

WHOSE FAITH FOLLOW

*Bible Studies on
Men and Women of Faith
from Hebrews 11*

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1. Introduction

‘Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

‘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 11.1-3.

These Bible studies were first prepared for midweek meetings and focus on the examples of faith given in *Hebrews 11*. Chapter 11 is a development of the teaching in the final part of *Hebrews 10* in which the Christian believer is being encouraged to persevere in the faith and not turn back. We read in *Hebrews 10.38* that *‘the just shall live by faith’*. In verse 39 we read that such believing faith is essential to our salvation and of great help to perseverance.

In *Hebrews 11* the theme of faith continues. Here we are taught some particular characteristics regarding living by faith as a believer. This chapter also gives examples of how faith was worked out in the experience of various people in the Old Testament.

Four characteristics of faith are taught in the opening verses of *Hebrews 11*.

Characteristic 1: *Looking forward with confident assurance*

‘Now faith is the substance of things hoped for’ v1a.

Faith does not depend upon the present. Faith confidently and assuredly looks forward to what has been accomplished eternally on our behalf through Christ. Reconciliation to God by faith in Jesus Christ will have its perfect fulfilment in glory. What Jesus has accomplished on our behalf, according to His mighty power and love upon the cross, is the door through which we must pass to look forward with assurance to Heaven!

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'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 that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city' Hebrews 11.13-16.

'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark...' Philippians 3.13-14.

Characteristic 2: *Depending upon the truth of God's Word with confident assurance*

'...the evidence of things not seen' v1b.

Faith is a confident assurance, believing in those things taught and promised by God. The Christian today believes by faith in what God says in His Word. He has never seen Heaven, an angel or the Redeemer with his physical eyes, nor has he seen a body raised from the grave. Nevertheless he has evidence which is satisfactory to his mind by faith, simply because God has spoken on these subjects in His Word. Those declarations in His Word are to his mind more convincing proof than anything else. The Bible records many who saw the Lord with their eyes and saw His miracles but who did not believe. Their problem was that they had no faith.

Characteristic 3: *Faith which is confidently assured in God's Word leaves a lasting testimony*

'For by it the elders obtained a good report' v2.

Introduction

Old Testament believers are remembered positively because of their faith. Faith is the evidence of belief in God, and it is *by faith* that they obtained a good testimony (see verse 39), not because of tradition or good works. It was through faith that they gained reconciliation with God and overcame the challenges of life. Notice that their faith in God's sovereign goodness and grace was remembered rather than their failures! Sarah is a good example of this. No mention is made in *Hebrews 11* of the incident in *Genesis 18* where Sarah laughed in disbelief at the angel's message.

Characteristic 4: *Faith confidently declares and accepts the Creator God*

'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed [perfectly put together] by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear' v3.

Faith is the surest way in which we can understand and accept that God, by the word of His power, made the universe out of nothing. Faith looks at Creation and sees in it the unseen mighty hand of the Creator God. But faith also glorifies God as the first source in scientific discoveries, discoveries which continually and relentlessly demonstrate His intricate and wonderful handiwork.

Christian faith is not against, or fearful of, reasoned scientific discoveries. However in the final analysis the human mind is incapable of totally grasping the complexity and wonder of Creation. Faith nevertheless simply understands it is all by God's almighty power and accepts it as such.

* * * * *

Having given some characteristics of this assured faith, the epistle moves on to give life examples. We will be looking at each one in the following chapters.

2. WORSHIPPING BY FAITH:

Abel's Testimony

'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.

See also *Genesis 4.1-5.*

A more excellent sacrifice than Cain – Why?

Cain was the first person to be born by natural birth here on Earth. When Cain was born Eve said *'I have gotten [acquired] a man from the Lord'* *Genesis 4.1.* The name Cain means 'He is the Jehovah man'. This indicates that Eve mistakenly believed her little baby was the promised Messiah. She was thinking of the One Who would fulfil the promise of breaking the serpent's head and overcome Satan who had deceived her. (See *Genesis 3.15.*)

But then we notice that Adam and Eve named their second child Abel. By this time they realised Cain had a fallen nature just like theirs and was not the Messiah. Their despondency shows in the meaning of the name Abel – 'emptiness' or 'vanity'. It seems that Adam and Eve soon realised for sure the sad effect sin and their fall was having upon the world. Remember Adam and Eve had personal experience of the wonder of living in perfection. They had sinned and been expelled from the Garden of Eden. They saw the contrast between the two – between peace and pain!

A modern-day illustration of this could be taken from Corrie Ten Boom's book *The Hiding Place*, an account of her family's experience in World War II. In it she tells of how she contemplated on the comfort of the believing family home as she lived in the horror of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp.

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Adam and Eve of all people knew the dreadful separating effect of sin: from communion with God to separation from God!

The two brothers, Cain and Abel, grew up into manhood under the care of their parents, Adam and Eve. They both received instruction about God. Both Cain and Abel would have been clearly warned by their parents about the dreadful nature of sin. They would also have been told of the need for repentance and faith in God.

When he grew up Cain, the older of the two, worked as a gardener – a respectable occupation. Abel, the younger, was a keeper of sheep – again a respectable occupation, but not better than Cain's.

At the appointed time Cain brought an offering of fruit as his perceived act of worship. We know that grain offerings are later commanded by God in the book of *Deuteronomy*, so it was not the *type* of sacrifice which was the chief problem for Cain. The wording of *Genesis 4.3-4* suggests they presented to God according to their occupation. However, when we compare closely the description of Cain's offering with that of Abel it suggests to our mind that Cain did not bring the best that he could for the Lord. The Word of God simply says he brought '*of the fruit of the ground*'; not the first fruits, nor the 'pick of the crop'.

God had respect to Abel's offering, meaning God expertly looked at and considered the two offerings and judged Abel's offering to be excellent. However this excellence was not so much to do with the *quality* but, more significantly, we are taught in *Hebrews* it was with the *way* in which the sacrifice was presented.

God looks at and discerns the heart. Here is the key to the reason why God respected Abel's offering, but did not respect Cain's. Abel presented his offering by faith; Cain did not. This is the main reason we are given for its rejection. The chief problem for Cain was his attitude and the manner in which he presented his offering. It was not

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by faith! He presented his sacrifice in the wrong spirit. He came in his own way without acknowledging his need of mercy. Worship for Cain was simply something which he felt duty bound to do. There was no love in his offering and it was not presented with faith.

Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. In the book of *Leviticus* the fat was considered its luxury. There was no question that Abel gave the best for the Lord. Even in a practical way Abel demonstrated respect for God.

His sacrifice was also full of symbolism. God had provided tunics of skin as coverings for Adam and Eve. This inevitably involved the shedding of blood. The Word of God says that '*without shedding of blood is no remission*' of sins (*Hebrews 9.22*). This sacrifice of Abel's therefore pointed to the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross.

But the primary reason for the excellence of Abel's offering was not the quality and the symbolism. It was because Abel came by faith, depending upon the mercy of God. Here is the fundamental difference between them both. They were both doing the right thing, worshipping the Almighty God, but their approach to worship was different. Abel's sacrifice was more excellent because it was offered by faith, whereas Cain's was simply offered as a duty with his heart still in the world.

The chief difference was in their understanding of their relationship before God. Cain showed he had little respect for God and he had no appreciation of his own unworthiness before Him. His conscience told him God should be worshipped but his attitude and lifestyle told another story. Cain worshipped in a careless manner not appreciating the fact that God looks at the heart. Abel worshipped in humility by faith, motivated by his love for God.

John Calvin comments that: 'Abel's sacrifice was preferred to his

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brother's for no other reason than that it was sanctified by faith.' 'By faith' is the key issue here.

The voice of Abel continues to cry out even now. By faith we follow God. If our worship and our service is not motivated by faith and love it is unacceptable before God. Without faith and love, we are serving on the treadmill of works. Committed Christian service is inspired by faith and love.

