faith, now included in the Book of Psalms in our Bible? Do you remember the ministry of that great prophet/judge we call by the name Samuel? Do you remember the ministry of God's prophets who often stood alone against popular opinion and sometimes suffered martyrdom because they believed and obeyed God? Men and women of God have by faith "*subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again*" (Hebrews 11: 33-35). That is the power and product of faith.

No wonder we sing,

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His word;

Just to rest upon His promise; Just to know thus saith the Lord.

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him! How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!

Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more!

Faith is essential

Why is faith so important? Hebrews 11:6 replies, "*Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently see him.*" Faith is essential because apart from faith no one can ever please God.

Think about that! The opposite of living with faith in God is to live with faith in man - yourself or some other person. How tragic that is. Psalm 118:8 reads, "*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.*"

Here is how the prophet Jeremiah recorded God's words on the subject, "*Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall habit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, and her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit*" (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

Which would you prefer to characterize your life? Would you like to be as a shrub struggling to hold on to life in the barren desert, or like the great tree with plenty of sustenance by the flowing streams of water? Your life is one way or the other, in a spiritual sense, depending upon whether you have faith in God. Therefore, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart*" (Proverbs 3:5).

FAITH AND CREATION

"*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*" (Hebrews 11:3). That text relates our faith in God to the origin of all things and is the basis of our Christian understanding of creation.

"Men have speculated all through the centuries as to the origin of the universe, and have questioned whether

matter is eternal, or whether it was directly created by God. But apart from revelation, no man can speak with certainty in regard to these things...Reverent, God-fearing men of science have always recognized the necessity of this divine revelation as to the origin of matter, and have had no difficulty with the sublime narrative of Genesis 1. It is only unbelief and willful rejection of the testimony of God that makes men stumble at and pervert so wondrous an unfolding of the beginnings of the created heavens and earth. Faith bows in subjection to the witness God has given

and glorifies Him for such a marvelous unfolding of the divine wisdom...No man who is not subject to the Holy Spirit knows anything whatever about the beginnings of the material universe, and creatures living in it. But to faith all is plain. The simplest Christian with his Bible before him would say, 'By faith we understand'." (H. A. Ironside. *Hebrews, James, Peter, Loizeaux*, 1947, pages 131-133).

By faith we understand the origin, duration, change and destiny of the whole material universe. What does faith teach us about the creation? I mention five things which are evident concerning the creation to the person who trust God.

Faith accepts the fact of creation

By faith we accept the fact of creation. We read in Holy Scriptures, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). Knowing the wisdom, power and purpose of God, we can accept that statement without hesitation. By wisdom He made the heavens (Psalm 136:5) so that "*all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*" (John 1:3).

Colossians 1:16, 17 says it best, "*By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*"

Those who know our Lord best testify, *Thou, Lore, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands*" (Hebrews 1:10). "*Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*" (Revelation 4:11).

It is no problem to us to say "God is the Creator of all that exists." By faith we understand it to be so.

Faith acknowledges the order of creation

By faith we accept the order of creation. Genesis 1 recounts the creative acts of God over a period of six days. On the first day He created light, air and water on the second, dry land and vegetation on the third, and light-giving bodies (sun, moon, stars) on the fourth day, air and sea creatures on the fifth and animals and men on the sixth day.

Here is an interesting exercise for you. Take a pencil and number one, two three on the left side of a page. Number four, five, six in the middle of the page on the same lines as each of the three preceding numerals. Notice how the first three match the second three acts of creation.

Day one, God created light. Day four, he created light-giving bodies.

Day two, God created air and water. Day five, He created the creatures which fly in the air and swim in the water.

Day three, God created dry land and grass. Day six, He created man and animals who live on the land and eat the herbs.

That is the kind of orderly, wise and powerful God He is. Knowing the order of creation, it is not difficult for us to say, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1).

Faith recognizes the persons of creation

By faith we recognize the persons of creations. Each person of the triune God-Father, Son and Spirit - were involved in the creative act. The Father is called "*God*" in Genesis 1:1, "*him that liveth for ever and ever*" in

Revelation 10:6, and in each instance we are instructed to “*Worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters*” (Revelation 14:7). Isaiah 42:5 calls Him, “*God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.*” Yes, God the Father was active in creation.

God the Son was the direct agent of creation. It is of Jesus the statement is made, “*all things were made by him*” (John 1:3). God has “*created all things by Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 3:9). “*To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him*” (I Corinthians 8:6). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was active in creation.

God the Holy Spirit effected creation. Psalm 104:30 says of God, “*Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created.*” The Holy Spirit of God, third person of Holy Trinity, was active in creation.

When we say God created all things, we mean God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were each involved in the origin of all things.

Faith understands the purpose of creation

By faith we understand the purpose of creation. Why does the universe exist? What is the goal toward which all things are moving? For what purpose is there human life on the earth? By faith, we have the answer.

Revelation 4:11 reads, “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*” For what purpose does the creation exist? For the pleasure of God! That is why “*the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork*” (psalm 19:1). They exist for the purpose of showing forth God. So well is He manifest in creation that “*the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*” (Romans 1:20). Creation exists for the purpose of revealing God and glorifying Him. What a worthy goal.

Faith recognizes the goal of creation

By faith we recognize the goal of creation. All creation is moving toward a wonderful climax. “*The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up...Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*” (II Peter 3:10, 13). That new creation is described in Revelation 21, 22 under the pictures of a glorious city, a spectacular temple and a lovely garden. All that is necessary to human happiness and God’s glory is there. The original creation was designed to consummate its existence in the wonderful new creation, to the blessing of mankind and to the glory of God.

FAITH AND WORSHIP

“*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh*” (Hebrews 11:4).

That text testifies eloquently of the validity and importance of faith in the act of worship. “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe...*” (Hebrews 11:6).

Background of text

Consider the historical background of Hebrews 11:4. You can read it in Genesis 4:1-7 in these words, “*And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of the sheep, but Cain was a tiller*

of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if though doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

Think of what is suggested in those verses. (1) Man has a need to worship. It seems to be written into his very nature. In that second generation of human history, you find men coming to worship God. (2) Sacrifice is required in worship. They knew nothing about the rituals of religion unless God had shown it to them. So in the first recorded worship service in human history the worshippers were offering sacrifices and love-gifts to God. (3) More than ritual is involved in worship. The two brothers came at the same time, to the same place and practiced the same ritual of sacrifice. But God accepted the one and rejected the other. Why? Because God demands more than the right performance of ritual when we come to Him. What was the difference in Cain's offering and Abel's offering, so that the former was rejected and the latter received of God? That leads us to the key for an understanding of that event.

Requirement for faith

Consider the requirement for Faith. The two brothers offered different types of offerings. Cain offered a cereal (grain) offering. He brought "*of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD*" (verse 3). There was nothing wrong with that offering. Generations later the Lord gave specific instruction about how to present such a grain offering to Him. God approved and accepted such an offering. I do not think the thing offered was, in itself the problem.

Abel offered to God "*The firstlings of his flock and of the fat (best) thereof*" (verse 4). Abel's offering may have been more closely related to God's first sacrifice of two animals to make leather garments for Adam and Eve as they left the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:21). But there was more involved than the thing offered.

Hebrews 11:4 gives us the key: "*By **FAITH** Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.*" Did you catch the difference between the two? Abel had FAITH and Cain did not.

It may have been faith which caused Abel to offer a blood offering, and the lack of faith which caused Cain to offer a grain offering. But it was faith that made the difference.

Suppose Cain had offered a blood sacrifice, as did Abel. Would God have accepted it? Not in the state of Cain heart. God will accept no act of worship which is not performed in faith. "*Without faith it is impossible to please him*" (Hebrews 11:6). God is not so concerned with correct ritual as with a believing heart. Cain may have offered his grain offering in disbelief that it made any difference. He may have presented his offering in disgust that he had to "waste" his valuable grain by burning it as a sacrifice to God. Either sin was enough to bring rejection of his offering and make his very act of worship a sin.

Remember this incident when you go to worship. God is not so concerned that you show up at the right place at the right time. He is not so concerned whether you bow when a prayer is said or sing correctly as a song is sung. He looks on the heart. He looks for faith there. "*For whatsoever is not of faith is sin*" (Romans 14:23).

Blessings of faith

Consider the blessings of faith. I see three great blessing which attended the faith of Abel.

(1) He was accepted of God. To say, *the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering*" (Genesis 4:4) means God accepted Abel and his offering. And what a blessing that is! Would you like to have assurance that God accepts you in peace? Then come to Him in faith. "*Without faith it is impossible to please him*"

(Hebrews 11:6), but He receives with joy the one who comes trustingly to Him.

(2) He experienced what it means to be righteous by grace through faith. Hebrews 11:4 says of Abel's faith-offering, *"By which he obtained witness that he was righteous."* Do you suppose Abel experienced what Abraham experienced centuries later? Genesis 15:6 says of Abraham, *"He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."* Abraham was justified by faith when he believed in God. Abel had God's witness that he was righteous when he moved in faith and offered to God the blood offering. You and I are made righteous before God when we trust Him.

(3) He gave a witness of faith to his posterity. Hebrews 11:4 says of Abel's act of faith, *"By it he being dead yet speaketh."* His faith bore a witness before God and still bears a witness before men. That is why you and I are making a study of it now. If you want to leave a blessing to your posterity, by a man or woman of humble faith in God. You will be declared personally righteous before God and remembered with honor before men.

Need of faith today

Consider the need of faith today. God has not changed, so His requirements have not changed. As in ancient times, so today, *"Without faith it is impossible to please him"* (Hebrews 11:6).

The necessity of faith is indicated in a statement recorded four times in the Bible: Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38. The statement is, *"The just shall live by faith."* Habakkuk calls for us to live by faith in social turmoil and international distress. Romans 1:17 calls us to live by faith when we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with unbelievers. Galatians 3:11 calls us to live by faith when we trust God to save us. Hebrews 10:38 calls us to live by faith as we wait for the return of Jesus Christ. It is faith first, faith last and faith all the way in between. *"For we walk by faith, not by sight"* (II Corinthians 5:7).

There is a blessing to living by faith today. Let *"the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost"* (Romans 15:13). Begin each day with God. Remind yourself of the presence of God all through the day. End the day with God. Trust God to act like God in your own life. And you will be filled with faith and joy.

FAITH AND DEATH

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).

That text reminds me of two men who were discussing religion. One said he thought one should have a religion he could live by. The other said he thought one should have a religion he could die by. And I think both were right. A true religious faith is one you can live by and die by in full security and assurance.

Enoch is a grand example of a faith in God by which one lives with the testimony that he pleased God. Enoch is also a grand example of a faith in God by which one can come to death with full assurance and step through its portals in peace.

Consider the historical background of Hebrews 11:5. You may read of it in Genesis 5:21-24 in these words: *"Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah; and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters; and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."*

Enoch lived in those significant centuries which came just before the universal flood that destroyed the human race in Noah's day. He was the seventh generation of the human race. He lived approximately 900 years after the original creation of Adam and Eve (892 years according to the chronology of Genesis).

The days in which Enoch lived were trying days. He named his first-born son Methuselah, a name that means

“when he dies, it will come.” Sure enough, Methuselah lived right up to the time of the flood. When he died, God sent the judgment of water upon the human race because of its sin. Those were the days in which Enoch lived, when “*God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5). And in those wicked, rebellious, sinful days “*Enoch walked with God*” (Genesis 5:24).

Consider the example of faith. Enoch stands as an example to each of us who wish to walk with God by faith today. Consider these qualities of faith which he exhibits for our learning.

Practical faith

Faith is practical. The Bible says, “*Enoch walked with God.*” Notice the word “walk.” We use it commonly to mean to move about on foot at a moderate pace. That is not the meaning of the word as it is used here. “Walk” in Genesis 5:24 means to follow a certain course of life; to conduct one’s self in a certain way; to follow a general method of behavior. To say that “Enoch walked with God” means that he lived in fellowship with God. He conducted his lifestyle in a manner pleasing to God. He showed himself to be in fellowship with God. Think how practical that is. One can “walk with God” by right relationships with his family and his business associates. He can “walk with God” by right motives and ambitions in life. He can “walk with God” by purity of thought and action.

You can “walk with God.” And that is shouting ground! Faith is not something related to a never-never world of religious philosophy. It is real and practical and profitable in the present world in which we live. I encourage you to seek to walk more personally with God every day.

Personal faith

Faith is personal. Notice the personal names in the statement, “*ENOCH walked with GOD.*” Think about that!

Here is a man, an ordinary mortal man, who walked with God. Unbelievable, but true! Why would God care to walk with a mortal when there are multitudes of immortal angels who are so much greater in glory than we humans?

God walks with a man because He loves each of us that much. He made us in His own image and likeness. When we fell into sin by the act of our first parents, Adam and Eve, God resolved to redeem us to Himself. He gave Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, to be our Savior. And Jesus, in turn, gave Himself to death on the cross for our salvation. Those who respond with faith in God will find God ready and anxious to share their lives in personal and daily fellowship. So the Scriptures reads, “*By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death...for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God*” (Hebrews 11:5).

God does not play favorites among men based on their generation, race, nationality or culture. As He walked with Enoch in generations past, so He will walk with you if you are a person of faith.

Powerful faith

Faith is powerful. It enables one to walk with God when other people are rejecting Him. It enables one to walk with God in the worst of times.

Enoch lived 669 years before the flood of Noah’s day, according to the dating in Genesis 5. I remind you that that was a time of increasing wickedness. It would conclude when “*the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5). But even then, it was possible to walk by faith in God.

How can one have faith when all other people doubt and deny? Remember our definition of faith. It is absolute assurance and firm conviction of the reality of things the natural eye has never seen. If one is positive concerning the unseen realities of God, he can trust if no other person does.

Perennial faith

Faith is perennial. It is not like a plant that springs up and dies away. It continues to live and grow more dynamic year by year.

Look at the example of Enoch. He was walking with God before his son Methuselah was born. Then the Bible reports, *“Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years”* (Genesis 5:22). Here is a man who faith remained constant for three centuries. Why should we think it strange or difficult if one trusts God for sixty or eighty years in our lifetime? Real faith never dies.

Pleasing faith

Faith is pleasant. *“For before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God”* (Hebrews 11:5). Who bore the testimony to Enoch? God did! He had the witness of the Holy Spirit in his heart that he was pleasing to God. How it must have encouraged his heart and strengthened his faith.

That same testimony is borne to the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit. Do you experience it? It is a quiet assurance, unspoken and yet positively known, that God’s blessed “well done” is upon our life.

Profitable faith

Faith is profitable. *“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death”* (Hebrews 11:5). Only one other man in human history experience a physical translation to heaven without experiencing death; his name was Elijah (II Kings 2).

God is not translating people away from physical death today. But He is delivering believers from spiritual death. Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die”* (John 11:25, 26). That is why the Christian can face physical death without fear. He knows beyond the doorway of death there is fullness of life beyond measure.

FAITH AND GOD

“Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

That verse of Holy Scripture is a key to understanding the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This chapter, often called “the faith chapter of the Bible,” gives illustration after illustration of the effect of faith in the lives of men and women in ancient times. We might be prone to ask, “Faith was effective for them, but what difference does it make today?” Hebrews 11:6 replies, “Apart from faith it is impossible to truly please God; for no one comes into God’s presence until he has come to the settled conviction that God exists, and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him by revealing Himself to them.”

I call your attention to four principles of faith suggested in this verse. (1) Faith is essential to please God. (2) Faith is based on the reality of God. (3) Faith is confident of the grace of God. (4) Faith recognizes the requirements of God. Think of these one by one.

Faith is essential to please God

Without faith no one can please God. There can be no question about that. God has said as clearly as human language can express it, *“Without faith it is impossible to please him.”* That word “impossible” means it is not capable of being done by any person, in any time or place, under any circumstance. We show the intensity of the word by saying it is “an absolute impossibility.” Kenneth Taylor’s paraphrase of that clause is, “You can never please God without faith.”

That truth is well attested in other passages of Holy Scriptures. Romans 14:23 reads, *“Whatsoever is not of*

faith is sin.” Where faith is absent, sin is always present. So the person who comes to God without faith comes to Him with increasing sin. Would God accept such a person? The Bible gives a resounding “NO!” in reply.

Two blind men came to Jesus with the cry, *“Son of David, have mercy on us.”* Jesus asked, *“Believe ye that I am able to do this?”* They replied, *“Yea, Lord.”* He touched their eyes and said, *“According to your faith be it unto you.”* Immediately they were able to see (Matthew 9:27-30). Notice their healing was “according to” their faith. They believed, so they saw. If they had not believed, there would have been no miracle and they would have remained blind. Remember, *“Without faith it is impossible to please him.”*

In the ninth chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, he reports how God offered Him imputed righteousness to people in ancient Israel. But though they followed their system of laws, they never obtained righteousness.

Why? Paul answers, *“Because they sought it not by faith”* (Romans 9:32).

Abraham was declared righteous when he believed in the Lord (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-25). Habakkuk announced, *“The just shall live by faith”* (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews warned that those who do not believe can never enter into the rest God has for His people (Hebrews 4:1-3).

“But without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith is based on the reality of God

The truth of the reality of God is the basis of faith. *“He that cometh to God must believe that he is.”* Yes, anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists, that there is a God. That is the bare essential without which there is no faith.

The Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God. It begins with the majestic statement, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). the rest of the Bible gives its attention to revealing the nature and work of the God who is.

Psalms 14:1 warns, *“The fool have said in his heart, There is no God.”* Look at the verse carefully and you will discover that the verb “there is” is not in the Hebrew text. It was supplied in English to clarify the meaning. So the fool’s rejection of God might be either of two attitudes. (1) The fool might say, “God does not exist.” or (2) he might say, “There is no God for me. If there is a God I do not need to be concerned about him.” Either way, one is a fool and has cut himself off from God. *“For he that cometh to God must believe that he is.”*

The God who is has revealed Himself so we could know Him. (1) He has revealed Himself through nature.

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (Romans 1:20). (2) He has revealed Himself through conscience, *“because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it unto them”* (Romans 1:19).

“Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness” (Romans 2:15). (3) He has revealed Himself through the Bible. Jesus said, *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39). The Bible is the “more sure word of prophecy” by which we can know the truth of God (II Peter 1:19). (4) He has revealed Himself in

His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son”* (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). You can know God personally today, if you will exercise personal faith. *“For he that cometh to God must believe that he is.”*

Faith is confidence of the grace of God

Faith is not afraid to rely on God’s grace. Some people fear to come to God lest He fall upon them in judgment and punish them for their sins. Not so. Faith has this assurance. *“He is a rewarder of them that diligently*

seek him.”

He is “a rewarder.” What does that mean? It means the person who comes to God will be profited by meeting Him. God meets with the person of faith, comforts him, assures him, supplies him. *“Behold, the Lord God will come...his reward is with him”* (Isaiah 40:10). *“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength...They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint”* (Isaiah 40:29, 31). Read Psalm 91 and rejoice in the blessings God promises to those who *“abide under the shadow of the Almighty”* (verse 1). Come to God now with full assurance that He blesses those who seek Him.

Faith recognizes the requirements of God

With whom does God meet? Whom does He reward? It is the ones *“that diligently seek him”* (Hebrews 11:6), those who honor His requirements. God’s requirement is that we “seek him” in faith. Psalm 34:4 testifies, *“I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”* Psalm 119:2 pronounces a blessing on those who *“seek him with the whole heart.”* Jeremiah 29:13, 14, records God’s promise. *“Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord.”* Isaiah 55:6-7 advises, *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near...and he will have mercy...he will abundantly pardon.*” On the basis of Holy Scriptures, come to God now.

FAITH AND JUDGMENT

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

Someone may ask, “Do you really believe that there was a flood of waters which covered the whole earth and destroyed the human race except for one man, his three sons, and the wife of each of them? Do you believe that flood came as the judgment of God upon sin?” My reply is a positive, “Yes I believe it.”

I believe it because of the testimony of geology. There is abundant evidence all over the world of a tremendous upheaval of the earth’s surface-fossils of sea creatures are found in tops of mountains and silts from great floods is settled in the valleys. There is the testimony of Scripture which reports it as a true event and not as a parable or allegory. There is the testimony of Jesus Christ who spoke of it as real and related the events then with the events just before His return to earth. I believe the record of the flood because I believe God who reported it.

Consider the historical background of Hebrews 11:7. The condition of mankind was pitiable. The mixture of God-fearers with non-believers produced a sinful culture which was without redemption. God resolved that when *“every imagination of the thoughts of (man’s) heart was only evil continually,”* He would destroy the human race as judgment on sin (Genesis 6:5, 7). It would be pure justice for judgment to fall.

But there was an exception to the rest of that generation. *“Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD...And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation”* (Genesis 6:8; 7:11).

Under the direction of God, Noah prepared a great ship in which he, his family, and representatives of the animal creation would survive the flood of judgment. And what a ship it was! It was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. (Not until the twentieth century had a ship been built to equal its size.) It was sufficient to house eight humans and scores of animals for one year, including a year’s supply of food and water.

God’s purpose was *“to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth”* (Genesis 7:3). So Noah took one

pair of unclean animals into the ark, but three pairs plus one extra of clean animals. He took in birds and all the earth creatures by pairs, male and female, as God had commanded.

The flood came. Men and animals perished in the waters. But the ark rose up upon the face of the waters so Noah and the passengers in his ship were spared from death.

What an example of faith! No wonder Noah is included in God's "Hall of Fame" of those who believe. Here are several factors which will help us to understand the necessity of faith in times of judgment.

Faith has principles to assure it in the face of judgments. Note these:

Faith is based on the word of God

Faith begins when we hear God speak. Noah was "*warned of God.*" God said to him, "*The end of all flesh is come before me....I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood...Thou shalt come into the ark...and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives...to keep them alive*" (Genesis 6:13, 14, 18, 20). The Bible reports that Noah did all that God commanded him (Genesis 6:22). Why? What reasons did he have to believe a flood of waters was going to come? The weather conditions continued as they had since Noah was a child. He saw no signs in nature that things were going to change. Yet, Noah exposed himself to misunderstanding and ridicule by building an ark to survive a flood. What was the basis of his faith? The basis of faith is the word of God. God had spoken; Noah did not doubt, deny or delay. What God has said is certain. You can stake your life on it. Noah did. Believe God's word.

Faith believes things that are unseen

Noah was "*warned of God of things not seen as yet*" (Hebrews 11:7), and he believed God. No one had ever seen it rain at that time. Water had never fallen from the sky in all of human history. "*There went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground*" (Genesis 2:6). God said water would fall from the skies in such abundance the mountains would be covered. Perhaps "scientific" people looked into the blue expanse and declared it was evident that there was no water collected there. But Noah believed it was evident that there was no water collected there. But Noah believed what he had never seen. Remember, that is the essence of faith. It makes us certain concerning realities we do not see.

Faith arouses fear

Yes, faith causes fear. Noah "*moved with fear.*" It was not that he feared God, but he feared that of which God warned him. Fear is not the enemy of faith. We are assured when we believe God's promises; we are afraid when we believe God's warnings. Fear can be a sign of faith as much as assurance can be.

Faith excites to action

"*Moved with fear,*" Noah set to work and "*prepared an ark.*" His work on that great ship was an expression of his belief of what God had warned about. What an illustration of the activity of faith. It is not static, unmoved or unmoving. Faith is full of energy. "*A man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works...But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*" (James 2:18-20). The faith that does not express itself in action is ineffective: "*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*" (James 2:26). If Noah had believed without acting, he would have perished in the flood.

Faith blesses others

"*By faith Noah...prepared an ark to the saving of his house.*" The Bible does not recognize a proxy faith by which one believes in behalf of another. But it does recognize the influence of one person's faith upon another. When Noah went into the ark, he was followed by seven people - his wife, his three sons (Shem, Ham, Japheth), and the wife of each of them. One man's faith brought salvation to seven other people. So you can

experience passing the blessing of God on to others as you live by faith in praying and witnessing about Jesus. I remember Timothy in whom a pure and unadulterated faith dwelt. But his faith was first in his grandmother, then in his mother, before it dwelt in him (II Timothy 1:5). Does your faith bring blessings to others?

Faith condemns unbelief

The faith of one condemns the unbelief of all. If Noah could believe God so could have his generation. The race perished because it did not believe. There is no excuse for unbelief of God's warnings and promises. You will have no excuse if you do not trust God, because multitudes do trust Him today.

Faith makes the believers righteous

Noah *"became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."* He was justified by faith in the same way. Abraham was so many centuries afterward: *"He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness"* (Genesis 15:6). You and I can experience the righteousness *"which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith"* (Philippians 3:9). Thank you for such a blessing we receive when we trust Jesus.

FAITH AND DELAY

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

Our study of Hebrews 11, the "faith chapter" of the Bible, has been rewarding thus far. We have seen that faith is absolute assurance and firm conviction of the reality of things the natural eye has never seen. We have seen God honoring such confidence in Him in giving us understanding of what we would not know, giving reality to the rituals of our worship, strengthening us in the time of death, giving us assurance of the grace of God and protecting us in periods of judgment. But in verses 8-10 we come to a new dimension of faith.

What do you do when God makes a promise, you believe it and act upon it, but fail to see the thing God promised come to pass? How do you trust in the face of delay? Let Abraham teach you what it means to trust in the face of unfulfilled expectations.

Faith believes God's promises are certain

Faith accepts the promise of God as certain of fulfillment. Genesis 12:1-7 reports how God called Abram out of his country and away from his relatives to go to a land which was not identified. God promised to make of Abram's descendants a great nation, to bless him and them and to make them a blessing to all the world. *"So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him"* (Genesis 12:4). Our text states, *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went"* (Hebrews 11:8). Why was he willing to go at such a cost and such a risk? God had spoken, and he was confident he could trust God to do what He promised.

That is the essence of faith. It is to be so confident that God will do as He says that we act as if God has already acted. Abraham's confidence in God was such that he was *"fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform"* (Romans 4:21). Confident that God was faithful to His word, Abraham acted with perfect assurance. Real faith is confidence in a person; religious faith is confidence in God.

Faith obeys when it does not understand

Faith is obedient even when it does not understand. Abram went out *"not knowing whither he went"*

(Hebrews 11:8). God had promised to show him a land, to lend him to a country. In complete ignorance of his destination he followed God.

Why should we hesitate to do so? God chose my first address on earth and gave me parents of whom I am justly proud and thankful. He has chosen my last address in heaven, and from John's description of it in Revelation 21, 22, it is beyond my wildest imagination in glory. Since He so excellently chose my first address and my last address, why should I hesitate to let him choose each address I will have between the first and last? We doubt and draw back in fear only because we do not trust Him. When we remember that God is a Father who loves us perfectly, we are confident to trust Him even in those areas we do not understand. Real faith casts out all fear, for it has full assurance in Him who has promised.

Faith trusts when the promise is delayed

Faith continues to trust even when the promised possession is not received. That answers the question, "What do you do when what you expect does not happen?" The answer is, "You keep on trusting and obeying God's commands."

God promised to give Abram a land inheritance for a permanent possession to his descendants. Yet, Abram wandered about as an emigrant through Palestine. He was like a man living in a foreign land. He lived in tents like a mere visitor in the very land God said would be his. What had happened to God's promise? The only land Abram ever owned in Palestine was the cave of Machpelah which he purchased from a citizen to use as a burial place (Genesis 23:1-20). He lived for approximately 88 years in Palestine and owned no more land than that. Yet God had said He would give Abram all the land, a promise which seemed to go unfulfilled. But Abram kept on believing God. You see, God's delay occurred because the time was not right for the fulfillment of that part of His promise. What would Abram have done with those thousands of square miles of land if God had given it all to him immediately? He was head of a small clan of people who could not have used the land, except in small portions to graze their flocks. God kept His promise and gave the land to them upon their exodus from Egypt, four hundred years later, when there were enough of them to need that much territory. Abram had confidence that God knew what He was doing, working according to a plan man did not understand, so he kept on trusting without demanding to see proof of God's faithfulness.

Faith does not question God

Faith does not question Him who promised. Think of it this way. Here is a husband and wife. She tells her husband she loves him and is faithful to her vow of marriage. Suppose he said, "Prove to me that you love me and are faithful." Such a request indicates he does not trust her. Love does not demand proof. Faith does not require repeated evidence. If that husband loved and trusted his wife, her assurances would delight his heart. He would live in the joy of them. He would require no proof; her words would be all the proof he needed. Apply that to one's confidence in God. The requirement of proof is a sign of a lack of faith. The insistence that God move according to our schedule is presumption and indicates that we do not trust Him implicitly.

Faith values spiritual realities

Faith values spiritual realities and holds firm to their certainty. Abraham "*looked for a city which had foundation, whose builder and maker is God*" (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham could never find such a city. His faith in God reached far beyond an earthly nation and a land inheritance. His confidence in God reached to spiritual realms. Like him, "*here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come*" (Hebrews 13:14). And one day we, with Abraham, will come to "*the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*" (Hebrews 12:22). We do not see it now, but that is no cause for concern. "*We walk by faith, not by sight*" (II Corinthians 5:7).

Let us learn a valuable lesson from this text: Delay is no sign of God's failure. Praise the Lord! It is safe to trust

God's timing in fulfillment of His promises to bless and His warnings to judge. *"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise"* (II Peter 3:8,9). His time schedule may be different from our own, but His promises will be fulfilled at the correct time. *"Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass"* (Psalm 37:5). *"They that trust in the LORD shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever"* (Psalm 125:1).

God's purposes do not change. His promises never fail. Delay does not mean He is unreliable. Trust and do not fear. Hold His hand tightly in the darkness, for He sees clearly the way. It is always safe and wise to trust Him.

FAITH AND FAMILY

"Through faith Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable" (Hebrews 11:11, 12).

Here and there God breaks into human experience in such a way as to leave us astonished. We stand in awe saying, "That was the work of God!"

Such was the case referred to in Hebrews 11:11, 12 concerning the birth of Isaac, the late-born son of Abraham and Sarah. His birth was in fulfillment of the specific promise of God to the parents. The child born was the exact sex at the very time God had said. It was concerning his then-future birth that Abram was justified by faith. *"He believed in the LORD and he counted it to him for righteousness:* (Genesis 15:6). A study of that surprising incident will encourage us to trust God for things we do not see, do not expect, and yet long to experience.

Lessons from History

History proves that it is wise to trust God concerning your family. Look at the experience of Abram and Sarai. Genesis 11:30 reports Sarai was barren; she had no child. That condition continued for 60 to 70 years or more. Abram was grieved and cried to God about it. God promised to give him a child whose descendants would be as numberless as the stars of the sky (Genesis 15:2-6).