Conclusion

- 1. Faith and Worship:** Abel reminds us that faith is essential to the true worship of the living God. It is the witness of our standing in the righteousness of Christ. Another illustration of this is found in the Old Testament. Job was in terrible circumstances, but he had the faith even then to believe that his sins were forgiven through Christ, and worshipped God even in trial. *'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth'* Job 19.25.
- 2. Faith and Works:** Cain reminds us that if we separate faith from works we end up with nothing acceptable before God.
- 3. Faith and Attitude:** Cain was careless; he failed to give the best for the Lord, offering his leftovers rather than the first fruits.
- 4. Faith and Motives:** Abel reminds us that motives do matter to God; we cannot separate our service from our motives. What is our motive for worshipping God? Are we motivated by adoration and respect?
- 5. Faith and the World:** Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. The world hates God, His Word and true believers. The world continues in its rejection of the testimony of the righteous.

'Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and

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his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you' 1 John 3.12-13.

'Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever' Jude 11-13.

A modern-day illustration of such a person is Charles Darwin who said: 'I don't reject the idea of God, I just reject the God of the Bible. I don't want anyone telling me this truth.'

Be warned by the testimony of Cain and inspired and taught by the testimony of the faith of Abel!

3. WALKING BY FAITH:

Enoch's Testimony

'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. But 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 11.5-6.

See also *Genesis 5.21-24.*

Enoch walked with God by faith and in that walk of faith he pleased God. At the end of his life here on Earth God bestowed upon this man of faith Enoch a unique and special privilege. He was translated to Heaven without experiencing death. This event is a remarkable mystery and a profound miracle. Enoch himself, both body and soul, was taken directly from Earth to Heaven (*Genesis 5.24*). The only other place in the Old Testament where the same expression in the Hebrew language is used is in the account of Elijah's departure to Heaven:

'And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace' 2 Kings 2.3.

'And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a

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chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven'
2 Kings 2.9-11.

Enoch's experience typifies what it will be like for believers still living on this Earth when Christ returns. God, in the experience of Enoch, gives us a sign of His almighty power that will be evident on Christ's return. Like Enoch believers still living at that time here on Earth will not experience death but will be caught up into the heavens, both body and soul. The Apostle Paul teaches this in his first letter to the Church at Thessalonica:

'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord' 1 Thessalonians 4.17.

The miracle of Enoch being translated from Earth to Heaven, body and soul, assures us there is an afterlife. There is a place called Heaven that all those trusting in Jesus Christ arrive at, in the goodness of God. It also assures us that God is sovereign over our lives for time and eternity.

Now let us consider Enoch's life here on Earth. He had an incredible testimony: he walked with God and he pleased God. The secret of Enoch's powerful testimony in what it means to walk with God is given for us in verse 6.

We will consider three aspects of Enoch's testimony of faith that pleased God.

1. Conviction of God's sovereignty for the future

'And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah'
Genesis 5.21.

The birth of Methuselah coincided with a special time of teaching, prophetic revelation and inspiration. Some commentators believe the birth of Methuselah actually coincided with the timing of Enoch's

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conversion. Be that as it may, we are clearly told that Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methusalah.

The name Enoch gave to his son means 'when he has died it shall be sent'. The name Methusalah foretold the coming judgement of God, demonstrated by the Flood. Methusalah was 369 years of age when his great-grandson Noah was born. Noah was 600 years of age when the Flood came, and Methusalah died at the age of 969 years. Therefore the prophecy taught through the giving of the name Methusalah proved true. He died aged 969 years, following which the judgement came through the Flood (*Genesis 5.27*).

We should stand in awe of God when we take time out to consider the ramifications of such events. Methusalah was the oldest man ever to live on this Earth. The length of his life was a remarkable symbol of the amazing and longsuffering mercy of God. But his death precipitated the awesome justice of God upon an unbelieving world. The world finally stepped over the line from God's longsuffering mercy to His awesome judgement.

We live in similar times when the world mistakes the longsuffering nature of God. People lull themselves into a false sense of security that God does not exist. But,

'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' 2 Peter 3.9.

Enoch was a man of God who was convinced about the sovereignty of God in a godless society. Enoch despaired of society, but did not despair of God. He remained convinced that God is in control.

I have a mug at home which some kind friends gave me at a particularly challenging time. On it is written, 'God is in Control'. When

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I drink from that mug it reminds me to think like Enoch: despairing of society but not of God.

2. Communion with God

'And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters' Genesis 5.22.

For the next three hundred years in the midst of a deteriorating and godless society Enoch had this remarkable testimony. Day by day living in the present with the future in mind *'he walked with God'*. All around him he was witnessing society in a downward spiral of evil.

Enoch's testimony speaks to us today. We also live in a society in a relentless and downward spiral of evil. Enoch teaches us that it is possible for a believer to walk with God in a world determined to do evil.

What was the secret behind his testimony which pleased God? As Enoch walked with God, he knew that to please Him he must exercise faith by trusting in God. *Hebrews 11.6* provides a telling description of the foundations of such faith that trusts in God. He believed there is one God. He believed that this God is true and keeps His promises, rewarding sincere seekers.

Consider some characteristics of Enoch's walk with God as he lived by faith in communion with God:

a. Reconciliation. There came a time in Enoch's life when he came to see himself as he was before God. He understood that he had sinned and come short of God's glory. Enoch, like any other believer, needed to repent of his sin, to look by faith to God understanding his need of a Redeemer. There cannot be peace with God apart from Christ our Redeemer.

God promised to Adam that He would bruise the serpent's head. This was a promise given by God of the coming Messiah who would get the victory over Satan. Now Adam was still alive when Enoch was born. This promise and its significance would undoubtedly have been

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taught to Enoch, possibly by Adam himself! While the vast majority of humanity had no time for this promise and its significance, Enoch was one person who responded to the Gospel message of hope in the Messiah. The result was reconciliation: *'Enoch walked with God'*.

The reconciliation in Christ is still the same today; the outcome, the privilege, is to walk with God. Walking with God speaks of communion, fellowship, reconciliation, union and harmony.

*'Can two walk together, except they be agreed [reconciled]?'
Amos 3.3.*

b. Privilege. Consider the amazing privilege of walking with God: God who is almighty, holy, infinite in wisdom and power, the Creator of the universe, the God before Whom the angels veil their faces because of His majesty and glory! This God is our God who condescends to allow us to walk with Him along life's pathway. This statement, *'Enoch walked with God'*, includes walking in God's love, mercy, kindness, comfort, compassion, correction, guidance and in His way!

Let's imagine that you were invited to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and the Queen came up to you and said, 'Take a walk with me in the garden so we can talk together.' What an honour it would be to walk with the Queen. Yet Enoch walked with God!

c. Righteousness. As Enoch walked with God he had a righteous testimony in an increasingly evil world. Many years later we are told of another man of God called Lot. This man, despite his weaknesses, was described by the Apostle Peter as *'just [righteous] Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked'* (2 Peter 2.7). Now if you are walking with God in your life you will be vexed or grieved because of sin. For example, as a printer I sometimes had to go on the 6.00am shift at the factory the morning following the Lord's Day. The conversation going on around was often a combination of swearing, blasphemy

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and boasting about the drunken exploits of the weekend. I found this very distressing and vexing to my spirit.

A believer is called to be a light in a dark world like Enoch, but remember we cannot be a light unless we are walking with God. Enoch walked with God in prayer, practice, preaching and principles. He was man in whom the Spirit of God dwelt. His body was the temple of the Holy Spirit. His walk witnessed the fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5.22-26*).

For example, a person went to hear a godly minister preach in Glasgow by the name of Alexander Galbraith. When he got home he decided to write and tell Mr Galbraith how much he had appreciated the message. The problem was he didn't have the minister's address. So he write on the envelope 'To Mr Alexander Galbraith – Man of God – Glasgow'. Evidently the letter arrived.