The years passed, and no child was born to Sarai. She suggested Abram take her servant girl, named Hagar, and have a child by her. Abram did and Ishmael was born (Genesis 16:1-16) when Abram was 66 years old. But Ishmael was not the son God had promised to give Abram. He was the result of Abram trying to help God fulfill the promise, but he was not God's gift.

When Abraham was 99 years old, God promised him that at the proper time next year a son would be born to Sarah (Genesis 17:15-22) who would be the promised seed. And it happened! It really happened! (See Genesis 21). That promised son was born and given the name Isaac, which means "laughter."

No one expected God's promise to be fulfilled in such a literal way,, at such an unexpected time and in such a demonstration of power. But God is faithful.

What promises have you claimed concerning your own family? Have you seen them fulfilled as yet? Do not despair. Abraham's experience teaches us that God will do exactly what He has said. Let Him follow His own timetable in doing it

Example of Abraham

We can trust God with assurance because of His faithfulness to Abraham. Even a casual reading of the fourth chapter of The Epistle of Paul to the Romans will convince you that God's dealings with Abraham and Sarah

were intended to teach us a spiritual lesson. It says Abraham “*staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but what he had promised, he was able also to perform*” (Romans 4:20, 21). Then the chapter concludes by saying that what happened to Abraham was intended not for him only but to teach us to trust God also. “*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*” (I Corinthians 10:11). So let us accept the testimony of the sacred record of history and trust God with all our hearts.

Principles for today

There are present applications to be made of the example of faith of the ancient people of God. Let us make a list of them.

Believe only what God says. Be very careful at this point. Do not trust in what someone tells you God has said. There are many “*false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves,*” Jesus said (Matthew 7:15). The Bible warns that the serpent (the devil) who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden might cause you to be “*corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*” (II Corinthians 11:3). There are “*false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ*” (II Corinthians 11:13). They can destroy your faith if you believe something that is not true about God, for you would cease to trust Him. Beware! Believe all that God says, but only what God says. “*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*” (Isaiah 8:20). Base your faith on the clear statements of the Holy Bible and on that alone.

Believe all that God says. You can trust God who has spoken in the Bible. Consider these testimonies of people who believed all God’s promises. Joshua 21:45 reads, “*There failed not aught of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.*” Joshua 23:4 repeats, “*Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.*” I believe that testimony, don’t you? God was faithful in the days of the exodus and the conquest. Hear the reading of I Kings 8:56 when King Solomon said, “*Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised; there hath not failed one word of all his good promise.*” God was faithful during the period of the monarchy.

The prophets cry out, “*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever*” (Isaiah 40:8). The teachers testify “*Every word of God is pure*” (Proverbs 30:5). And the psalmists sing, “*The words of the LORD are pure words*” (Psalm 12:6).

That is enough, though the biblical testimony could be continued. Believe God. Believe every word God has spoken. He who has promised is faithful.

Believe what God has said even when it seems impossible. God promised to give a son to Abraham and Sarah when he was 99 years old and she was 90 years old. Surely no one would believe that possible, especially when they had been married for years and years with no child. But Abraham believed it! “*He considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief...being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform*” (Romans 4:19-21). And the long-promised child was born!

Let us remember that with God nothing is impossible (Matthew 17:20). Let us trust God to be greater than our impossibilities and perform every promise.

Believe in view of God’s ability. Our doubts come when we think in human terms. But when one is “*fully*

persuaded that, what he (God) had promised, he was able to perform” (Romans 4:21), he can have confident faith all the way.

Let God’s ability to do the unexpected and humanly impossible encourage you to trust Him. Believe concerning your children. Believe and be a blessing to others. Claim God’s promise, pray, and trust Him alone. He is able to do *“exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”* (Ephesians 3:21).

What is your need just now? Bring it to Jesus. Claim a promise He has made in Holy Scriptures and present your need upon the basis of His word. *“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him, and he shall bring*

it to pass” (Psalm 34:5).

FAITH AND GOD’S PROMISES

Hebrews 11:13-16 reads, *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, it they had been mindful of that country from which they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”*

I am reminded of a great Christian hymn whose words were written by William R. Featherston. It is entitled “My Jesus, I Love Thee.” I will take the liberty to change the word “love” to “trust” and use verse 3 of the song to introduce our study of “Faith and God’s Promise.”

“I’ll trust Thee in Life, I will trust Thee in death;

And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath;

And say when the death dew lies cold on my brow

If ever I trusted thee, my Jesus, ‘tis now.”

Trust God’s promises even to death

It would be tragic if we read of the patriarchs, *“These all died.”* But it is a shout of victory to read, *“These all died in faith”* (verse 13). Think about that.

They had received God’s promises about inheriting the land of Canaan as their permanent and sole homeland.

They lived out their whole lives through three generations (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and not one of them saw the promise fulfilled. One would have expected one or more of them to give up hope, But not so. *“These all died IN FAITH.”*

How long can faith hold on? How long can one keep on trusting in the face of delay? He can trust as long as there is life, if he is trusting the living God. Why would one cease trusting Him?

Jacob blessed his sons (including the two sons of Joseph) shortly before his death, speaking of what God would do to them and for them in fulfillment of His promise. Jacob believed. Joseph requested that his body be embalmed and carried from Egypt to Canaan when the exodus occurred. He did not see it, but he trusted God to do it as He had promised.

Trust God even when you do not see His promises fulfilled

Those early men of God received God’s promises and were persuaded of them. They rejoiced to see the fulfillment of them in the then distant future. They hailed it with delight. If the fulfillment did not come in their own lifetime, they were certain it would come in due time. So they believed and rejoiced.

The promise of Genesis 15 (to give Israel the land of Canaan for an inheritance) was fulfilled four full centuries after it was made (Exodus 3:6-8). Abraham, who had received the promises first, had been dead at least two

centuries before God moved to bring Israel into the promised land. Was God unfaithful just because He did not act in Abraham's day? Not at all.

A mother promises her child she will bake his favorite cake. Is she untrue to her promise if she waits until dinner time to serve it? Of course not. She is fulfilling her promise at the right time.

Trust God whether you see reason to trust Him or not. He is faithful.

Trust God because of who He is

Do not settle your faith on sight. Do not trust your power to trust. Do not depend on your energy in prayer. Trust God.

Trust God in view of how He has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture. Remember He is a covenant-keeping God. Consider He is a loving and redeeming God. Think of Him as a tender and compassionate God. Look to Him as a providing and protecting God. He is all of that and more. That is why it is safe to trust Him. He is faithful to the extent of keeping His covenant promises to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9). You have a firm foundation for faith when you can say, *"The LORD is on my side; I will not fear...It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man"* (Psalm 118:6, 8).

It is no problem to trust when our eyes are upon Him. But to look at self or circumstances is to invite doubt to come.

Trust God and never transfer your confidence

God said, *"In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength"* (Isaiah 30:15). We must *"hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end"* (Hebrews 3:6). *"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end"* (Hebrews 3:14). *"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward"* (Hebrews 10:35).

When some were deserting Jesus, His disciples said, *"Lord, to whom shall we go; thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God"* (John 6:68, 69). So I ask you if you do not trust the living God, whom will you trust?

Trust God in view of future blessings

The ancient patriarchs sought for a permanent home. They realized they could never find it during their lifetime here on earth. So they turned their attention to a heavenly country.

They had caught a glimpse of glory land! They were filled with a yearning to enter it. Their aspiration was for a better, a heavenly, land which was yet future to them. So they continued in faith in view of those future blessings. God saw that aspiration and responded to it with approval. He blessed them in this world because they desired fellowship with Him in the next world.

Trust God because of His personal relationship with you

God identifies Himself as one with people of faith. Those ancient patriarchs trusted Him, *"wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God"* (verse 16). He promises men and women who believe, *"I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters"* (II Corinthians 6:17, 18). Even Jesus, blessed incarnate Son of God, is not ashamed to call us His "brethren" (Hebrews 2:11). The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is our God also. We know Him personally, trust Him implicitly, and serve Him daily through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is safe to trust Him who looks upon us as His own dear children.

Let the testimony of the patriarchs encourage you to trust God. Trust Him even to death, when you do not see proof of His faithfulness, because of who He is, without wavering in your allegiance, knowing He gives blessings in the future, and rejoicing in your personal relationship with Him. Trust Him.

FAITH AND TRIALS

Hebrews 11:7-19 reads, *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”*

To appreciate the meaning of this passage, it is necessary to turn to the historical record on which it is based. That record is found in Genesis 12:22. I will recount it briefly for you.

A man name Abram lived in the city called “Ur of the Chaldees,” located in southern Mesopotamia on the banks of the Euphrates river. The city was given to idolatry. All land was thought to be owned by the moon-god Nannar. A great temple was built to him in the city. Taxes from the land were paid into the treasury of the moon-god.

God called Abram to come out of Ur, following God’s guidance to a land not then identified to him. He obeyed the call of God (Genesis 12) and moved into the land of Palestine.

God’s promise to Abram was three fold. (1) God would give him so many descendants that would form nations. (2) God would give him a land inheritance on which his descendants would live. (3) God would bless all the world through those descendants. In relation to that promise, Abram’s name was change to Abraham. Abraham *“believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness”* (Genesis 15:6).

Abraham moved into the promised land. He waited for God to give him those many descendants. But not even one child was born to Abraham and his wife Sarah. Not one! They waited and waited. Abraham was now near 100 years old and his wife Sarah was near 90 years. It seemed impossible for them to have children after so many years of marriage and no child born. Now they were past the normal age for child-bearing. Had God’s promise failed? Not at all!

When Abraham and Sarah had given up all hope, God sent a messenger saying at that time the next year Sarah would become a mother. And it happened! When Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, a child was born to them. They named him “Isaac,” which means “Laughter.” How delighted they were in their baby boy. In him all the promises of God rested and on him they placed all their hope for the future.

One day God spoke to Abraham and said, *“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of”* (Genesis 22:2).

What would Abraham do? God had spoken, so he did as God commanded. *“Abraham rose up early in the morning... and went unto the place of which God had told him”* (Genesis 22:3). He took with him two young men, wood for the burnt offering, and Isaac his son. They came to the appointed place. *“Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son”* (Genesis 22:9, 10). He was doing what God commanded and leaving the consequences to God.

Do you think it a foolish thing for Abraham to do? It was not foolish at all. Abraham knew God had promised to produce a nation of people through the descendants of Isaac. He was sure God would fulfill that promise. He knew God would not do it if Isaac were dead. So he was of such confident faith that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary, in order to fulfill that promise. That is faith! Let us look at Abraham’s experience and draw some lessons which will be helpful to us today.

Testing of faith will come

Genesis 22:1 says *“that God did tempt Abraham.”* That means God put him to the test. Hebrews 11:17 speaks of Abraham being *“tried.”* It was a challenge to his faith to obey the command to sacrifice his only son. How could God fulfill his promise to Abraham if Abraham killed the son God had given him miraculously in his

old age? It was not Abraham's place to reason the "why" or the "how" of God's work. It was his place to obey and trust God to work out the details. Abraham's faith was tested and he passed the test! How will you do in the times of testing your faith?

The Bible says, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised...*" (James 1:12).

Obedience in faith is essential

God said, "Offer your only begotten son as a burnt-offering to me." Abraham did not delay. Early the next morning he arose and departed on the journey which would bring them to the place of sacrifice. Obedience is the proof of faith.

James 2:21-24 teaches that Abraham proved by his works that he trusted God. He believed in the Lord and God accepted him as a righteous man. He was willing to offer Isaac because of his faith in God and we recognize his works justified him before men.

Explanation is not necessary for faith to act

There was no explanation given to Abraham. God had evidently given Isaac to him and Sarah as a "son of promise." All Abraham's hope for the future fulfillment of God's promises rested in Isaac. But when God said, "Offer Isaac as a burnt-offering," Abraham did not ask for explanations.

He trusted God. When you trust God, explanations are not necessary. Abraham believed God might well permit him to kill his beloved son. But he was so sure God would fulfill the promises he made concerning the lad that, if necessary, God would raise him from the dead to do it. That is faith!

Faith accepts God's promises as if they were already fulfilled

It needs no proof. God said it and that is enough. He promises nothing He is unable or unwilling to perform. Faith said, "I believe God can, I wish God would. I am so certain God will that I will act as if He already has." That is why, when we pray, we should reach out the hand to receive (Mark 11:24). God's promise is His guarantee.

Now, let us draw some practical conclusions to this biblical lesson. I suggest three truths I see; perhaps you can think of others.

- (1) We do not need to understand in order to trust. In fact, if we truly trust we will not demand explanations or proof. Just know God is faithful. We may not understand in our limited human capacity, but God knows and will perform it all.
- (2) We can trust even when God's leading seems to contradict His promises. It was so with Abraham. It can be so with you and me. God's leading is always in agreement with His promises.
- (3) We must follow in the full obedience of faith and leave the consequences with God. It is enough that we follow Him. He will take care of the results. And He will take care that the results are always to our good and His glory.

FAITH AND THE FUTURE

Hebrews 11:20 reads, "*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*"

It is such a simple statement: "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Yes, it is such a simple statement but it has profound implications when we view it as an act of faith, for the Father's plan for the future were in turmoil at the time the blessing was uttered.

The historical background

Jacob and Esau were the sons of Isaac. They were twin brothers whose mother's name was Rebekah.

The boys were in trouble with one another from the first. Even before they were born, their mother Rebekah complained at their struggles with one another in the womb. When they were born, Esau was first but Jacob was holding to his heel. That conflict continued as the lads grew into manhood.

The problem between Jacob and Esau was compounded by their parents. Esau was the favorite son of his father because he was a hunter who brought home fresh meat for him to eat. Jacob was the favorite of his mother because he stayed about the tent and helped with her work. That favoritism made the separation between the two brothers even more severe.

A time came when Esau had been on a long hunting trip. He returned without food and famished with hunger. His brother Jacob had a pot of stew cooked and ready to eat. In his gruff uncultured way, Esau said, *"Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint,"* Jacob replied, *"Sell me this day thy birthright."* Esau said, *"Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me".* So a vow was made and Jacob took away by trickery Esau's birthright (Genesis 25:29-34).

The years passed and Isaac became an old man. His eyesight failed along with the other senses of his body. One day he said to Esau, his favorite son, *"Take . . . thy weapons . . . and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savory meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die"* (Genesis 27:3-4). Esau hastened to do his father's bidding.

Rebekah heard what Isaac said to Esau. She went to Jacob and they schemed to trick the aged and sick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead of Esau. Their plan did succeed. Isaac gave this blessing to Jacob. *"God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blessed thee"* (Genesis 27:28, 29).

No sooner was the blessing given than Esau returned from his hunt with the food he had prepared for his father. Isaac was distressed to learn he had been tricked and had given to Jacob the blessing he intended for Esau. With tears Esau cried, *"Hast thou but one blessing my father? bless me, even me also, O my father"* (Genesis 27:38).

Isaac's blessing on Esau was in these words, *"Thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and be thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck"* (Genesis 27:39, 40).

how heartbroken the aged Isaac must have been to realize he had been deceived by his wife and younger son. How it must have grieved his heart to know the blessing he intended for the older son had gone to the younger instead, and that the older son (whom he favored) would receive the lesser blessing.

But in all of this, it is written in Hebrews 11: 20. *"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."* In spite of personal plans gone awry, in spite of broken heart over deception in his own family, in spite of old age and failing health which indicated death was near to him, Isaac blessed his sons with a confident expectation for the future.