'For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish' Psalm 1.6.

d. Humility. *'He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'* Micah 6.8. Abel demonstrated true faith in worshipping God – Enoch demonstrates true faith in walking with God.

3. Courage to speak for the Lord

'And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him' Jude 14-15.

Here we have one of the greatest examples of faith. Enoch prophesied about the first judgement of God upon the whole world

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by the Flood. We have already seen this evidenced by the name Methusalah that he gave to his son. But here in the *Epistle of Jude* Enoch prophesies about the second, worldwide judgement of God.

Enoch looked by faith to the end of the world, so he must have believed by faith not only in the first coming of Christ as the Messiah the Saviour: here he is looking by faith to Christ's *second* coming as Lord (*Matthew 25.31*). This is a powerful example of the incredible light Old Testament believers were given upon the truth of God. These accounts are given to inspire our faith.

Enoch prophesied with God given discernment and courage in an evil world. He understood what the times would be like at the end of the world. Enoch knew that while God was longsuffering He was also a God of justice and judgement; the God who doesn't change!

Conclusion

We cannot please God without faith. What type of faith pleases God?

- A faith that believes God is in control: a **conviction** of His sovereignty;
- A faith that brings us near to God: **communion** seen as a privilege;
- A faith that believes in who God really is: a **courage** and belief in God's character.

The Apostle Paul had the same desire to please God as Enoch. He said, *'For we walk by faith and not by sight'* (*2 Corinthians 5.7*).

According to the medical authorities, walking is one of the most profitable forms of physical exercise. It stimulates the heart and lungs, strengthens the bones and muscles, increases the blood flow throughout the body, and reportedly contributes to the loss of excess weight. As it is physically so it is spiritually. We need to walk with God by faith as a constant exercise (*1 Timothy 4.7*).

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I once read the statement of an African pastor martyred for his faith. This statement was found after his death tacked to the wall of the house in which he lived. It read:

‘My past is redeemed; my present makes sense; and my future is secure. I’m finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colourless dreams, mundane talking, cheap living and dwarfed goals. I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, plaudits or popularity. I don’t have to be first, recognized, praised, regarded or rewarded.

‘I now live by faith, lean on His promises, walk in patience, live by prayer and serve in God’s strength. My face is set, my goal heaven, my road narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, and my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won’t give up, shut up or let up because of the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go on till He comes.’

4. WITNESSING AND WORKING BY FAITH:

Noah's Testimony

'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 the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith' Hebrews 11.7.

See also *Genesis* 6 and 7.

Noah's testimony teaches us how we should both witness and work by faith. We have noticed how the names given in the Old Testament often carried with them a message to the world. The name Noah means rest.

In an ungodly society there was this man of God, Noah, who spiritually rested in the Lord. Noah trusted and rested by faith in his soul as he worked and witnessed for the Lord. Noah waited patiently for Him while at the same time he diligently worked in obedience to God's commands.

Our text provides us with six particular characteristics of Noah's testimony inspired by faith.

1. Believing in the things not yet seen: believing in God's prophetic Word

'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet'

God revealed to Noah by direct revelation of the Holy Spirit that He was going to judge the world with a flood. Creation was to undergo a tremendous upheaval, which would result in man's destruction and death. Noah was divinely warned of this judgement and took heed of the warning that had a future fulfilment. Noah's faith believed in the certainty of the as-yet-unseen fulfilment of God's Word (*Genesis* 6.13).

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This statement reveals the reality of true faith and harmonises with verse 1: *'the evidence of things not seen'*. Here is a man of God living by faith, believing in God's Word which revealed the certainty of a future event. Noah believed by faith in God's Word to him as absolute, certain truth.

Noah's witness of faith shone in the manner in which he trusted with his whole being in the Word of God. For Noah God's Word did not mean he had to physically see with his eyes before he believed it to be true. It was enough for Noah that God had spoken. God had warned him of future judgement – this was certainty.

Christian faith is the evidence today to the world of the as-yet-unseen second coming of Christ. It is the evidence of the impending judgement which is coming upon this world. Our day is not dissimilar to Noah's day. Jesus Christ the Lord said, when describing the last days: *'as the days of Noe [Noah] were'* (Matthew 24.37). This places great significance on our witness.

Our faith is the evidence to the present world that we believe in God Who is in control and Who keeps His Word. We are also people like Noah who have responded by faith to the warning of God through His Word. Therefore we are witnesses to an unbelieving world of the certainty of both the second coming of Christ and the final judgement of God.

Jesus said: *'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed'* (John 20.29).

2. Moved with godly fear

'...moved with fear'

Noah was not afraid of God because he was reconciled to God by faith and justified before God by faith. He undoubtedly believed by faith in the promise of God's Word revealing the coming Messiah.

When a person is justified by faith in Christ they enter into a

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relationship of loving acceptance with God. They are both justified and reconciled.

However Noah was not casual about that relationship: he took God seriously. He understood by faith that God, being holy and just, meant what He said. He had a deep respect for the character of God.

The fruit of this was a fear of God that deepened and strengthened his faith. Because he believed by faith in God's prophetic Word, Noah had a respectful fear of the coming destruction. Noah understood clearly that only by faith in God and obedience to His Word would he be saved.

Noah didn't pick and choose with God. Noah didn't say, I believe in a God of love but not in a God of justice. Noah didn't say, I believe in Heaven but not in hell. Moved with fear, awe and respect, Noah believed in the awesome reality that God is not only great in His grace but great in his judgement.

Faith motivated Noah, but fear moved him! The Psalmist describes such faith and respect in *Psalms 2.11*: '*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.*'

If we consider for a moment the reason for lethargic Christianity today, it is not so much a lack of faith as a lack of fear. This is one of the reasons why there are thousands of professing Christians who say they believe in God but do not want to serve God.

Faith moves us to works if, like Noah, it is accompanied with a respectful fear of God. If a person's faith is really only an assent to part of the truth about God, and not a total submission by faith to all the truth about God, that person will have little sense of urgency about the Gospel message. We are called to be a people moved with godly fear.

We may believe what He says about salvation. Do we believe what God says about the second coming of Christ and the judgement of God by fire?

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3. Action

‘...prepared an ark’

One of the greatest acts of faith this world has ever witnessed was when Noah took his axe and his saw and cut down the first gopherwood tree to get started on the ark. Every tree subsequently cut down was a warning to the world. Every swing of the axe and the noise of the blow on the tree was a constant warning.

Moved with godly fear he built the ark according to God’s plan; moved with godly fear he prepared for the certainty of the as-yet-unseen.

Spurgeon said: ‘Noah was prepared to put all his eggs in one basket and sink all his capital in God’s project.’

His witness of faith as he preached was a constant light in a dark world. His testimony of faith in building the ark was the evidence to an unbelieving world of a future judgement. So Noah’s faith inspired him to preach God’s righteousness in both word and action. God had told him to build and build he would. The command of God was his security against failure. Noah obeyed God and prepared an ark:

- even when, no doubt, he didn’t fully understand all the will of God;
- without procrastination (*Genesis 6.22*);
- even though his contemporaries thought he was building a folly;
- at great cost in time and faithful labour.

Noah’s work of preparation for a future event prefigures the work of God in building the Church before the end of the world.

4. Care

‘...to the saving of his house’

One of the most moving aspects of Noah’s faith was his leadership and loving care for his family. I expect his children were subjected to ridicule: Your father believes in God; Your father is building this huge

Witnessing and Working by Faith: Noah's Testimony

boat – where is the water for it to float? How ridiculous; Your father is a preacher and nobody is taking any notice; Your father is wasting his time and effort.

Maybe the ark became a type of tourist attraction, and the Noah family had to endure verbal persecution. Maybe friends of the family came up to him and said, 'Is what you are doing fair on the children?'