The blessing which Isaac pronounced was from God 0(*"God give thee the dew of heaven"*). It included material things (*"the fatness of the earth"*). It involved social prominence (*"be lord over thy brethren"*). It embraced family dominance (*"be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee"*). It even incorporated divine protection (*"cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee"*). It was a wonderful blessing, indeed!

I would like to be under that kind of benediction. Wouldn't you?

Practical Applications

But let us think of the practical application of truths taught here. What do we see in this historical incident which will help us today? I would suggest four things.

(1) There is hope for the future. the future and expected good things to happen to his sons. Some people are pessimists. They worry constantly about what might happen in the unknown future. How much better to trust God for the tomorrow just as we trusted Him in the yesterdays and trust Him today. As one has said, “All I have seen teaches me to trust God for all I have not seen.” I believe His faithfulness in the past is the guarantee of His provision in the future. Look forward in faith. Hope is ahead.

(2) There is hope in spite of human frailties. Rebekah had her pet son Jacob. Isaac had his pet son Esau. They played the boys against one another and contributed to the animosity between them. Who would expect God to bless in a situation like that? I would! Where is God’s help needed more than in the presence of severe human problems? His strength is shown most perfectly in the presence of human weakness. Let men do their worst; God will work it out for the best. He is in control in spite of our failures.

(3) There is hope for the future because God is in control. Listen to God’s word: *“I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done. . . I will do all my pleasure. . I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it: (Isaiah 46:9-11). “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35).* A loving God is in control of all persons and things. There is hope!

(4) There is hope for you in Jesus Christ. God has come as a Man among men in the person of Jesus, His only begotten Son. You can know God personally when you meet Him in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”* He said, *“I and my Father are one.”* John the Apostle said of Jesus, *“No man hath seen God at anytime; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).*

You will have hope for the future when your hope is based on personal faith in Jesus Christ. Christ is our hope. Our hope in Him is an anchor to our souls, it is sure and steadfast, and it centers in the very presence of God in heaven. If you are fearful of the future, trust Jesus.

FAITH AND HERITAGE

Hebrews 11:21 reads, *“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”*

Historical background

The biblical account of the blessing of Joseph’s two sons begins with Joseph himself. He was the eleventh son of Jacob, the first-born of his mother Rachel, and great-grandson of the patriarch Abraham. Joseph’s mother died at the birth of her second son, named Benjamin, leaving him motherless among his brothers and sisters,

Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob because he was the first-born of Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife, and perhaps because of the death of his mother. The favoritism of the father was indicated in Joseph receiving a special garment called a “coat of many colors.” There is indication that Jacob intended to elevate Joseph above his brothers and make him the ruler of the tribe.

The other brothers were jealous of Joseph’s favored position with their father. Their jealousy caused them to plan his murder. But instead of killing Joseph, they sold him to be a slave. Thus the young Bedouin prince in Canaan became a Bedouin slave in Egypt. His brothers told his father a wild animal had killed him.

But God was with Joseph, even in his slavery in Egypt. He became steward of all the possessions of an Egyptian army officer named Potiphar. But a false accusation against him by

Potiphar’s wife caused him to be cast unjustly into prison. His sterling character showed itself even there and he became manager of the prison under the oversight of the warden. Through the influence of friends made there,

Joseph was brought from prison to stand before Pharaoh to interpret a dream.

The dream was this: Pharaoh saw seven fat cows grazing in a meadow by a river. Then seven lean cows came and ate the seven fat ones. That was the dream. What did it mean?

Joseph interpreted the dream in this way: There will be seven years of plenty when the harvest of Egypt will be great. Then there will be seven years of famine in which there will be no harvests and all the reserves from the years of plenty will be consumed. Joseph further counseled Pharaoh, "Gather the excess food during the years of plenty. Store it up to feed the people during the years of famine. Let Pharaoh choose a wise man to supervise that project." Pharaoh discussed the issue with his counselors and they concluded, "*Can we find such a one as this is* (referring to Joseph), *a man in whom the Spirit of God is?*" (Genesis 41:38). So Joseph was set in the Egyptian government with power second only to Pharaoh himself.

Joseph was given a wife named Asenath. To their union was born the two sons to whom reference is made in Hebrews 11:21.

As the famine increased in the Middle East, people from surrounding territories came to purchase food from Egypt. The supplies Joseph had gathered were enough to provide for the people of Egypt and enough left over to sell to neighboring peoples.

So it was that the sons of Jacob, the brothers of Joseph, came to Egypt to purchase food for their families in Canaan. They never expected to find Joseph in a position of power in Egypt, and were both surprised and fearful when he revealed his identity to them. Joseph told them the famine would last for years. With the permission of Pharaoh, Jacob and all the clan were moved from Canaan to Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen--a land particularly suited for the herds of cattle. And so they lived through the famine and many years afterward.

Seventeen years after moving to Egypt, Jacob became ill. Word was brought to Joseph informing him of his father's serious illness. He took his two sons, named Manasseh and Ephraim, and brought them before their grandfather.

In a solemn ceremony, Jacob adopted the two sons of Joseph saying, "*Thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine*" (Genesis 48:5). (That is why in listing the tribes of the nation of Israel we do not speak of a tribe of Joseph. We speak instead of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.) It is of those two boys that Hebrews 11:21 speaks when it reads, "*By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*"

Jacob's blessing

Let us examine that blessing as recorded in Genesis 48.

(1) It was a covenant blessing (Genesis 48:3-5). It was a three-fold blessing of a great posterity, a land inheritance, and a spiritual blessing to all the world. That covenant was given first to Abraham, confirmed to Isaac, then to Jacob, and now Jacob in including Joseph's sons in it. That is the covenant which produced Jesus, the Christ of God.

(2) It was a strange blessing (Genesis 48:13, 14, 17-19). Joseph took each of his sons by the hand and led them to stand before their grandfather to receive his blessing. He purposefully took Ephraim in his right hand and Manasseh in his left hand so that Jacob's right hand would be on Manasseh's head and his left hand on Ephraim's head. (It was thought the right hand conveyed the greater blessing than the left.) But Jacob purposefully crossed his arms as he reached forth, and placed his right hand on the head of Ephraim, not Manasseh. Thereby, indicating the younger son would be more powerful than the elder son. It was a strange blessing, indeed.

(3) It was a spiritual blessing (Genesis 48:15-22). The aged Jacob said, "*The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads . . . in thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as*

Manasseh” Genesis 48:16, 20). He recognized all true good comes from God and all blessings are His bounty to men.

(4) It was a blessing of faith (Genesis 48:21, 22). Jacob’s dying bequest to Joseph involved the covenant promise of God. God had given to Abraham and his descendants the land of Palestine, not the land of Egypt. but here were Abraham’s heirs living in Egypt as if they were to be there forever. Not so. Jacob said, *I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers*” (Genesis 48:21). He was sure the promises of God, revealed in the covenant to Abraham, would be fulfilled. And his dying words confirmed his faith.

Practical applications

There are some practical applications to truths found in this incident which apply to you and me. I mention four of them.

(1) God keeps His covenant promises. Not one will fail. Famine in Canaan may drive the heirs of the promise into Egypt, but they will not stay there. God will bring them back again and perform all His purpose in them, just as He will in us.

(2) God blesses whom He chooses. He blessed Ephraim above Manasseh. In blessing two of Joseph’s sons, He gave Joseph a double inheritance among the tribes of Israel. Let us accept God’s blessings, rejoice in them, and be content.

(3) God blesses one in order to bless others through Him. From generation to generation, God’s blessings passed until the blessing came to us in Jesus Christ. We are blessed in order that we may be a blessing.

(4) God blesses today the same as yesterday. We recognize, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father”* (James 1:17). So we look with confidence to God’s provisions for us now, and He never fails.

FAITH AND FULFILLMENT

Hebrews 11:22 reads, *“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”*

Here is one of the greatest indications of faith to be found in the Bible. It is based on the promise of God, was contrary to all appearances, looked to a happening in the unknown future, and yet was confidently expressed and preparation made for its realization.

Joseph was a Hebrew who had risen to position as prime minister in Egypt. He exercised power during the reign of the Hyksos kings (shepherd kings who invaded and ruled Egypt for many years). But the passing of the years took their toll on Joseph. He knew death was approaching when he reached the age of 110 years.

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.” (Genesis 50:24-26).

What can we find in the faith of Joseph which will encourage us to trust God? I see four things which challenge my faith today.

Faith is valid in spite of human frailty

Joseph recognized his limited time on earth when he said, *“I die.”* And the sacred record continues in the words of Psalms 90:10, *“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”*

The ancient patriarch Job testified, “ *Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble*” (Job 14:1). Hebrews 9:27 reads, “*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*” Our days here will end in death.

How can we have faith when the unknown fate of death awaits us? Our faith is not dependent upon our personal strength or longevity. It is based in God who never dies., Hebrews 1:10-12

teaches how God created all the universe in the beginning. A time will come when the universe will wear out. God will gold them up and lay them aside as a worn-out garment. Then the text says of God, “*Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*” He who outlasts the universe is the foundation of our faith.

You can trust the God who never grows old, never tires, never changes, never dies. Faith is valid in spite of human frailty.

Faith is valid because of the diving faithfulness

Joseph said, “*God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*” (Genesis 50:24). Notice two words in that verse: “surely” and “sware.” “God will SURELY visit you.” There was no doubt in Joseph’s mind that God would come to deliver them from Egypt. “He SWARE to Abraham.” God’s oath was all the proof Joseph needed. Whatever God committed Himself to do, He would do it.

The faithfulness of God is the basis of our hope. The covenant God revealed to Abraham (Genesis 15) was the covenant of grace. It is the same covenant we have in Jesus Christ. The terms of that covenant were planned of God in eternity, revealed to Abraham in the Pentateuch, foretold by Jeremiah in the prophets, confirmed by Jesus in the gospels, and explained by Paul in the epistles. It is certain and it is sure. We can stake the destiny of our souls on it. What God has promised He is certain to perform.

Faith is related to human responsibility

Genesis 50:25 reads, “*Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying . . . ye shall carry up my bones from hence.*” He trusted God to come in the exodus and he trusted his fellow Hebrews to take his body with them and bury him in the land of promise, even in Palestine.

They were faithful to that trust. Exodus 13:19 tells us, “*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him*” when the exodus began. They carried Joseph’s coffin for forty years in the wilderness. At last, “*the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought us out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem*” (Joshua 24:32).

Our faith today is in both God and the people of God. We believe the message and witness of those who have lived before us in the faith. We believe the message and witness of those who live for God today. but far more than we trust people, we trust the Lord God. “*It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man*” (Psalm 118:8). But our trust in God leads us to have faith also in His people.

Faith is expressed in personal deeds

Genesis 50:26 reads, “*So Joseph died, being hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*” The interesting thing about that statement is the fact that he was not buried. His body was “put in a coffin” but the coffin was not entombed. It was a further indication of faith.

Abraham proved his faith in his willingness to offer up Isaac, believing God would perform His promises concerning the boy even if He had to raise him from death. Rahab proved her faith by hiding the Hebrew spies in Jericho and putting the scarlet cord in her window. Joseph proved his faith by causing his body to be embalmed but not buried. It reminds us of the New Testament teaching, “*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*” (James 2:26).

Some practical applications

Let us turn to practical application of what we have seen in this historical incident. I suggest four things which you can follow in expression of your faith.

(1) Trust God to keep His promises. Do not ask “how” or “why” or “when.” Just know that He who knows the end from the beginning never makes a promise He cannot or will not keep. Trust God. Trust God only. He who promises is faithful.

(2) Trust God when fulfillment is long delayed. It was approximately four centuries between the time God made the promise of a land inheritance in Palestine to Abraham and the time it came to pass (Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6). It was almost two millennium from the time God made the promise to Abraham until the promised “Son” came in the person of Jesus Christ. But God’s promise never changed in those years. Keep on trusting even if it seems God has forgotten.

(3) Trust God and prepare to receive His promised blessing. That is a great testimony of faith. Joseph prepared for the exodus by the order to embalm and not bury his body. Let your works show your faith. If you pray for rain, carry an umbrella with you. God honors such faith.

(4) Trust God without fear of His failure to perform. *“He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee”* (Deuteronomy 31:6). *“There hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised”* (I Kings 8:56). *“What he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Romans 4:21).

Remember that to trust God is the height of wisdom. To doubt Him is the depth of foolishness. *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart . . . and he shall direct thy paths”* (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

FAITH AND FEAR

Hebrews 11:23 reads, *“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”*

To appreciate the circumstances in which faith in God was manifest, as indicated in this text, we must turn to the book of Exodus in the Old Testament and read chapters 1 and 2. Here is the historical situation we find described there.

Jacob had brought his family into Egypt to find relief from a famine which had struck the Middle East at that time. His son Joseph, whom he thought had died, was prime minister of the land. The Hebrews were settled in the land of Goshen, a land suited for shepherds and the raising of livestock. Under the protection of a benevolent government, they prospered and increased.

Exodus 1:7 reads, *“And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.”*

Then there came a change in the political administration of the country. The Hyksos kings had ruled Egypt for at least two hundred years. They were foreigners who had invaded and taken control. At last they were driven out and an Egyptian came to the throne. The new Egyptian rulers were suspicious of all foreigners, after having been ruled by foreigners for so long, and they were fearful of the Hebrews. How could they control the foreign Hebrews who lived within the borders of Egypt and limit their rapid increase in numbers?

Five introductions

Five persons come to our attention as we deal with the expression of faith referred to in Hebrews 11:23. I introduce you to them one by one.

First, I introduce to you Pharaoh (scholars are unsure what name to give the Pharaoh of the exodus), ruler of Egypt. As an absolute monarch, he had the power of life and death over all the citizens of the kingdom. It was his responsibility to control the rapid growth-rate of the Hebrew foreigners living in the land of Goshen.

He tried oppression, setting taskmasters over them: *“But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew”* (Exodus 1:12). Then he turned to infanticide, ordering the midwives who tended the

Hebrew women in childbirth to kill any boy baby but to save a girl baby alive. The midwives feared the Lord and did not obey the Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-21). Finally, Pharaoh sent out a decree to all the citizens of Egypt commanding that any Hebrew male infant born was to be cast into the river, but the girls were to be spared to live.

Second and third, I introduce Amram and Jochebed, a Hebrew husband and wife of the tribe of Levi. They feared God more than they feared the Pharaoh who sat on Egypt's throne. So when their baby son was born, they kept him alive rather than kill him as the king had decreed. They kept their baby hidden for three months, but as he became stronger and more active, they showed their faith further by committing him to the will and care of God.

Fourth, I introduce a baby with no name. If his parents gave him a name, we have no indication of it. He was named when he was three months, his name being given him by the daughter of Pharaoh and not by his parents.

Fifth, I introduce the sovereign God of the universe. He had chosen Abraham and promised to bless all the nations of the earth through his descendants. Amram and Jochebed, with the rest of the now enslaved Hebrews, were those descendants by whom God intended to bless the world. He would not permit them to be destroyed before that purpose of grace was performed. So according to His eternal purpose, He took control of the circumstances of the baby who had no name and thereby honored the faith of the infant's parents.

A baby saved

Amram and Jochebed prepared a basket of reeds and made it water-tight by applying an oil-based substance (like pitch) to it. They placed their infant son in the basket and set it in the reeds which grew in the shallow waters of the Nile river there in Egypt. Pharaoh's daughter came to the river and saw the basket. When it was opened, she discovered a Hebrew baby in it. Immediately her heart was moved. She did not drown the baby, as her father had commanded, but adopted him as her own son to be reared in the palace and the learning of the Egyptian royal family. God rewarded the faith of those faithful parents by protecting their son from death.

The baby's older sister, named Mariam, was stationed nearby to see what would happen to the child. She came to Pharaoh's daughter and offered to secure a nurse for the infant. Being so commissioned, she brought the child's own mother (Jochebed by name). Pharaoh's daughter said, "*Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.*" (Exodus 2:9). So the Hebrew mother took her own son to her home and openly reared him under the official protection of the daughter of Pharaoh.

The baby was named Moses, a Hebrew word meaning, "draw out." The Egyptian princess who adopted him named him that with the explanation, "*Because I drew him out of the water*" (Exodus 2:10). The Egyptian princess gave him a Hebrew name. Strange, isn't it?

Divine providence working in all that situation

(1) There was an act of faith in which two parents agreed to trust God to protect them and their infant son rather than to kill him as a wicked ruler ordered. There would have been no story of Moses or record of his great work unless his parents had trusted God.

(2) There was an act of sovereignty in which Pharaoh's daughter came to the Nile river at the right time, to the right place, and saw the basket with the baby inside. You see God further at work in her resolve to adopt the baby rather than to drown it as her father had ordered. Only God could place a baby born under a sentence of death into the palace and under the protection of the very man who had sentenced him. That is God at work!

(3) There is an act of providence in which the baby's own mother is chosen to be his nurse. She not only fed and bathed him, but planted in his little mind the realization that he was a Hebrew with a destiny under God.

(4) There is an act of preparation in which Moses was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was prepared by the best education in the world to be the leader, legislator, and deliverer of the Hebrews from their Egyptian bondage. It took 80 years to prepare him - 40 in Egypt and 40 in the desert-but he was prepared and

used of God for deliverance of His people to His fuller purpose.

What can you and I learn from this? We can learn to trust God. Amram and Jochebed were afraid, but they trusted God and their fear was overcome. They learned to say in the words of Psalm 118:6-8, *"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? The Lord taketh my part with them that help me. . . It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."* They learned, and they teach us, *"They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever"* (Psalms 125:1). They teach us, *"What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee"* (Psalm 56:3). They teach us it is always safe to trust God.

FAITH AND VOCATION

Hebrews 11:24-26 reads, *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."*

The background of the text

The Old Testament of this text is found in Exodus 2:11-15. There you find the record of Moses' identification with the enslaved Hebrews, even though he was a prince in Pharaoh's household. You will read there of his flight from Egypt to the land of Midian in an effort to be safe from the anger of Pharaoh. But it was the initial choice to be identified with the Hebrews slaves, rather than with their Egyptian masters, which showed the presence of his faith in God.

Moses' identification with the Hebrew slaves is quite surprising. Why would he do that? The Bible reports, *"Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds"* (Acts 7:22). If he had chosen to do so, he could have remained in the palace and lived in luxury as a prince of Egypt. Why did it come into his heart *"to visit his brethren the children of Israel"* (Acts 7:23). He had lived in the palace since he had been weaned as a child. Why did he identify the children of Israel as *"his brethren"*? Quite surprising, isn't it?

There is only one explanation for that decision. His mother planted the truth of his identity as a Hebrew in his mind when he was a very small child. She nursed him and talked to him about the God of Israel. He never got away from that godly influence. Years in the palace of a king who considered himself a god would not erase the influence of a godly mother in the earliest years of childhood.

Moses moved with a misguided zeal, however. *"He spied an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand"* (Exodus 2:11, 12). Moses was acting in behalf of the people of God. How could he help them by breaking a basic law God had set in human society? God had forbidden murder and established the death penalty for murder in words He spoke to Noah long centuries before, *"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man"* (Genesis 9:6).

Moses was zealous for the welfare of his people, but his zeal was misguided.

Even his own people misunderstood Moses' intention. Another day he went out to visit his captive countrymen and found two of them striving together. He tried to separate them and correct the wrong. One of them replied, *"Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?"* (Exodus 2:14). *"He supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not"* (Acts 7:25).

Moses knew his life was in danger. So he left the land of Egypt in haste. His death was already decreed by Pharaoh (Exodus 2:15). There was no time to waste. He must have felt God's will for his life was thwarted and

could never be realized. How surprised he would have been if he had known the full truth—that God was preparing him in the desert as He had prepared him in the palace for the life-work God had assigned him to do.

Lessons to encourage our faith

What lessons can we learn which will encourage our faith, as we review this experience in the life of Moses? Here are four truths I suggest for your consideration.

(1) Refuse to be identified with sinners, even if they are in the majority or in positions of power. There came a time in Moses' life (called "*when he had come to years*") when he could make his own decisions as an adult. At that time, he chose to make clear that he was not one of the Egyptians among whom he was reared and lived. He "*refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*" (Hebrews 11:24). That decision might have broken her heart, but it had to be made. Loyalty to God cannot be based on the opinions of relatives or friends. One must take his stand, and stand there whatever the consequences.

The New Testament statement of that principle is found in the words of II Corinthians 6:14, "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*" And again in II Corinthians 6: 17, 18, "*Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*"

The meaning is clear to you and me, isn't it?

(2) Suffer, if necessary, for righteousness' sake. Look at Moses' decision, "*Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*" (Hebrews 11:25, 26). The words "affliction" and "reproach" indicate the decision Moses made was no small matter. From a prince in the palaces of Egypt to a shepherd in the deserts of Midian—that was the course Moses' decision laid out for him.

Jesus pronounced a special blessing on those who suffer for righteousness' sake (Matthew 5:10-12). We can bring healing to others by the pains we bear if we suffer in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

(3) Have a true estimate of values. A child might trade a valuable diamond worth thousands of dollars for a bright-colored toy of almost no value. But it would be because he did not realize the relative values of the two objects.

Let the Christian look at what is called "*the recompense of the reward*" in Hebrews 11:26. Look at the ultimate, not the immediate, outcome of any action. We are not to live our lives looking for temporary satisfactions. On the other hand, faith requires us to live with a view to eternal realities we do not yet see. The reproach of Christ is of greater value than wealth, power, or fame in this world. Moses understood that and made his decision. As we understand that, and set our goals to the ultimate reward, our lives will be marked by faith and devotion to God.

The central truth

Here is the central truth we must learn from this study: Put God first in your choice and pursuit of a life-vocation. That is what Moses did. And it cost him dearly at the first. But look at what happened to him. He met God personally as no other man in history has met God (Exodus 3). He became the leader of the exodus of his nation from bondage in Egypt to freedom in Canaan. He was used of God to write five books of the Bible. He is honored as a man of God by the three largest religions of the world: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. He made the right choice and it paid him well. You make the right choice and you will benefit from it.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present you bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:11).

FAITH AND PERSEVERENCE

Hebrews 11:27 says of the patriarch Moses, *“By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible”*.

Moses leaves Egypt to go to Midian

The text seems almost a contradiction. Moses had killed an Egyptian in an effort to correct an error. Because he had identified himself with the Hebrew slaves of the Egyptians, Moses would be killed as a slave because of his deed. It mattered not that he had been reared in Pharaoh's palace. His execution was decreed.

So Moses left Egypt. Our text makes it quite clear that he did not simply leave Egypt out of fear of Pharaoh. On the contrary he left *“not fearing the wrath of the king.”* He was undaunted by the royal anger and the decree of death. He left Egypt because he trusted God. He may have been fearful about heading alone into the desert, when he was accustomed to palace life, but he was confident God would care for him. So Moses left Egypt as an act of faith in God.

Here is the record of what happened to Moses on the trek, according to the sacred record in Exodus 2:15-4:28. Moses fled from Egypt to Midian. That was a country far to the east and south of his home in Egypt. There he came into contact with a priest of Midian who had seven daughters. Moses married one of the girls and became the herdsman of the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro. He lived for forty years in that situation.

How could Moses endure all those years outside what he understood to be the will of God for his life? How could he wait for forty years on the will of God? I am sure he must have grown impatient at times and fretted because his kinsmen were still slaves in Egypt and his heart cried out to relieve them.

Moses' faith produces perseverance

There was just one thing which gave Moses peace. Our text says, *“He endured, as seeing him who is invisible”* (Hebrews 11:27). To “endure” means to persevere, to persist, to hold to one's course, to be resolute and not turn from the way. Moses was kept faithful by one thing: *“Seeing him who is invisible.”* He was strengthened in his endurance by the vision of the invisible God. Think of that! No wonder Moses waited upon the Lord.

Observe that the verb “seeing” in our text is a present tense verb. It indicates continuing action. Moses persisted “as one who was constantly seeing Him who can't be seen” (Beck). It was as if he was actually seeing the invisible God. Think about that!

But remember that is the very essence of faith. The New English Bible translates Hebrew 11:1, “And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we cannot see.” Faith is confident assurance and the title deed to what we hope for. It is the proof of things we do not see and the conviction of their reality. Faith perceives as real what the senses cannot apprehend.

Moses' preparation for his work

Moses may or may not have known those days in the wilderness were a preparation for his future ministry. But God knew. Moses had to learn how to live in the desert. He had to know how to find pasture for the livestock. He had to learn how to find water for man and animals. He would be responsible for leading three million people, plus much cattle, through some of the very desert he was now covering. He must have “on the job experience” before that task was attempted. So God trained him for forty years before He let Moses return to Egypt to lead forth the Hebrews.

In the meanwhile, Moses waited. And waiting may have been the hardest thing to do. He must have remembered his vain effort to relieve the Hebrews which had resulted in his killing the Egyptian and being a man personally sentenced to death. He must have realized how wrong that act was. The Hebrews could never be delivered in such a way. Only God could bring them together and lead them out of the land of their suffering. As Moses thought along that line, he waited for God to act.

While he waited, he was busy. He lived in the desert. He watched the flocks of his father-in-law. He learned how to survive there, how to protect and provide for animals there. He meditated much about God and the ways of God. God was preparing His chosen man, only Moses was not fully aware of it.

While Moses waited, the suffering in Egypt continued. The Bible reports, *“The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. . . And God remembered his covenant with Abraham”* (Exodus 2:23, 24). Even the sufferings the people endured had a purpose. It was not that God was heartless to let them be abused. He permitted them to suffer in order to make them ready to leave the land of Goshen and journey to the land of Canaan.

God’s time finally arrives

Things were about ready for the great exodus. (1) God had his leader prepared. Moses had learned he could not do the work of God. He was skilled in survival in the desert. He was ready to meet God. (2) God had the nation prepared. They had suffered enough that even a travel through the desert was preferable to remaining under bondage in Egypt. They were ready to leave. (3) God was ready in His divine purpose. It was the fullness of time and the exodus was about to take place.

There is a world of grace in the words, *“God remembered his covenant with Abraham.”* That was the covenant of blessing which would come into all the world by Abraham and his descendants. It was the covenant which provides salvation through Jesus Christ. God has never forgotten that covenant. It is the covenant you enter through faith in Jesus today. So one day on Mt. Horeb, Moses met with the Lord. It was all unexpected on Moses’ part. He saw a bush afire, yet it was not consumed. He turned aside to see and God spoke to him out of the flame of the bush. There Moses received his commission to return to Egypt as the deliverer of his people.

Up to that point, Moses lived as if he were seeing Him who is invisible. After that time, Moses could live knowing he had talked with Him who is unseen. He had faith before meeting God, but greater faith after meeting God.

The lessons from this study

What can you and I glean for our spiritual benefits from this study? I suggest we learn to wait of God. He stretches our faith by moving slowly in performing His purposes. But it is safe to wait confidently on Him. The Bible teaches the testing of faith produces patience which leads on to maturity (James 1:3, 4). Learn to wait on God. The promises of God are inherited through faith and patience (Hebrew 6:12).

Jesus gave us this principle: *“In your patience possess ye your souls”* (Luke 21:19). Standing firm on spiritual realities is the key to a full and joyful life. Persevere through whatever trials come. *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations”* (James 1:2). *“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold. . . might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”* (I Peter 1:7).

Do not give up hope when the going gets tough. Keep your confidence in God even if you do not understand all He is doing. Wait on God’s time. And He will reward your faith which causes you to persevere.

FAITH AND PROTECTION

Hebrews 11:28 reads, *Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”*

Reference is to the faith of Moses during those fearful days of the death of the first-born of all the land of Egypt. We read the historical record in the book of Exodus, chapters 6-12. I will review it for you before we make application of the truths to us today.

Reviewing the historical record

The people of Israel moved from Canaan to Egypt when there were only 70 of them. They settled in the land of Goshen in the northern delta of the Nile river. After four centuries, they had increased to more than three million persons.

The Egyptians became suspicious and fearful of so many foreigners living in their country. They agreed it was necessary to put them under strict control lest an invading army find them willing to cooperate against the motherland. So the Egyptians put the Hebrews under a yoke of abject slavery. The Bible says, "*They made their lives bitter. . . all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with vigor*" (Exodus 1:14).

The enslaved people cried out to God. He acknowledged their burdens and resolved to deliver them as He had promised before to do. Now God was ready to select the man He would use to bring the nation from their bondage in Egypt to their inheritance in Canaan. The man He selected was Moses.

Moses had been reared as a prince in Egypt. But he had fallen into disfavor with Pharaoh and had to flee for his life from the country. In the land of Midian, he met a priest of God named Jethro and married one of Jethro's daughters. While keeping his father-in-law's flocks in the desert, Moses had a vision of God. From a bush which burned but was not consumed by the flame, God appeared to Moses and commissioned him to return to Egypt and lead the Hebrews out.

Egypt was a land filled with idolatry at that time. They worshipped many gods. We know the names of many of their gods: Osiris, Isis, Horus, Set, Ra, Nut, Geb, Tefnut, and the list could continue. Standing above all their idol gods was the Lord God, unknown to the ancient Egyptians. God resolved to do two things in the events of the exodus: (1) to deliver the Hebrews from their bondage, and (2) to be exalted above all the gods of Egypt as the sovereign God of all the world.

God moved against Egypt, showing His power and majesty, by bringing ten judgments upon the nation. Each judgment was more severe than the one before, because Pharaoh hardened his heart, and each judgment was directed against one of the gods worshipped by the Egyptians.

God's judgment upon Egypt

The ten plagues included the water turning to blood, frogs covering the land, lice everywhere, swarms of flies, disease on the cattle, boils on men, a plague of locusts, three days of darkness, and the death of the first-born. It is the death of the first-born to which reference is made in Hebrews 11:28. God announced that coming plague fourteen days before it fell. The first-born of every human and beast would die in Egypt the night of the fourteenth day of that month. Only those would escape who believed God's warning and made the preparation He decreed.

The Passover lamb

On the tenth day of the month, each family was to select a lamb. It was to be kept four days to determine that it was healthy and whole. It was to be killed on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the month. Its flesh was to be roasted in fire and eaten that night. Its blood was to be put on each side and across the top of the door of each believing household in Egypt. God promised that when He passed through the land in the judgment of death, He would pass over the house where He saw blood on the door posts.

It happened! "*At midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the first-born of cattle*" (Exodus 12:29). The result was "*There was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead*" (Exodus 12:30). God's judgment had fallen.

What about Moses and the Hebrews? They believed God. Therefore they killed the sacrifice and put the blood by the doors. They were spared from death. Not one person died in a house where the blood had been applied.