No doubt there were times when Noah was tempted to give up. Why make this stand, why cause the family so much embarrassment? Is God really going to keep His Word? Am I not depriving my children by my actions? But Noah loved his family and was a godly husband and father. Noah wanted to protect them at all costs.

Noah understood that his family was his responsibility; he was responsible before God to care for them. Noah's faith in God motivated both a practical and spiritual care for his family. Noah's care for his family involved separation from worldliness as a preacher of righteousness. His care was a fruit of his faith in God.

Now Noah's testimony speaks to fathers today. How far are we prepared to go to protect our children? Noah made a stand in the world and in the end Noah led his family into an ark which he had prepared. He was prepared take the ultimate step of faith which demonstrates itself in complete dependence on God.

Now the world thought the ark was like a prison. Perhaps even Mrs Noah said to her husband, Is this really necessary? Do we really need to take such a stand against the world? But after their deliverance I expect Mrs Noah truly thanked God for the caring leadership of her husband.

Spurgeon said: 'Noah believed even to separation from the world. See Noah and his family entering the ark! I have no doubt that the jeering world said to Noah, "Well, old man, you have built a prison for yourself, and the sooner you go inside and shut yourself in the better;

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for we have had enough of your preaching!” When the good man and his family went in, and the Lord shut the door, they were dead to the world. No salvation without separation!

When Satan tempts you to think your stand against worldliness in the home is denying your children or depriving them, remember Noah. In the end Noah was proved to be the only man in the world who really loved and cared for his family both practically and spiritually! It was the unbelieving fathers who led their families into destruction.

Christian fathers are responsible before God to lead and encourage their family like Noah into the ark. This means to encourage them by example, prayer and the Word of God into trusting in Jesus Christ, to trust in Him as Saviour and Lord. We cannot save our children or give grace, but we can pray for them and encourage them in the right way.

Noah's faith in God led to the saving of his family.

5. Noah's faith was to demonstrate the condemnation brought about by wilful unbelief

'...by the which he condemned the world'

The world's rejection of Noah's testimony and preaching was ultimately a rejection of God. As Jesus says, *'He that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me'* (Luke 10.16). In the end their unbelief was their undoing.

Noah was building the ark for 120 years (Genesis 6.3). This means for over 37,000 work days and more than 6,000 Lord's Days Noah was preaching a message of righteousness and warning in word and action to the world. He served God all this while, yet without any recorded conversions (1 Peter 3.20).

In the end he couldn't prove to the world that God was going to punish the world for their sin, nor could he prove to a sceptical world that God existed. But nevertheless he remained faithful.

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The testimony of Noah raises a challenging issue regarding preaching the Gospel. People who reject the Gospel render themselves doubly responsible before God not only because of their sin but because of their rejection of God's Word.

Matthew Henry says: 'Good examples will either convert sinners or condemn them. There is something very convincing in a life of holiness and regard to God; it commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and they are judged by it. This is the best way the people of God can take to witness to the wicked; not by harsh and censorious language, but by a holy exemplary conversation.'

6. The fruit of righteousness of Noah's faith

'...and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.'

Noah did not earn or demand his righteousness, neither did he satisfy God with his own. Noah was justified by faith in God's Word and Christ the Messiah, the Promised One who would *'bruise the serpent's head'*. He believed that this would still happen in the future despite the judgement by water. He received the righteousness of Christ put to his account as he trusted only in God and His Word.

Noah only had a very small part of the revelation of God in His Word and yet enough to inspire living faith. Just like Enoch before him, Noah is said to have *'walked with God'* (*Genesis 6.9*).

Barnes' Notes comments: 'The same faith or confidence in God, which led Noah to believe what God said about the flood, would have also led him to believe what God said about the Saviour who would bruise Satan. The same confidence in God, which led him to commit himself to the safe keeping of an ark on the world of waters, would have led him to commit his soul to the safe keeping of the Redeemer, the true Ark of safety. As the principle of faith, therefore, existed in the heart of Noah, it was proper that he should become, with others, an "heir of the righteousness by faith"'

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Conclusion

- The symbolism of salvation in the ark as God's provision (*Genesis 6.18*);
- Only one door (*Genesis 6.16*);
- Noah invited to come into the ark (*Genesis 7.1*);
- Faith and obedience (*Genesis 7.5*);
- Absolute security (*Genesis 7.16*).

5. OBEYING BY FAITH:

Abraham and Sarah's Testimony

'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.

'Through faith also 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, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable' Hebrews 11.8-12.

See also *Genesis 12, 15.*

Of all the Old Testament examples of faith to consider, Abraham is the one of the most important. This is because of the spiritual manner in which he, by faith, embraced the promises of God. He believed in their saving significance in Christ to all the world (*Galatians 3.6-9,16*). Christian believers are of the same faith as Abraham; therefore we must remind ourselves of his example.

Abraham is also a remarkable example of the sovereign grace and love of God. Abraham was elected by God and singled out according to His divine mercy. Abraham was called by the unique intervention of God (*Acts 7.2-3*).

1. By faith Abraham obeyed

'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed' v8.

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When God called Abraham to leave the great, fashionable and highly-developed city of Ur of the Chaldees, with all its attractions of art and commerce, it meant taking a step into the unknown. The unbelievers of Ur would consider him to be taking a foolish step backwards. Was he not giving up his prospects in the city? But Abraham obeyed by faith trusting in God. He took a deliberate step, which demonstrated his trust in the character of God Who had called him out.

It was not a step in the dark, but a step of faith into the unknown. A step into the dark is when we take a step without reference to God. Abraham stepped into the unknown in obedient faith, called by God. But Abraham's obedience was taken in two stages. Abraham first received God's call when he lived in Ur of the Chaldees (*Genesis 12.1; 15.7; Acts 7.2-5*). The first step Abraham took out of Ur was not the separation to which God was ultimately calling him. Abraham went from Ur with his father Terah leading, and dwelt in Haran (*Genesis 11.31*). Abraham must have told his father Terah about his call from God to come out of Ur. His aged father took the initiative and led the family out to Haran.

Haran, like Ur, was recognised as a beautiful city and a very comfortable resting place. It may have been that they settled in Haran for a while because his father was unable to continue any further. Abraham at this stage was dwelling on the edge of the total commitment by faith. Haran was the last big town before stepping out into the unknown, sandy desert towards Canaan.

After his father Terah died Abraham makes this great step of faith in dependence upon God. He walks into the desert on his journey to Canaan. It was this second stage which exemplified the obedience required by God for Abraham, this being separation from kindred and country.

There is danger in an obedience which makes a stopover, short of

Obeying by Faith: Abraham and Sarah's Testimony

what God requires of us. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees by faith, but with his father and still under his authority, stopping in Haran. Dwelling in the halfway house of Haran did not fulfil God's call to Abraham. However Abraham's true faith in God would not allow him to settle short of the place where God called him. So he finally steps out into the desert into Canaan land.

Abraham fully obeyed by faith as he embraced both the call and the promise. It meant letting go of the temporary security of the world to gain by faith the comfort of the eternal security promised by God.

There is a story about a man who was on a long journey and was exhausted and thirsty. He came across a ramshackle hut and went inside and noticed an old hand pump in the corner of the room over a well. He pumped vigorously but no water came. Then he noticed on the floor a screw-top jar full of water with a note attached. It said, 'To prime the pump use all this water'. So he had a choice: he could drink the stale water, or trust the instructions and its promise and pour all the water into the pump to receive the cool water from the well. So the man poured out all the contents of the jar into the pump and worked again at the lever of the pump. Sure enough before long cool water was pouring out. After he had quenched his thirst he filled up the jar and left the note attached for the next passer-by. The cool water was received when the man took that total step of faith, which meant first pouring out all the water in the jar and depending totally on the instruction and the promise.