Jesus is our Passover lamb

There is an important lesson here for us to learn today. Much teaching in our Christian New Testament is based on this “Passover” occasion in those ancient times.

Jesus is called “*the lamb of God*” in the New Testament (John 1:29, I Peter 1:18-21). He is referred to as “*Christ, our Passover. . . sacrificed for us*” (I Corinthians 5:7). We are said to be redeemed from the death sin brings “*with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (I Peter 1:19). It is evident the meaning of those statements. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the picture shown in the Passover lamb of the days of the exodus.

Jesus was chosen, as was the Passover lamb. He was tried to test His purity. He died to avert judgment. Protection was found for those under His blood, but judgment of death fell upon those who refused the protection of the blood. An understanding of the passover in Exodus 12 helps us appreciate the more the work of Jesus on our behalf.

Four great evidences

As our “passover lamb,” Jesus brings four great evidences of protection to us. First, Jesus protects us from death. He said, “*I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*” (John 11:25, 26). Second, Jesus protects us from judgment. He said, “*He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life*” (John 5:24). Third, Jesus protects us from falling. He is “*able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24). Fourth, Jesus protects you from perishing. He says of those who believe in Him, “*I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish*” (John 10:28).

Can you, like Moses, trust God to keep you safe when death is all about you? Can you trust Him to preserve you when judgment falls? You can if you believe what He has said about Jesus Christ. Moses and the people of Israel believed God, made the required preparation of sprinkling the blood, and were spared. You and all true Christians believe God, make the required preparation by repentance and faith, and are spared. That is the essence of the Christian gospel.

Turn all confidence from every person and thing. Set all your hope on Jesus today. Trust Him alone and you will discover He alone is enough.

FAITH AND DELIVERANCE

Hebrews 11:29 refers to Israel’s experience of one of the greatest miracles recorded in Old Testament scriptures, saying, “*By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.*” The historical incident is recorded in Exodus 14, 15.

The historical record of deliverance

Moses was leading the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt to their promised freedom in Canaan. The shortest distance would have been to travel northeast by way of the Gaza strip directly into their homeland. But Canaan was under the military control of Egypt at that time. To go that route would have meant to face the powerful Philistine armies in Gaza and then to face the Egyptian armies in Canaan. Something must be done to bypass the Philistines and to break the military power of Egypt that the newly-freed Hebrew slaves might enter their promised land. God solved the problem at the Red Sea.

Instead of going northeast from Egypt, God sent the Hebrews southeast - not toward Canaan but toward the desert mountains of Sinai. Their line of march was directed by a pillar (Exodus 13:21) so there was no mistaking

the right direction for them to take. The problem was their journey brought them to the shores of the Red Sea and they had no way to cross.

Pharaoh changed his mind about releasing the Hebrew slaves. After his first-born son had died under the judgment of the Lord God, he had insisted they get out of the land. But upon further reflection, he ordered his armies to pursue the Hebrews and turn them back to where they had lived and back to their slavery. The Bible reports, *"The Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army"* (Exodus 14:9). The primary military strength of the nation was rallied against the Hebrews. The army came upon the people camping beside the Red Sea.

The Hebrews were terrified when they saw the Egyptian army marching after them. They cried out in fear to the Lord. They came before Moses with the accusation that he had failed in his leadership and had brought them to the desert to die by the weapons of the armies of Pharaoh. They complained, *"It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness"* (Exodus 14:12).

Moses' faith

The faith of Moses shined forth brightly in the face of the fears and doubts of the rest of the people. He said, *Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today. . . The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace"* (Exodus 14:13, 14). What an expression of faith! He not only believed God was able to deliver them; he believed God would do it that very day. The expression of his faith was his words to the people and his turning to God to ask what to do under this situation.

God's response to Moses' faith

God's response to Moses' faith was clear, even if it was almost unbelievable. *"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: but lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea"* (Exodus 14: 15, 16). No one had ever heard of such a thing happening, in all of human history. Why did Moses believe it would happen? He believed because he trusted the Lord God to be faithful to His word. Again, Moses expressed his faith by his action. It was his place to lift up his rod across the sea. That was all. The rest was up to God. Moses stretched out his hand across the Red Sea, with the rod of God lifted high as a sign of his dependence on God. *"And the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all they night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided"* (Exodus 14:21). What a miracle! There was a wall of water on the right hand, a wall of water on the left hand, and dry ground in the bed of the sea between the two. Moses teaches us it is always safe to trust God. *"The children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground"* (Exodus 14:22).

The Egyptian army destroyed

Light of day revealed to the Egyptian military how the Hebrew slaves were escaping between the walls of water. All Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen followed the course into the midst of the sea. Moses lifted up his hand over the Red Sea from the opposite bank where he had lifted up his hands before, and the Lord caused the water to return to its place. The Egyptian army was drowned and the military strength of Egypt was crushed; *"There remained not so much as one of them"* (Exodus 14:28).

How the Hebrews rejoiced! *"The people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses"* (Exodus 14:31). They joined in a great song of triumph over their oppressor and a great song of praise to God (Exodus 15:1-21). The theme of the song was, *"Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously"* (Exodus 15:1, 21). And so He had!

"By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned" (Hebrews 11:29).

Practical applications for today

What application can we make to our lives today in view of that historical incident? What does it teach us about faith?

- (1) Trust God to lead in the right way. Their journey seemed to take them away from Canaan, not toward it. But God's way was right, for there the military strength of Egypt was broken and the conquest of Canaan was made possible for them. God knows the way you take, also, and will direct your paths as you trust him.
- (2) Trust God when the enemy seems sure to win. Israel had no hope when she was caught between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. But she turned to God and He gave deliverance. The stronger the devil appears the more urgent it is that we trust God for help.
- (3) Trust God to make a way to escape; do not depend on your own provisions. Moses had no way of escape unless the Lord provided it. He called the people to be still and see God's provision. They trusted and found God faithful to deliver. In like manner, our victory depends on what God does rather than on what we are able to do.
- (4) Trust God when the way is filled with fears. It was not easy for the people to walk down into the bed of the sea with a wall of water on either side. But their fear did not keep them from following God's command. They followed and were safe. Fear is not necessarily a sign of lack of faith; one can fear because his experience is different. If you have faith to walk through the waters, you have faith to be saved.
- (5) Trust God for full deliverance. He not only spared the Hebrews from their immediate danger, but protected them from future attacks by the Egyptian. His deliverance is always complete and sufficient.
- (6) Rejoice in faith when deliverance comes from God. Keep looking to Him. Do not rejoice in your improved circumstances, nor give credit to your own actions, but return thanks and praise to God when He has worked in your behalf.

The experience of Israel at the Red Sea teaches us to trust God in our emergencies. His protection extends over all who trust Him.

FAITH AND VICTORY

Hebrews 11:30 reads, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."* The historical record of that amazing victory is recorded in the fifth and sixth chapters of the book of Joshua.

Reviewing the historical record

Approximately forty years passed since Moses led the people of Israel across the Red Sea, between two walls of water, and saw the destruction of the Egyptian army. Israel has encamped before Mount Sinai, received her law from God, built the tabernacle, and organized as a nation. She has gone to Kadesh-barnea where her faith faltered and she refused to begin the conquest of the land which God had given her. She was sentenced to wander forty years in the wilderness before entering Canaan. Those forty years have ended. Moses has died and Joshua is in command of the nation.

Jericho-an impregnable fortress

The great problem which faced Joshua and the children of Israel after their crossing the Jordan River into Canaan was the great military fortress called Jericho. It was fortified to repulse such an invasion as the Hebrews intended to attempt.

The city of Jericho was built on the top of a small hill. About seven acres of land was included in its walls. Most of the people of the area lived outside the walls, but would hasten there in times of danger.

The city had two great walls surrounding it. There was an outer wall separated from an inner wall by a space of

a few feet. If attackers were able to break through the outer wall, they must then break through the inner wall while the defenders were attacking them from above their heads. The great double walls, plus the military presence in Jericho, made it an impregnable fortress according to the methods of warfare at that time. Jericho must fall to the Hebrews for the conquest of Canaan to succeed. How could the city be taken?

The captain of the Lord's army

Joshua was pondering that question as he walked on the plain between the camp of Israel and the Jericho fortress. He was suddenly aware of the presence of an armed soldier near him. *"Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"* he inquired. *"Nay; but as the captain of the host of the Lord am I now come,"* was the surprising reply. Joshua fell on his face, recognizing the soldier to be a messenger of God, and asked, *"What saith my lord unto his servant?"* Then God gave instructions through his messenger on how the city of Jericho would be conquered. (See Joshua 5:12-15).

The conquest of Jericho

The conquest of Jericho was not at all as one would imagine. There were to be no battering rams to knock holes in the walls. There were to be no covered protection for workers to dig under the walls. The method of warfare required the utmost act of faith. What would they do? They would march around the city thirteen times, shout aloud, and trust God to make the walls fall down flat. Who could believe it would happen? The people who trusted God believed. That is why Hebrews 11:30 reads, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down."* The method of the conquest of Jericho was God's plan. It required the people to trust Him for victory. It showed the victory was of the Lord and not by man. It was evidently God's work.

The battle for Jericho lasted seven days, and not a shot was fired until the seventh day. The first day the Hebrews left their camp and marched around the city one time. (Their march was far enough out that no arrow or spear could reach them.) Then they returned to their camp. They did the same thing the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth days. Not a shot was fired for six days. What a strange way to take a city.

The seventh day saw a difference. They marched around the city seven times instead of the usual one time. As they marched, they looked. But they did not speak. They were under Joshua's strict command, *"Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout"* (Joshua 6:10). They march silently and looked at the great military fortress from all angles until they knew if victory came it had to be given from the Lord. So they marched, gave up hope in themselves, and looked to the Lord for the overthrow of the city.

The defenders of Jericho rallied to their posts the first day the Hebrews came near to march around the city. But the expected attack did not come. The invaders returned to their camp instead. When they did that day after day, it must have become a joke in Jericho. Insults were probably shouted from the walls. But the Hebrews could not answer. They continued to march silently in what appeared to be a futile effort.

Why did Israel march around Jericho like that? They marched in obedience to God. They did not understand why. They knew only that God had commanded it. so they marched. Their obedience was an indication of their faith.

God vindicated their faithful obedience. On the seventh day, when they had completed their final lap about the city, Joshua cried, *"Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city"* (Joshua 6:16). They shouted in faith. And *"the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city"* (Joshua 6:20).

They had trusted God to give the victory. They did not know how He would do it but they believed He would. And He did! He did it in a way they would never have expected, but He did it. Jericho fell and the victory was of God.

What is your “Jericho?”

What does this say to you and me? The Jericho in Joshua’s day was an impossible situation for him. It well represents all the impossible situations you and I face today. We have our “Jericho” just as Joshua had his. He teaches us to trust God in all the difficult (and seeming “impossible”) situations. He gave victory then and He will give victory now.

Your “Jericho” may be internal. It might be a passion of the flesh, an ambition of pride, a sense of jealousy, or any other spiritual sin. If it is a thing you cannot master on your own, it becomes to you what Jericho was to Joshua—an impossible situation.

Your “Jericho” may be external. It may be the people with whom you work, the situation in which you live, a family which is opposed to spiritual things. If it is a condition you cannot remedy on your own, it becomes to you what Jericho was to Joshua—an impossible situation.

What should you do with the impossibilities of life? You commit them to God in faith. I have seen God answer when people have turned their impossible situations over to Him and trusted Him to provide. I have seen the walls fall and victory be given to the hands of God’s people.

That is why the record is placed in the Bible of how Jericho fell: *“By FAITH the walls of Jericho fell sown”* (Hebrews 11:30). What happened then is recorded so we can know what God will do now for those who trust Him. It is as safe to trust Him now as it was to trust Him back then. *“They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever”* (Psalm 125:1).

FAITH AND CRISIS

Hebrews 11:31 reads, *“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.”*

The background of the crisis

That statement raises many questions. Who was Rahab? Why was a prostitute trusting God? Who were the spies whom she had received in peace? The answers to those questions are to be found in the second and sixth chapters of the book of Joshua.

Joshua had brought the Hebrews across the Jordan River to begin their conquest of the land of Canaan, which God had promised through Abraham to give them. They had camped at a place called Shittim (also called Gilgal) on the west side of the Jordan River. The impregnable military fortress called Jericho was to be their first point of attack in the new land.

How should Jericho be attacked? What were the points of strength and weakness of the city? The best way to answer those questions, so Joshua thought, was by the use of spies. He chose two men and sent them to enter Jericho as travelers, and search out what information they could gather by personal observation.

The two men entered the city and spent the night in a hostel operated by a woman named Rahab. (Most of the inns of that day were related to immoral activities, so it is no surprise to learn Rahab was a prostitute.) When the king of Jericho sent authorities to arrest the two spies, Rahab hid them beneath the flax drying on top of the flat roof of her house. She explained her actions to them, saying, *“I know that the Lord hath given you the land . . . For the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath”* (Joshua 2:9, 11). She had become a believer in the Lord God, even though she lived in a pagan Canaanite city! She asked assurance of the two spies that when the Hebrews took the city, she and her family would be spared. They promised their protection over her if she helped them get safely out of the city. That is why Hebrews 11:31 reads, *“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.”*

Reviewing the faith produced by the crisis

I will review the account for you, as recorded in Joshua 6, by setting out a number of practical applications and illustrating them with Rahab's experience.

Faith is possible to all classes of people. It is a little surprising to hear Hebrews 11:30 speak of the faith of Rahab and then report that she was an immoral woman. But that is just like our Lord. He takes the impure and makes them clean, the immoral and makes them decent. Rahab was a pagan and a prostitute before she came to personal faith in the Lord God.

Faith in God is possible to every kind of sinner. No sin excludes you from Him. Jesus said, "*They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" (Mark 2:17). It is possible for you to trust God, whatever sin may be in your background.

Faith is built upon facts. Rahab had heard how God had given the Hebrews victory over the kings of the Amorites, and how he had dried up the Red sea for them when they came out of Egypt. That convinced her that the Lord is God over all. It was on that conviction based on facts that she believed in Him.

The Bible says, "*Faith cometh by hearing . . . the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). That means our faith is built upon facts today. Know what the Bible says, believe what God says in the Bible, and you will be saved.

Faith expects God's blessings in the future. Rahab was sure God would give Jericho, with all the land of Canaan, to the Hebrews. She asked His blessings upon her family, in the form of protection from harm when Jericho fell.

The spies showed their in God by giving her a scarlet cord she should put in her window as a sign of her faith. When the Hebrew invaders saw the cord, they would harm no one in that house. That was an expression of faith that God would bless with victory when the attack came.

One person's faith may bring blessings to many others. Rahab believed in God and brought all her household into safety with her. The spies had promised all who were in her house would be spared. She included her parents, brothers, sisters, and other members of her household. God's blessings came on all because of her faith. Whom do you have who should be included in your prayers and influence that God's blessings may rest on them? Let your faith bless others, also.

I do not mean to say one person can believe in behalf of another. Never! God requires each of us to exercise personal faith on our own behalf. But as God blessed the household of Potiphar in Egypt because of the faith of Joseph, so we can bring a blessing to those we love by trusting God and serving Him faithfully. Be a witness to your loved ones of your faith in Christ Jesus.

Faith is expressed by works. Rahab gave a public testimony to her faith in God. "*She bound the scarlet line in the window*" (Joshua 2:21). Faith is proven valid by its works. Her testimony of faith, given to the two Hebrew spies, was not mere words. She showed her faith by the act of binding the scarlet cord in her window. It was a witness to the faith she already had.