2. By faith Abraham accepted his status

'By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country' v9.

In the *Genesis* account Abraham's status as a pilgrim was clearly revealed. *Genesis 12* – He departed v4; went forth v5; passed through v6; removed v8; and journeyed v9. Here is a fundamental

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requirement for Christian faith: an understanding of our pilgrim status, understanding we have not yet entered into the full realisation of salvation. It is described as the 'already-and-not-yet'. A Christian believer is already saved and secure, but his salvation is not fully realised until he arrives in glory.

In providence God gives us all things richly to enjoy, while at the same time He warns us that this world is not our home. A Christian has to learn to enjoy God's providential gifts and, at the same time, always keeping in the back of his mind that they are temporary. They are not meant to replace or hinder our saving relationship with God.

Abraham makes an incredible statement of faith by his lifestyle in Canaan. The inhabitants of Canaan were evil and idolatrous. Abraham refused to put down his roots among idolaters but maintained his pilgrim status in the land. Later the children of Israel were told by God to remove the Canaanites from the land before they settled down. None of the children of Israel could argue that father Abraham had settled down with the Canaanites, so setting a precedent for them to settle and build houses among the idolators.

There is a difference between Abraham and Lot on this issue (*Genesis 13.11-12; 19.1-2*). Lot settled down in a house in Sodom, and eventually had to be dragged out of the city by the angels of God. Are we prepared to accept our 'tent' status as a Christian believer in an ungodly world?

3. By faith Abraham waited for something better

'For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God' v10.

The word 'better' is significant to an understanding of the central theme of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Christ is so much better than the angels (*Hebrews 1.4*); Christ is the surety of a better covenant (*Hebrews 7.22*); Christ is the mediator of better promises

Obeying by Faith: Abraham and Sarah's Testimony

(*Hebrews 8.6*); in Christ we look forward to a better and enduring substance in Heaven (*Hebrews 10.34*); Christ is the reason believers can look forward to a better country that is an heavenly (*Hebrews 11.16*); Christ is the uniting reason for all believers to look forward to something better (*Hebrews 11.40*).

In 1952 long distance swimmer Florence Cadgwick, who had already swum the English channel non-stop, attempted to swim from Catalina Island to the coast of California. She swam for more than fifteen hours and then asked to be taken out of the water. Her trainer urged her to continue: she only had another half a mile to go. But she gave up. It was not the cold or the exhaustion which caused her to fail but sea fog. The sea fog stopped her from seeing the land ahead and she just couldn't keep going in the fog.

When Christians lose sight of the goal and feel to be in the fog, they often feel like giving up. This is why Paul encouraged his readers when he said, '*I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*' (*Philippians 3.14*).

Abraham waited for something better. He looked forward to his heavenly home. His lifestyle testified to this: this world was not his home. Remember Abraham was a wealthy man. He had been incredibly prospered by God; he was dwelling in a land that God said was to be a future inheritance for his family but not a present inheritance for him. This promise to him for the future didn't make him proud or make him hang on to the things of this world; his wealth didn't make him feel self sufficient. For Abraham the promise of the Messiah, Jesus Christ his Saviour, was of even greater significance.

Jesus said that '*Abraham rejoiced to see my day...and was glad*' (*John 8.56*). Through Christ he would inherit the heavenly home. Abraham says to us – remember there is something better to come. Whatever I enjoy here, it is incomparable to the glory to come.

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A girl was looking at the stars. She said, 'If it is this beautiful the wrong side of Heaven, what must it be like the right side of Heaven?'

Verses 13-16 explain the thinking which guided Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob in their attitude as pilgrims. They believed in the providential promises of God for the future; they were assured of them and embraced them in the land of Canaan as a blessing to Abraham's future generation.

They believed in the salvation promise of God in Christ Jesus the Messiah through Whom they believed by faith they would be enabled to enter the heavenly Canaan land. The evidence of Abraham and Sarah's faith is demonstrated by their refusal to return to their original homeland, symbolising the believer's refusal to go back into the world.

*Through floods and flames, if Jesus lead,
I'll follow where he goes;
Hinder me not! shall be my cry,
Though earth and hell oppose.*

John Ryland (1753-1825)

Abraham didn't look back; he only looked forward. It could have been so different. If Abraham had kept on thinking about the material attractions of Ur and Haran he would have longed for an opportunity to return. Remember Satan is an expert at giving opportunities to return to the old ways of sin. For example, the children of Israel longing to return to Egypt (*Numbers 11.4-9*).

Maybe you are being presented with opportunities to return to the old ways. How did Abraham overcome this type of problem? He was not mindful of the past but mindful of the future. By faith he looked forward to a better country. He understood God's way was better, and God's eternal future was better. Christians cannot go back even though opportunities present themselves because divine grace has produced in their heart a desire for something better. That

Obeying by Faith: Abraham and Sarah's Testimony

'something better' can only be obtained by pressing on towards the crown through Christ Jesus, not going back.

When you are struggling to cope, struggling with doubts and fears, struggling with questions, remember: something better is to come. The outcome for all believers is always and most certainly better.

There were two men living in a town. One was extremely wealthy and respected as the leader of the town council. He had a huge mansion lavishly furnished with antiques and expensive paintings. A stylish car sat on the drive and a boat was moored up on the lakeside at the bottom of his garden. This was his home and this was his life and in these things was his security. The other man had a modest living but was a committed Christian, truly dedicated to the ministry of the local church. One night the two men were rushed into accident and emergency suffering from heart attacks. The first man was reported to say despondently, 'I am leaving home.' The second man was reported to quietly say, 'I am going home.'

By faith Abraham fully obeyed, accepted his pilgrim status, and waited for something better. By faith both he and Sarah entered the heavenly homeland.

By faith Christian believers are identified with God as they look forward to their heavenly home, but what is marvellous and wonderful is the fact that God Himself is not ashamed to be called their God. The assurance of this is Heaven. He has prepared for them a city in a heavenly country. This is amazing grace despite all our failures and weaknesses. God is not ashamed of us because our hope is in Christ. Our shame is taken away in Christ (*Hebrews 2.11*). We have every reason to walk by faith and not by sight.

4. By faith Sarah received strength

'Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because

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she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable' v11-12.

Abraham and Sarah were faced with a challenging reality. Humanly speaking it was impossible for them to receive the fulfilment of God's promise to them. There were times when the human impossibility of the fulfilment of God's promise of a son overwhelmed them! They struggled with doubts and fears even as we do sometimes:

- Ishmael had been born as a result of Abraham and Sarah's impatience to receive the fulfilment of God's promise. Sometimes we want to go ahead of God and accept an alternative solution. (See *Genesis 16; 17.18.*)
- Sarah had laughed within herself in an unbelieving manner. (See *Genesis 18.12.*)

However even though there were times of doubt, they didn't give up hope. Sarah, by faith in the faithful character of God to keep His promise, in old age received special strength to conceive and bear a son. Ultimately her faith was victorious over her natural incredulity and scepticism.

Together Abraham and Sarah never gave up hope because God had promised and that promise must be fulfilled. God is never obligated to fulfil what He has not promised, but He is obligated to fulfil what He has promised because His faithful character is at stake. God sometimes delights to deal in the impossible for His glory!

When their son was born they named him Isaac, meaning 'laughter'. In the end it was only God who could make Sarah laugh again with all her being.

'And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me' Genesis 21.6.

6. DEPENDING BY FAITH:

Abraham's Faith Tested

'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' Hebrews 11.17-19.

See also *Genesis 22*.

1. A test for Abraham

'By faith Abraham, when he was tried' v17.

This was undoubtedly a test of Abraham's faith in God, and his obedience and loyalty to God. The test for Abraham was:

- how deep was his belief in a sovereign God?
- did he believe in God who keeps His promises, whatever?
- who came first in his life – was he willing to put God before Isaac?