That is what personal testimony and Christian baptism does for us today. We can speak with our mouth the words which declare we are Christians. We can receive the ordinance of baptism in water to testify we have died to sin and are living a new life in Jesus Christ. Faith is always declared by works. How well do you testify to your faith in God?

Faith is rewarded. God never proves Himself unfaithful to those who believe Him. You remember how Joshua had his people march around the city of Jericho one time each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. At the end of the last circuit of the city, the priests blew the trumpets and the people shouted. God laid flat the walls of Jericho. All the wall fell, except for one portion. The house of Rahab was on the wall. That portion did not fall. She had all her family gathered in her house. Not one of them suffered injury. God rewarded her faith.

Faith in God is never in vain. He always honors those who trust Him. You will find deliverance coming when you face life's seeming impossibilities, if you trust in the Lord. The Bible says, "*Trust in the Lord with all times*

heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6). You can stake your life on a promise like that.

Six principles we learn from the faith produced by the crisis

Look back over the truths we have found in this history of Rahab and the spies. I have found six principles which relates to us today. Think of how they apply to you.

(1) Faith is possible to all classes, even to a prostitute like Rahab. It is possible, and profitable, for you to trust God. (2) Faith is built upon facts, not fiction. Trust God on the basis of what He has revealed in the Bible. (3) Faith receives present help and expects future blessings. It included all of life. (4) Faith of one brings blessings on many others-your faith can bless your loved ones. (5) Faith is expressed by works if it is real. (6) Faith is rewarded by God’s blessings. Those who believe are always special to Him. Are you trusting God?

FAITH AND THE HEROES

Hebrews 11:32 reads, *“And what shall I more say? for the time would fill me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.”* After a long list of particular people, with specific reference to their acts of faith, the writer of this “Faith Chapter of the Bible” suddenly begins to generalize his list. He writes names without relating acts of faith to each one as before.

Six men of faith

This verse list six men by name and refers to many others who are unnamed. The six he lists reach from the days of the Judges to the early monarchy in the history of the nation of Israel. Three of them were judges - political and military leaders of the Hebrews. One was both judge and prophet (Samuel), and one was a king (David). There are many other prophets to whom mention is made but whose names are not given.

Another interesting thing is seen in this list. If the six names are listed in pairs (Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthah, David and Samuel) the second of each pair is given historically before the first. Barak was before Gideon, Jephthah was before Samson, Samuel was before David. Why that order is followed is unknown to us today.

Let us look at the record of each of the six men listed in Hebrews 11:32. Each man is given as an example of faith in God. What was there about him that made him significant enough to be listed in this “faith chapter”?

Consider Gideon first

The record of his exploits are recorded in Judges 6-8. He was not a man of faith when God first chose him. His faith arose from his personal contacts with God Himself.

The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and He disciplined them for seven years by making them subject to the people of Midian. They hid in dens and caves in the mountains trying to escape the oppressors. The Midianites destroyed all the livestock and the produce of the fields, causing Israel to be greatly impoverished. In their distress, they cried out to the Lord.

God’s angel came to Gideon when he was threshing grain by the winepress in an effort to hide from the Midianites. The angel said, *“The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor”* (Judges 6:12). Gideon could not believe the Lord was with him or his nation, because of the evil they were suffering. God commissioned Gideon to become the leader in overthrowing the altars of the pagan god, Baal, and to lead an army against the Midianites.

Gideon wanted proof God was with him. He laid out a fleece two nights, asking God to make it wet one night while the grass around it was dry, and asking God to make it dry the other night while the grass around it was

wet with dew. After that proof of God's presence, Gideon believed God without question.

With only 300 men he went against the army of Midian which numbered into the thousands. And God gave Gideon the victory.

What does that teach us? It teaches the man without courage can have faith in God. It means the coward can become bold when he trusts God. It means you can be strong through faith in God, even though you are fearful at this moment. Gideon teaches us to trust God instead of fearing men.

Consider Barak second

The record of his exploits are recorded in Judges 4, 5, Barak was a military leader of the Hebrew army in northern Palestine. The Canaanites were oppressing them because of their sins against God. Deborah, a prophetess, called Barak and commanded him to take 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun to fight Sisera, the Canaanite captain. Barak agreed to go provided Deborah would go with him and his army, otherwise he would not go.

And that man is given as an example of faith in Hebrews 11:32! Where is his faith? He proved that his faith was not in the army or in his military wisdom. It was in God. If the prophet of God went with him, he would go gladly into battle. If the prophet did not go, he would not venture an encounter with the enemy.

What a lesson of faith Barak teaches us. It is not enough for us to obey the commands of God. We must trust God to go with us and enable us to obey His commands. Barak's faith in God was shown in his insistence that God's prophet accompany him.

Are you trusting God personally and specifically for each day's needs?

Consider Samson next

You can read a summary of his life in Judges 13-16. Samson was a strange person with contradictions in his character from time to time. He was far from the perfect man you would expect a judge of God to be. Samson attempted to marry a pagan woman. He was subject to violent expressions of anger. He betrayed the secret of his strength (his commitment to God as a Nazarite) to Delilah. And he always had a weakness for a beautiful woman. Yet, he was a judge used of God, and an example of faith.

This man teaches us that God does not require perfection in order to be used by Him. God can take a very imperfect person and mold him through circumstances to become an instrument of righteousness. Samson erred, by he never forgot God. The reality of God brought him back once and again to the way of righteousness. And his death was a great testimony of devotion to God. Even if you feel unqualified, God will receive you and bless you for your faith.

Consider Jephthah

You can read of him in Judges 11, 12. He was an illegitimate child who was rejected by his own family and driven away from home. Yet, God chose him as a judge and delivered from their Ammonite oppressors the very ones who had rejected him. Let us learn that God does not see as men see. the person rejected of men may be the very one God uses. Faith in God is possible to all, even the outcasts of society. Let Jephthah teach you to trust God, in spite of people's opinion of you.

Consider David, the king

He is the only king to be mentioned by name in this list. His life-record shows he had faults. But it shows also his readiness to humble himself before God and seek forgiveness when he had fallen.

Here is a man who has the responsibility of ruling a nation. Yet, he has time to seek God, to know Him, to trust Him, and to write songs of praise to Him. Let David teach you that you can find time to serve God also, if you will. You need never be "too busy" to trust and serve Him.

Consider Samuel

He was the last of the judges and the first of a great line of prophets. He manifested the prophetic gift and knew the call of God in his early youth. When the Ark of the Covenant had been taken by the Philistines, Samuel taught the people to trust God without dependence on a visual symbol of His presence. He anointed both Saul and later David as king of Israel. He held the nation together through a turbulent transition period in her history. He was, above all, a man who trusted God.

Let Samuel teach you to trust God even when you have no visible proof of His presence and power in your life. Trust Him when the winds of inspiration are blowing. Trust Him when you feel no inspiration. He is there the one time as well as the next. Trust Him without requiring proof of His presence, and He will give you all the proof you need.

FAITH AND TRIUMPH

Hebrews 11:33, 34 reads, *“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”*

Ways faith triumphs

There is a list of nine ways in which faith showed itself strong in the lives of men and women mentioned in the Bible. The nine phrases may be divided logically into three groups of three statements each. (1) There are general areas of triumph: *“Subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises.”* (2) There are personal experiences of triumph: *“Stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword.”* (3) There are occasions of triumph in the service of God: *“Out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”* When and to whom did those things happen?

Through faith, kingdoms are subdued

That is to say, invaders who opposed them with numerically superior forces were overthrown and driven from the land.

The mention of such a thing takes one's mind immediately to Gideon. Here is an untrained man, threshing grain in hiding because of the Midianites, when God called him to deliver his people. Gideon hesitated at first, but when he became sure of God's call he gave all he had to the task assigned. And God gave him victory. *“The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon”* (Judges 6:34). That was why he was successful. And that was why the people of Israel were willing to follow him. He went into battle with 32,000 men. When all who were afraid were permitted to leave the army and return home, 22,000 were left. But God said the 10,000 remaining were too many. The army was reduced by 9,700 more, leaving only 300 men in Gideon's army. He did not doubt God when he was left with only 300 men, even though the enemy *“Lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude”* (Judges 7:12). He did not doubt, for God had promised to be with him and give victory, and he believed God.

Gideon went into battle with his three hundred men armed with a torch, an earthen pitcher, and a weapon of war. At a given signal, all broke the pitcher so the light of the torch would shine out, shouted aloud, and the enemy was routed. Israel *“subdued kingdoms”* in the battle which followed. It happened because he had faith to follow God's instructions even when they did not seem advisable.

Israel had a veritable history of “subduing kingdoms.” Beginning with Sihon and Og, kings defeated in their

wilderness wanderings, through the times of Joshua and the judges, on to the reign of David, the empire was expanded from the Egyptian frontier to the Euphrates. Read 11 Samuel 8 for a list of the kingdoms subdued in the reign of David, King of Israel.

Think of that truth spiritually. Whatever kingdoms of evil rise up against you, they can be defeated if you trust in the Lord.

Through faith, righteousness is established

Think of that term “righteousness” in the sense of “justice,” for that is what it means. As the kingdoms of the enemy were overthrown through faith, justice was made to reign in that area. That is the way God always works, isn’t it?

Second Samuel, chapter 8 lists more than a dozen nations which David subdued through warfare. How did he treat the captured people? The Bible answers, “*David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people*” (II Samuel 8:15). He followed the example of the godly prophet Samuel, who had anointed him to the office of king, in dealing honestly with all people (I Samuel 12:3-5).

Psalms 101 seems to be a “coronation oath” taken by kings of Israel as they assumed their office. It begins, “*I will sing of mercy and judgment . . . I will behave myself wisely . . . I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes . . . I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.*” Why was such an oath taken? Because the rulers believed they ruled for the Lord over His people. Their faith in God made them honest men.

Through faith, promises are obtained

That could mean either of two things. (1) They received the fulfillment of the promises God made before. (2) They received new promises from God concerning what He would do in the future. Either application would be appropriate here, but I feel reference is to the former. Because God’s people trusted Him, they personally experienced the fulfillment of His promises.

Jerusalem was under siege by the army of Sennacherib when God promised Isaiah that deliverance would come. The prophet and the people believed the Lord and by the next day a plague had hit the camp of the invader and he had to retreat to his home. Because they believed God, they lived to see the fulfillment of His promise.

God promised through Jeremiah that the Babylonian captivity of Judah would be for the exact time of 70 years. Daniel was an old man, a prophet in Babylon at the time he discovered that promise in Jeremiah’s writings. He believed what God had said through His prophet, and lived to see the king arise who would permit their return to their homeland.

All through the Old Testament period, God’s people were promised that He would be with them if they served Him in faith. They believed God and saw the fulfillment of His promises.

That same promise relates to you and me today. “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise*” (II Peter 3:9). All He has promised He is both willing and able to perform (Romans 4:21). There is no reason to doubt His promises. Every word will be fulfilled. If you trust Him, you can see the promises of God come to reality. The ultimate end of all God’s promises is to provide a Savior for man in his sin. Acts 13:23 reads, “*Of this man’s seed hath God according to promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus.*” The coming of Jesus, the Christ, was in direct fulfillment of many of God’s promises given in Old Testament times. We know how perfectly He kept and fulfilled them all.

Behold the blessings of faith. It can subdue kingdoms, establish justice and receive what God promises. Who, then, would want to doubt? To doubt God is the depth of foolishness; to believe Him is the height of wisdom. If you have enemies united against you, trust God. By faith you can “subdue kingdoms.” If you have injustice about you, trust God. By faith you can see justice administered. If you have promises unfilled, trust God. By

faith you can procure His promised blessings. Blessed are those who believe.

FAITH AND ESCAPE

Hebrews 11:33, 34 reads, *“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”*

We have observed how that list of nine victories of faith falls into three logical parts: general areas of triumph, personal experiences of deliverance, and divine supply to make one sufficient. We have discussed the first. Let us turn our attention to the three statements concerning the personal experiences of deliverance.

Through faith, the people of God have *“stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword.”* Think about those occasions of deliverance from danger and relate it to your situation today.

Through faith, God has stopped the mouths of lions

The very mention of that turns our minds to the experience of Daniel in the den of lions. You can read the account in Daniel 6.

Daniel was a Hebrew who was taken captive to Babylonia from the land of Judah. He advanced rapidly through the offices of government there, until he was the first of three presidents under whom the 120 princes who governed the empire must give account. The king was considering setting Daniel over the whole realm, even the other two presidents. The word was known and a plot was planned by the princes and presidents to get Daniel removed from his position of power, which they coveted for themselves.

The plan was this. They would get the king to call for an expression of allegiance from his citizens. A decree would be passed saying no person could make a petition of any God or man for thirty days. The citizens who obeyed would show they were loyal to King Darius.

Daniel knew the decree was signed, but he continued to pray to God three times a day as before. He was found in prayer and consigned to be thrown into the den of hungry lions. But the angel of the Lord came and closed the mouths of the wild beasts so that Daniel suffered no harm. The king came to the den early the next morning, having spent a sleepless night, and found Daniel preserved by God.

A new decree was issued, saying, *“In every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast forever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end”* (Daniel 6:26). Behold the power of faith to protect God’s people and to exalt God’s name.

Do not fear when you face dangers beyond your capacity to defend yourself. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Trust Him to intervene. He is able. He is faithful. Trust Him.

Through faith, God has quenched the violence of fire

Again, the very mention of such a miracle turns one’s mind to Daniel 3 and the experience of three Hebrews named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

They were three of the thousands taken from the land of Palestine into Babylonian captivity at the beginning of the sixth century B. C. Even in their foreign land of enforced residence, they kept their faith in God.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king at that time. He made an image of himself which was 90 feet high. A decree was issued that at a certain musical signal all people were to fall down and worship the image of the king. *“All the people, the nations, the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the*

king had set up” (Daniel 3:7). All, that is, except three of the Hebrews.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were officers in the government of the king. But they refused to bow down before an idol, even though it was of the king himself. The king called them in and explained personally the requirements for them to bow before the image as a sign of loyalty to him. Again, they refused.

The king told them that unless they bowed, they would be cast into a furnace of fire and consumed in the flames. They replied that God was able to deliver them from the furnace, if He chose, but whether He did or not they would not bow down to the image of gold.

The king was infuriated. He commanded the furnace to be heated to its extreme limit. The three men were bound with ropes. The soldiers who cast them into the furnace were themselves killed by the heat issuing from it. Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace and said, *“Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire . . . Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God”* (Daniel 3:24, 25). The three men were brought forth from the furnace unharmed and without so much as the smell of smoke on their garments. The only thing that had burned in the flames were the ropes with which the king had them bound.

Consider their faith. It would have taken no faith if God had promised to spare them. But He had made no such promise. They trusted Him anyway and were delivered.

Trust God in your life-threatening situations: sickness, war, accident. He is faithful to those who trust Him.

Through faith, God had delivered His people from death by the sword

There are so many occasions in the biblical record of God’s deliverance of His people from death, it is difficult to determine which the writer of Hebrews 11:34 had in mind.

The prophet Elijah escaped from the death threatened by Jezebel to come within twenty-four hours (II Kings 19:22ff). The prophet Elisha was delivered from Jezebel’s son Jehoram who sought to kill him when the city was experiencing famine (II Kings 6:31). Jeremiah was spared from death by the decree of King Jehoiakim because of men who feared God and trusted the words of His prophet (Jeremiah 36:19, 26). Those are but a few instances in which God spared those who trusted Him.