When viewed from a human perspective Abraham's test of faith often troubles people. They ask the question, How could a God of love command Abraham to kill his son? What sort of test is this? What about Isaac's welfare in such a traumatic experience? What about Sarah?

How should we respond to such questions which arise in our minds? We know that God is sovereign and perfect in all His ways. As Job also found, Abraham realised that God sees the end of the matter from the beginning. The teaching in *Isaiah 55.8-9* is very helpful on this issue:

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the

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earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

In all our considerations, we must put our anchor down first – He sees the whole picture.

2. The test brought forth the fruit of profound faith

'Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead' v19.

God was not playing a cruel game with Abraham. God, knowing the end from the beginning, tested Abraham to bring forth further blessing.

The Apostle Peter teaches the same principle:

'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ'
1 Peter 1.7.

One of the blessings coming from the testing of Abraham's faith was its refining under extreme testing. When exercised his faith deepened.

How deep and profound was Abraham's faith? God in His wisdom has given us further light in our text to help us understand the depth of Abraham's faith. We are told that Abraham actually believed by faith that even if he did go all the way and kill his son, God would raise him up again from the dead, even from the ashes of a burnt sacrifice!

This was true obedience motivated by a profound faith in God.

3. The test brought forth the fruit of figurative faith

'...from whence also he received him in a figure' v19.

Here we have another reason why this passage in *Hebrews* is so helpful in understanding the events recorded in *Genesis 22*. It clearly

Depending by Faith: Abraham's Faith Tested

shows us that we must also look at this event as typical of a far greater transaction.

Abraham received Isaac again, understanding by faith the events on Mount Moriah symbolised the future death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, '*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad*' (John 8.56).

This is one of the most powerful passages demonstrating the significance of typology. The event at Mount Moriah speaks to us about the transaction between God the Father and God the Son, the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

4. The test brought forth the fruit of Christ-centred faith

a. The love of the father to the son

'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest'
Genesis 22.2.

As Abraham started on his journey to Mount Moriah it was his only beloved son he was leading to the altar. Isaac is described in *Hebrews 11.17* as '*his only begotten son*'. How deeply this command of God must have affected Abraham! In testing Abraham God reminds him of their union as father and son.

It was three days' journey to Mount Moriah. How the heart of Abraham must have been moved on that journey as he led his only son to the place of sacrifice. Abraham knew that each step drew them closer to an awesome transaction.

This is a picture of how God the Father would eventually lead His only Beloved Son to the place of the cross. Each day of His life from birth, each hour, each second, was drawing Christ closer to that awesome transaction between Himself and His Father on the cross.

The love between Abraham and Isaac was precious but the love between God the Father and God the Son is something perfect and

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powerful. It is impossible for us to understand more than a tiny part of the wonders of that love. We may not understand the depths of that love but we can admire the wonders of it. No love has ever stood the test in a greater way than the love of the Father to the Son. But at no point in the awesome transaction at Calvary did the Father ever stop loving His Son.

In eternity past He loved His Son; while His Son was here on Earth He loved His Son; while His Son was in Gethsemene, in the Judgment Hall, on the cross, His Father continued to love His Son. Now He continues to love His Son and will continue to love Him for ever.

The Father's awesome will for His Son leading Him to the cross did not mean His love for Him had changed. So Abraham, hundreds of years before, took his only son Isaac to Mount Moriah trusting in the perfect will of God, while at the same time continually loving his son.

God was not telling Abraham to do something that He was not prepared to do Himself! There at the cross at Calvary was this awesome, amazing and yet mysterious aspect to the love of God; a love which allowed such a transaction to take place at so great a cost and effect to His only Beloved Son.

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' John 3.16.

God's love to His people is as great as His love to His Son.

b. The burden laid on Isaac

'And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son' Genesis 22.6.

Abraham lay the burden of the wood upon Isaac his son, so that Isaac carried that burden to the altar. So God the Father placed upon Jesus the burden of the iniquities of all His chosen people.

Depending by Faith: Abraham's Faith Tested

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' Isaiah 53.6.

c. The judgement in the father's hand

'and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife' Genesis 22.6.

The fire and knife was carried by the father. As he walked up the mountain Abraham carries in his hand the symbol of death and of judgement. So God the Father controlled the fire and knife of judgement, bringing it to the cross and laying it upon His only Son, Jesus Christ.

'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted' Isaiah 53.4.

d. The unity of the father and the son

'and they went both of them together' Genesis 22.6.

'so they went both of them together' Genesis 22.8.

Twice we are told in this account that Abraham and Isaac went together. This reminds us of how the father and the son are perfectly united. As the love between this father and son is truly amazing, so also is the unity between the Father and the Son; they were perfectly united in this transaction.

e. The provision of the sacrifice from God Himself

'And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering' Genesis 22.8.

This statement by Abraham speaks so powerfully about the reality of the sacrifice provided for the atonement of our sin. God provided from Himself on behalf of needy sinners a way of satisfying His pure justice.

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'John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' John 1.29.

f. The submission and obedience of Isaac

'And they came to the place which God had told him of; and 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' Genesis 22.9.

Here is something amazing: Isaac allowed himself to be bound! Abraham at this stage would have explained to Isaac the command of God to him. He would have assured Isaac of his faith in God's power to resurrect him from the dead. By faith Abraham put his son on the altar and by faith Isaac willingly lay bound on it. His submission to the altar signified the binding of Christ to the cause of His people: no escape.

'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth' Isaiah 53.7.

g. The raising up of Isaac

'And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me' Genesis 22.11-12.

As far as Abraham was concerned, as he raised the knife, his son was as good as dead. But now God calls from Heaven and Isaac is taken off the altar. In Abraham's mind the transaction symbolised death and resurrection (*Hebrews 11.19*).

This speaks to us of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. On

Depending by Faith: Abraham's Faith Tested

that great day God the Father actually brought down the knife of His wrath upon His Son, slaying Him on the cross. But then He raised Him again on the third day.

h. The substitute

'And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son' Genesis 22.13.

Here the type changes. We are reminded of another aspect of the death and sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The ram was provided as a substitute for Isaac. As the ram provided the substitute for the natural sinful man, Isaac, so the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the substitute upon the cross for sinful men. He suffered in the stead of His people.

'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' 2 Corinthians 5.21.

i. The Lord will provide

'And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen' Genesis 22.14.

Abraham now makes one of the great prophetic statements found in the Old Testament. Here at Mount Moriah the city of Jerusalem was built and then the Temple.

'Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in mount Moriah' 2 Chronicles 3.1.

Here, in this land of Moriah, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was crucified two thousand years later. As Abraham stood on Mount

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Moriah with his son, he saw by faith when Christ the Messiah would die and then be raised again on behalf of sinners.

Conclusion

There was a pure purpose in God testing Abraham's faith: did he love Isaac more than God? Through this trial Abraham's faith became totally Christ-centred and therein his faith was proved.

7. FAITH IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Isaac's Testimony

*'By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come'
Hebrews 11.20.*

See also *Genesis 25* and *27*.

Isaac's testimony teaches us valuable lessons about the relationship between God's sovereignty and faith. Therefore it is helpful to set *Hebrews 11.20* in its context. However by doing this, difficult questions arise for the finite human mind to understand. But faith must come to the context, reminding us that God is on the throne and is working out His purposes!

1. God's sovereignty

'And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger' Genesis 25.21-23.

It is important to place the sovereignty of God as a foundation stone for the events recorded in *Genesis 27*. The Word of God clearly makes Jacob and Esau examples of God's sovereign grace (*Malachi 1.2-3; Romans 9.9-16*).

Jacob was not chosen because he was going to be a nice person. Nor was he chosen because he was going to be better than his brother Esau. Jacob was chosen simply because of God's sovereign grace. The electing purposes of God remain a mystery to the mind and yet these truths are to be received by faith.

Whose Faith Follow

A person once said to Spurgeon, 'I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.' Spurgeon replied, 'That is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God should love Jacob.'

Are you surprised that God loves you? We cannot fathom the mystery of God's sovereignty, but faith accepts the truth as revealed in God's Word. It is clearly set forth in Scripture on several occasions. For example, the Apostle Peter, like Paul, clearly taught this doctrine. He greets the believers in his first epistle, '*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*'

So in the context of God's sovereignty we consider the family of Isaac and their actions at a most crucial time. God's Word faithfully records the situation as it really was, but it does make uncomfortable reading.

2. Parental favouritism

'And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob' Genesis 25.27-28.

It is said that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Esau found his way into his father's heart through his skilful hunting. Esau was a man's man whom Isaac admired. However, Jacob, found the way into his mother's heart by staying at home. She obviously loved his company and they related well to each other.

Parental favouritism is always divisive and has the potential to damage the harmony of the home.

3. Corruption

'And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he

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was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint... And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?...and he sold his birthright unto Jacob' Genesis 25.29-33.

Unbelieving Jacob takes advantage of his brother's hunger and weakness. Unbelieving Esau despises his birthright. *Hebrews 12.16* speaks volumes about Esau's attitude to God.

The birthright involved a material and spiritual blessing. The son of the birthright received a double portion of the inheritance. He also became head of the family and the spiritual leader upon the death of the father. In Isaac's family the birthright determined who would inherit the covenant God made with Abraham, the covenant made for a land and nation, and the family would also be in the natural lineage of the Messiah.

God had before ordained this blessing would be Jacob's and not Esau's. Therefore Jacob was guilty of scheming in the flesh to gain something God had already promised to him. Yet at the same time Esau despised his birthright.

Luther says: 'This corruption was not a valid transaction. Jacob was buying something which was already his, and Esau was selling something that didn't belong to him.'

The confusion of corruption and compromise!

4. The deceit of Rebekah

'And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them' Genesis 27.13.

Rebekah knew that God had ordained the family blessing for Jacob, but she was determined to ensure its fulfilment by taking matters into her own hands. Humanistic thinking takes over from faith. Her thinking was that the end justified the means.

Whose Faith Follow

When we are willing to abandon the question of right and wrong and our only concern is what works for us, we have embraced the modern idea of pragmatism. This thinking can easily slip into our own lives and has certainly slipped into the thinking of churches up and down the land.

5. The deceit of Jacob

'And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me' Genesis 27.19-20.

Jacob protests at first and then falls in with the plan, thus taking the name of the Lord in vain. When we use deceit to bring about God's promise we bring judgement and sorrow upon ourselves. Rebekah loved having Jacob around the tent but very soon after the action of deceit Jacob fled from the home. Jacob and Rebekah never saw each other again on this Earth! For a man who loved to be at home with his mother the pain of separation must have been severe.

While God in His sovereignty overrules our mistakes to ensure His will is done, He is not the author of evil, and sin has its consequences for which we are responsible. Jacob involves himself in the pathway of deceit, lying words and taking the name of the Lord in vain and this has far-reaching consequences.

6. The disobedience of Isaac

'And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said...make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring

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*it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die'
Genesis 27.1-4.*

'And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near...And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him...Therefore 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 blesseth thee' Genesis 27.21, 27-29.

Isaac is determined to give the blessing to Esau. This was despite the prophecy of God given to Rebekah concerning Jacob – *'the elder shall serve the younger'*. Isaac would also undoubtedly have been aware of this.

Isaac's determination to bless Esau was also despite the way in which Esau had despised his birthright and the manner in which Esau was now united in ungodly marriage relationships (*Genesis 26.34*). Esau was his favourite son.

7. Division

'And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son...And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother' Genesis 27.5-6.

Isaac speaks to Esau in private; however Rebekah overhears. This is a dire situation for such an important matter. Isaac and Rebekah are not praying together over the matter: they are separated over it. Notice how the Scripture refers to Esau *his* son, and Jacob *her* son.

Whenever a believing couple do something of such significance without the other knowing, you can be sure there is an underlying problem.

Whose Faith Follow

8. The distress of Esau

‘And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father...And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob’ Genesis 27.34, 41.

Humanly speaking one could feel sorrow for Esau. His pathetic cry at losing the blessing rings out loud and clear. However Esau was not without blame. Esau despised his birthright and never repented of his actions. He had remorse, he felt sorrow for himself because of his loss, but not because of his sin. Esau never faced up to the truth of the situation. Therefore he found no place for repentance (*Hebrews 12.17*).

Application

What are we to make of such a statement of faith in such a messy situation?

1. Isaac’s faith was in the faithfulness of God for the future

‘See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed: therefore 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 blesseth thee’ Genesis 27.27-29.

The commendation of Isaac’s faith spoken of in *Hebrews* in the midst of such confusion related in the first instance to Isaac’s belief in the providential and faithful God ‘concerning things to come’ (*Hebrews 11.20*). Isaac tried to bless the wrong person, but got the actual first blessing right. It was the blessing concerning things to come that he was assured by faith would happen.

Faith in God's Sovereignty: Isaac's Testimony

2. Isaac trembled exceedingly

'And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed' Genesis 27.33.

This was faith in the future. As the events unfold, here is a classic example of the battle between Isaac's new nature and his old nature. His new nature under God was assured by faith of the future blessing while at the same time his old nature was battling with the reality that this blessing was Jacob's and not Esau's.

Calvin says: 'Remarkable was the faith of the holy man blended with a foolish and inconsiderate carnal affection.'

This explains his response to Esau. While acknowledging the finality and reality of the blessing given to Jacob, he at the same time puts all the blame upon Jacob because of his special affection for Esau (*Genesis 27.35-37*). But nevertheless his faith shines again as, trusting in God's provision, he blesses Esau for the future (*Genesis 27.39*).

3. God is on His throne and working out His purposes

God is sovereign in His purposes over favouritism, deceit, corruption, disobedience and distress. Despite the failure of men God's purposes will unfold. What Satan means for evil, God overrules for good.

However we are not robots but responsible human beings before God. Jacob suffered for his deceit and had to run for his life, yet came to a position of repentance and faith in God. Esau also suffered because he despised his birthright, but never came to a position of repentance and faith.

When the two men meet many years later, the difference between their views on life and respect for God becomes apparent.

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'And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant...And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself... Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough' Genesis 33.5, 9, 11.

Jacob constantly acknowledges God's grace. The expression used by Jacob in the original is stronger than Esau's 'enough'. For Esau his providential prosperity satisfied him while Jacob's satisfaction and contentment included the spiritual dimension.

4. Isaac's faith finally prevails and is victorious

'...And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham' Genesis 28.3-4.

It is important not to forget the way in which Isaac blessed Jacob the second time. Now he is speaking in the right spirit, in faith and knowingly giving it to the right person. Here the blessing is clearly linked to the blessing previously given to Abraham. Isaac as head of the home is passing the blessing on to Jacob. Everything about this second meeting is ordered and clear: Isaac *calls* Jacob; Isaac *blesses* Jacob; and Isaac *directs* Jacob in a godly manner. The blessing starts with God and has a spiritual as well as providential content!

5. God's eternal purposes can never be overturned

From the chaos, deceit and confusion surrounding the first blessing, God in His sovereignty intervenes. Jacob leaves with God's blessing and his father's.

God has to deal with people who are imperfect. God has to work out His divine purposes even when people make mistakes. The Word of God tells us:

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'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us' 2 Corinthians 4.7.

Conclusion

God recognises faith even when it shines in the midst of our struggles with unbelief and failures.

'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief' Mark 9.24.

8. GRACE AND FAITH:

Jacob's Testimony

'By faith Jacob, when he was a-dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff' Hebrews 11.21.