On the other hand, it is not God’s will to spare everyone. Some were *“stoned . . . sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword”* (Hebrews 11:37). Why God protects some of His children from death and permits others to die, we cannot know now. It is enough that we trust Him to do all things well. Whatever He does is what needs to be done. Keep on trusting Him.

Summarizing the power of faith

Look at the power of faith in the three areas we have just surveyed. (1) Faith is effective to keep one’s heart turned to God in prayer even when others object. See Daniel pray three times a day in spite of the king’s edict. (2) Faith is sufficient when facing the certainty of death. Study the three Hebrew’s stability in the face of death because they believed in God. (3) Faith is rewarded by deliverance from enemies who desire to do harm. Examine the escapes of Elijah, Elisha, and others because they trusted God.

That teaches you to trust God in your times when deliverance is needed. He is faithful. He will keep you in the hour of trial and deliver you in His own way. Daniel was delivered through prayer. Elijah was delivered by flight. The three Hebrews were delivered by the personal presence of God. But in each case, deliverance was the direct consequence of faith in God.

FAITH AND SUFFICIENCY

Hebrews 11:33, 34 reports the exploits of men and women of faith in these words, *“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the*

violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

We have observed the list of exploits of faith listed there fall into three categories: (1) general areas of triumph, (2) personal experiences of victory, and (3) sufficiency to triumph in the service of God. That third category includes *“out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”* In each instance we see God enabling His people to overcome. Look at each statement and observe God at work.

The weak are made strong through faith

Do you know of a person in the Old Testament who was given God’s strength in times of weakness? There are two who come immediately to my mind.

Samson was given strength in weakness. Yes, I refer to the Samson who was a judge of Israel and known as the strongest man in the country (Judges 13-16). We usually think of Samson as a large man with bulging muscles. Not so. If that had been the secret of his strength, it would have been evident to all. Samson was no stronger than most other men until the Spirit of God came upon him. When that anointing came, he was able to do exploits of physical strength that no other person could ever do. He was made strong in weakness.

Elijah was given strength in weakness. After the great victory for God on Mount Carmel, when he prayed and fire fell from heaven to prove the Lord God is the only God, he sojourneyed far to the south toward the wilderness of Sinai. His physical strength was exhausted in the way. Finally, he sat beneath a juniper tree in that desert and desired to die. An angel of the Lord came bringing food and water. He slept and awoke to eat again. Then the Bible reports, *“He arose . . . and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God”* (I Kings 19:8). His human weakness was swallowed up in God’s strength.

What does that mean to you and me? It means God still strengthens His people when they have need. He says to us as He said to the apostle Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (II Corinthians 12:9). We can respond with confidence, *“When I am weak, then am I strong”* (II Corinthians 12:10). Knowing the provision of God, I counsel you in these words of Holy Scripture, *“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might”* (Ephesians 6:10).

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength . . . They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:29, 31).

Through faith, courage is experienced in the battle

Who do you remember in the Bible records who showed courage in war because they had faith in God? Gideon is a prime example of courage through faith. He was from a small tribe among the Hebrews. His family line had never been marked by greatness in their history. He was personally hesitant to assume leadership of his nation as a judge appointed by God.

But with only 300 men he attacked an army numbering in the thousands and routed them. He had faith to follow God’s battle plan and he won a resounding victory.

David is an excellent example of courage through faith. As a teen-age lad he went out to face the giant Goliath in hand-to-hand combat. No seasoned soldier in all the army of Israel dared do that thing, but this lad had a courage based on faith. He expressed his faith in the words, *“The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine”* (I Samuel 17:37). That is a courage based on faith, the wisest and most enduring courage of all.

Your faith in God will encourage you in times of stress. Trust in the Lord. He is faithful according to His promise. Do not let your courage rest in yourself or in any other person, but in the power and faithfulness of God. That was you are strong in the Lord.

Courage comes when you know that *“there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few”* (I Samuel 14:6). There is courage when you are sure *“the battle is not yours, but God’s”* (II Chronicles 20:15). That is when you can experience the promise that *“one (will) chase a thousand, and two (shall) put ten thousand to flight”* (Deuteronomy 32:20), *“for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you”* (Joshua 23:10). I encourage you to trust God and be strong in Him.

Through faith, invading hostile powers are hurled back

We see that in the history of the Hebrew conquest of Canaan under Joshua. Jericho fell under the hand of God because the people had faith to follow His battle plan for taking the city. Five kings united in battle against Joshua and his army. In the ensuing battle, the army of the enemy was routed and the five kings were killed. The conquest continued to the cities of Lachish, Libnah, Gezer, Eglon, and Debir. The victory continued until Joshua possessed all the land from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza even to Gibeon, the whole southern part of the land of Canaan. Victory followed victory because the army of Israel walked with faith in the Lord God.

Once Israel had taken Canaan and was settled in the land, it was necessary that she continue to trust God.

Other nations came to invade her territory. Through faith, those hostile powers were hurled back.

Jonathan had faith to attack a military outpost of the Philistines, during the reign of King Saul, and that resulted in a great military victory for Israel. Jehoshaphat sent his army into battle against overwhelming odds singing praises to God saying, *“Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever”* (II Chronicles 20:21). They sang before the battle began because they believed God would fight for them and they would be able to overcome. The moment they began to sing, the invaders began fighting among themselves and had destroyed themselves by the time Israel came to the field of battle. That is the power of faith as illustrated in history.

But what does that mean to you? It means you can stand successfully against the enemy which seeks to invade your life. You can have the victory over lust, fear, greed, materialism, pride, or any other enemy of your spiritual life the devil raises against you. It is not that we “win” the victory but that God “gives” us the victory. Since the battle is fought in His power, the credit for the victory goes to Him.

A final promise

Here is a promise from God which I encourage you to memorize and make it part of your spiritual resources. *“God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that yes’ always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work . . . being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God”* (II Corinthians 9:8, 11). Claim that promise as your own. Rest with assurance on it. You will find your faith in God will enable you to triumph in trials.

FAITH AND SUFFERING

Hebrews 11:35-38 reports the sufferings endured by saints of generations gone, saying, *“Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”*

Review that list of sufferings and then we will draw some applications for our day. There are truths we can profit from which are taught by the sufferings of the people of God in generations gone.

Examples of faith in the midst of suffering

We think at once of the widow of Zarephath whose child was raised from death by the prophet Elijah (I Kings 17:17-24) and the widow of Shunem whose child was raised from the death by Elisha (II Kings 4:18-37). These women are shown as examples of faith because they turned to the prophet of God when death came into their families.

There are occasions when the blessings of God on our faith are evident in this life, as the resuscitations of the two children just mentioned. (We could also mention the raising of the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and the brother of Mary and Martha, all happening in the ministry of Jesus.)

But there were other occasions when some were tortured for their faith and endured because they believed in a “better resurrection,” which would not return them to this life but to life in the world to come. Torture would not change their confidence in the other world for relief from pain in this world. That is faith !

Others suffered in different ways. Mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonment were endured by some saints. They were not killed. Their abuse and sufferings continued for a long time, requiring the enduring quality of faith to hold them up.

Death did come to many. They died by being stoned, as was the prophet Zechariah after rebuking the people for forsaking the Lord (II Chronicles 24:20, 21). Tradition said the prophet Jeremiah was stoned to death in his old age while living in Tahpanhes, Egypt. Some were cut to pieces with knives (called “sawn asunder” in KJV Hebrews 11:37), as was Isaiah according to Jewish tradition. That was a common way to execute prisoners of war in ancient times (II Samuel 12:31; I Chronicles 20:3).

Many were tempted by being offered rewards for renouncing their faith in God. When they did not recant, they were slain with the sword.

Look how wretched their lives became. They became refugees with nothing for clothing but sheepskins or goatskins. They were continually in destitute conditions. They were continually in pain. They were cruelly attacked and ill-treated.

The world treated them as if they were worthy to live in this world. The truth is the world was not worthy to have such saints living in it!

They were not able to settle anywhere but lived a hunted life in deserts and on the mountains. Their shelter was found in caves and dens (caverns) underground. The animals could return to their dens, but these oppressed and beleaguered saints had to keep on the move to keep their enemies from locating them. All that was endured because they would not give up their faith in God.

How could they hold on to faith in God when they were suffering so? Remember that faith gives substance to our hopes and makes us certain of realities we do not see. They were so sure of the unseen realities that they persisted in spite of violent opposition.

Some applications for today

From that brief and somewhat depressing description of the suffering saints of God in generations gone, let us draw some applications for today. These will be helpful to those who have endured suffering, who may be suffering now, and who may enter into suffering in time to come.

Faith does not exempt the believer from trials. The history of religion shows that to be a fact of life. The teachings of Jesus underscore that fact the more emphatically.

Jesus said, **“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33). He explained why trouble comes in this world: *“If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:19).

The world is hostile to spiritual things because it is controlled by the devil. Do not be surprised if you experience opposition to your faith in God.

Faith gives reason for sufferings in this world. Satan is the god of this world. Jesus is Lord of the

Christian. To be a Christian means one lives in the territory of the enemy. Satan will not let God's people go unchallenged. He comes with temptation, opposition, and otherwise tries to destroy their faith and witness. That would be a fearful thing if we were not sure God is greater than the devil. God is in you as a Christian; the devil is in the world. The Bible assures, "*Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*" (I John 4:4). Victory!

Faith provides strength in time of suffering. If we had no hope, we might surrender to the devil. But we have hope in Jesus. It is the "*anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*" (Hebrews 6:19). Multitudes of God's saints can testify with Ezra, "*I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me*" (Ezra 7:28).

Looking to God in faith encourages confident trust in Him. Trust in Him to act will keep one steadfast in the faith. So faith brings strength and strength from the Lord increases faith. Thank God for the blessed ministry of faith in times of weakness and human inability. When one is weak in himself, he becomes strong in the Lord through faith.

Faith enables a testimony in suffering. Many saints of God have given their greatest life-testimony in times of suffering. I remember a lovely Christian lady who suffered a long and painful illness due to cancer. How vibrant was her testimony as the weeks passed. How she glorified God in her illness because of her faith.

Remember Job, who trials are recorded in the book that bears his name? He was a man who feared God and hated evil. Yet, he underwent physical suffering, misunderstanding by his friends, the loss of his family, and the loss of his fortune. But as a result of that, he stands forth in a great testimony of the power of faith to bear one up through trials. Thank God for the trials which give opportunity for a testimony of His faithfulness.

Do not give up hope when trials come to you. Know that God loves you and is with you whatever trials you may be required to bear. Look for God's strength to be yours and for an opportunity to give a testimony to His grace. Your burden will become a blessing as you see God working in you through it. Faith is powerful to make us victorious in times of suffering.

FAITH AND THE PROMISE

Hebrews 11:39, 40 reads, "*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*"

Those verses serve as a fitting summary to this great "faith chapter" of the Bible. It teaches us that faith's vindication comes with Christ, for its object is Christ Himself. Salvation through faith in Christ is the great "promise" God made and repeated over and over again through the Old Testament scriptures. It is the best gift God has ever given to fallen man. Ancient people lived with confident expectation of the Savior's coming. Their faith made Him real and God accepted them on the basis of their faith, counting them righteous because they believed. Now we have the reality of the Savior's ministry on earth and we look up to Him in faith and God accepts us and accounts us as righteous on the basis of faith. Praise God for our faith and for His faithfulness! All the Bible is built around the idea of "the promise" God made. The Old Testament is the expectation of it. The New Testament is the realization of it. Old Testament saints lived in faith that God would fulfill His promise; New Testament saints live in confidence that He has fulfilled His promise in Jesus Christ. I am identified with the faith of the New Testament saints, confident that Jesus is both Savior and Lord. How about you? Do you know for sure that God has given to you "the promise" He made and renewed through the ages?

Belief in "the promise" is based on Bible testimony

It began with the words of God spoken to the serpent and recorded in Genesis 3:15, "*I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt*

bruise his heel.”

The statement means a son born to some woman at some time will crush the power and overthrow the kingdom of the devil.

When Noah came out of the ark with his three sons, God made a choice among them saying, *“He shall dwell in the tents of Shem”* (Genesis 9:27). That means we can expect the Savior to be born in the Semitic branch of the human race.

From among the thousands of Semites in the generations that followed, God selected Abram (Genesis 12:1-3) and promised, *“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”* (Genesis 22:18). When Abram afterward had two sons, God chose Isaac and not Ishmael to be the one through whom the promised blessing would come (Genesis 21:12). When Isaac had two sons, God chose Jacob rather than Esau as the one whose descendants would produce the Messiah (Genesis 25:23). Then when Jacob had twelve sons, God chose Judah among them as the progenitor of the Savior (Genesis 49:10). Among all the people of the tribe of Judah, God chose the family line of David as the descent to the birth of His only begotten Son (II Samuel 7:12-16). And so it was.

The promise was given to the first human parents. It was continued through the ages to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Several thousand years passed from the giving of the promise to its fulfillment, but God’s purpose never changed. Each generation believed the promise and wished that it might be fulfilled in their days. Hebrews 11:39 reads, *“These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.”*

The delay of the promise seems to test the faith of those who believed

Can you imagine each generation thinking God’s promise of the victorious Man would be fulfilled in their time, only to come to death without seeing it? Generation followed generation without the fulfillment. Why did people continue to believe? It was because they knew God and knew He was faithful to His word. We might apply to them the words of Jesus to Thomas, *“Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet having believed”* (John 20:29). do not doubt when God’s promises are long in fulfillment. He who knows all things will give in the best possible time, in the best possible way, and at the best possible place. Keep on believing.

God had a great purpose of grace in the delay of His promise

Hebrews 11:40 says God delayed because He had provided *“some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”* That “better thing” which God provided is the New Testament age of grace in which the doors of salvation is opened wide to people of all nations on the basis of the finished work of redemption in Jesus. The family of God will not be complete until the last one who is to be saved has been saved. Only in company with us (we who trust Jesus Christ, the Son of God) would the saints reach their completion as the people of God. One day many will come from the east and the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11). I’m glad God waited to consummate the age until we had opportunity to hear and believe.

God is still delaying His coming. The faith is being spread to millions more in our generation. They will be included in the august company of the redeemed, with the saints of all ages. What a day that will be when we all stand before God and praise Him for saving grace.

We have received the promise in the person of Jesus Christ

God promised in Genesis 3:15 that one day a Son would be born to a woman and He would destroy the power of the devil. Jesus is that Son of Man who is also the only begotten Son of God.

“When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are

sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:4-6). Jesus is the Son of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15. But what about bruising the head of the serpent? The Bible says, *“The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8).* That is His purpose and certain accomplishment. Romans 16:20 promises, *“The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”* That is exactly what was promised in Genesis 3:15.

When you trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you gain the victory over the devil. The Christian life is a continuing experience of that victory. It is not a victory we gain by our own effort, but is given to us in Jesus Christ and entered by faith in Him. *“Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:57).*

So we come to the conclusion of our review of Hebrews 11, the “faith chapter” of the Bible. What has this study meant in your own heart? Have you come to understand that faith is the absolute assurance and firm conviction of the reality of things the natural eye has never seen? Do you have faith in God?

More particularly, do you trust God to do all He has said He will do in and through Jesus? Christ faith is personal confidence in God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).* Trust Jesus today. Remember:

“Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

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