See also *Genesis 28-49.*

Jacob's testimony teaches us about the relationship between God's grace and faith. The grace of God towards needy sinners is so powerfully displayed in the life of Jacob. He was, before his conversion, a deceiver by name and nature yet God loved him, saved him and changed him. *Exodus 3.15* puts Jacob alongside Abraham and Isaac in stature. God is consistent with His sovereignty; mercy allows Him to be identified as the God of Jacob. In this way God encourages us to remember the deep miracle of His grace in salvation and sanctification. What an encouragement this is to us.

There were several crisis points in Jacob's life where he proved God to be faithful and gracious. In these crisis points Jacob came to know God by the promise and direction of His Word and by personal experience of God's dealings with him. Each crisis served to develop his faith in God.

First we will take a journey with Jacob to see God's grace in partnership with his growing faith. Secondly we will consider Jacob's testimony of faith through God's grace at the end of his life (*Hebrews 11.21*).

1. Journey through Jacob's life

a. The seed of faith was sown when running for his life

'And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night,

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because the sun was set...And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of'
Genesis 28.10-15.

Jacob, who used to dwell at home in a tent, is now exposed to the elements – weary, lonely, and depressed. He has an aching body and is in danger from the wild beasts. And now he is resting his head on a pile of stones!

In his extremity God came to him. His dream assured him of God's providential and spiritual care and blessing. The heart of the vision is Christ (see *John 1.51*). His humanity is seen at the foot of the ladder and his divinity at the head. He is seen as the Mediator between Heaven and Earth, the Ruler of the angels and the Lord of providence and grace. Jacob had a faith's glimpse of Christ.

b. Faith strengthened when rejected by Laban and his family

'And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before...And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob...I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me' Genesis 31.1-2, 11, 13.

Grace and Faith: Jacob's Testimony

God is with Jacob. God sees, God knows and God directs.

c. Faith strengthened by God's presence on his journey home

'And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim' Genesis 32.1-2.

'Mahanaim' means 'two hosts' – in front and behind.

d. Faith strengthened by God's Word

'And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee... Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children' Genesis 32.9, 11.

Jacob is in trouble. He displays a pattern for us of how to exercise faith in trouble: through prayer, trusting in the Word of God, showing humility before Him, with an attitude of dependence, and deriving our comfort through faith in the Lord.

e. Faith strengthened by spiritual experience: wrestling with God

'And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed...and he blessed him there' Genesis 32.28-29.

Jacob was concerned for his soul. He wrestled and found blessing! Jacob was not without the Lord in his problems.

f. Faith strengthened when facing conflict in life

'And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God...Let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who

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answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went...So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Beth-el, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother' Genesis 35.1, 3, 6-7.

God said, Go back to Bethel, which reminded Jacob of His promises in time of difficulty and how He had graciously fulfilled those promises.

g. Faith strengthened through making a stand: leaving the idols behind

'And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem...But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Beth-el under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth' Genesis 35.4, 8.

Repentance leads to blessing. Allon-bachuth means oak tree of tears.

'And God appeared unto Jacob again...And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply... And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land' Genesis 35.9-12.

Rachel's death follows this event.

'And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Beth-lehem' Genesis 35.19.

h. Faith strengthened when distraught, having lost Joseph and now experiencing a famine

Grace and Faith: Jacob's Testimony

'And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me' Genesis 42.36.

'And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved' Genesis 43.14.

'And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night...And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation' Genesis 46.1-3.

In grief Jacob was led to submission in faith, and then to worship in joy.

i. Faith strengthened at the end of his life

'And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: but I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said' Genesis 47.29-30.

God must be worshipped. Now we might say, This is all very well to consider Jacob in this way, but surely he was a special case: God doesn't speak directly today in the same manner. This is true. But remember, neither Abraham, Isaac, nor Jacob had the Word of God written as we do.

God does still speak into our case and condition but now through His Word. God speaks to us personally as we read it and hear His Word preached. God's written word is no less authoritative than His audible word given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses.

Whose Faith Follow

At the end of his life God's gracious dealings with Jacob bore incredible fruit in his faith, word and witness. This is evident by Jacob's estimation of God at the end of his life. Jacob had proved God in so many ways. Now in his bodily weakness he ascribes all the glory unto God.

This is evident as he blessed both the sons of Joseph – see *Genesis* 48. Consider this picture: his grandsons, Ephraim and Mannasah, hear Grandfather Jacob speaking. They see Grandfather Jacob in his old age and weakness leaning upon his staff. They witness with their eyes and hear with their ears. Grandfather Jacob worshipping God. This was an unforgettable experience. The last memory they have of Grandfather Jacob is of him worshipping God and blessing them!

2. Jacob's testimony at the end of his life

a. Jacob strengthened himself in the Lord

'And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed'
Genesis 48.2.

Jacob sits on the edge of the bed and leans upon his staff. Such an action was a witness to his grandchildren of two things: firstly, dependence upon God, and secondly, their pilgrim status. Jacob by faith then makes several clear statements about God in the hearing of his grandchildren.

Note that Jacob's testimony of faith is a valuable lesson for grandparents as they witness to their grandchildren.

b. The grandchildren heard that God is almighty

'And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me' *Genesis 48.3.*

The phrase 'Almighty God' is so important! It means God is the all-sufficient One; He is omnipotent – meaning infinite, boundless

Grace and Faith: Jacob's Testimony

in power; He is omnipresent – meaning He is universally present throughout the universe.

c. The grandchildren heard that God is sovereign

'And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession' Genesis 48.4.

Twice Jacob refers to the sovereign will of God in his life. Jacob had previously wanted to make things happen in his own way and time. At the end of his life he now understands his life is subject to God's will.

The phrase *'I will make'* sums up the reality of God's dealings with all His people. God has to intervene in our lives to make us what we can't make ourselves.

'And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect' Genesis 17.1.

This is God's command in all its clarity and it is awesome! God is almighty and sovereign. He has the right to demand perfection; otherwise He wouldn't be God. But God takes blameworthy people like Jacob and makes them blameless through Jesus Christ.

d. The grandchildren heard that God is gracious and merciful

'And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession' Genesis 48.4.

The Israelite nation would be blessed and inherit the land of Canaan. But Jacob by faith reminds Joseph and the grandchildren that the promises of God are not limited for time to a land, or even a

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particular nation. The promise of God given to Abraham went beyond its providential sense to the spiritual sense in Christ. Therefore Jacob speaks of Canaan symbolising the eternal, everlasting inheritance of all those who put their trust in Christ who are of the spiritual seed of Abraham.

e. The grandchildren must know God has provided for him

'And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day' Genesis 48.15.

Jacob commences the pronouncement of the blessing. He begins with God. As we look back over our lives to whom do we give praise for our material blessings? From the day of his birth Jacob acknowledges the good hand of God.

Why is it important for us to say grace at mealtimes? As Christians we should acknowledge God's hand in feeding us (see *Deuteronomy 8.10*).

f. The grandchildren must know that God has redeemed him

'The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads' Genesis 48.16.

Jacob is making reference here to Christ as the Redeemer Who, in a unique manner was present in the Old Testament times in certain ways. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob understood the significance of Christ.

Jacob had a lot to be redeemed from. He was one of God's great examples of a person being rescued from sin. God redeemed him from danger and hurt and, mostly significantly, from sin.

Notice how Jacob uses the word 'all'. This is a very important word for our assurance.

*'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness' 1 John 1.9.*

Grace and Faith: Jacob's Testimony

g. The grandchildren must know that God's plan must be obeyed

'And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations' Genesis 48.17-19.

Jacob, guided by the Holy Spirit of God, puts his right hand on the younger son, Ephraim. Joseph is upset and attempts to change his father's mind. But Jacob was now living close to the Lord and was sure this was His will. Therefore he refused to disobey God to please his son Joseph.

Jacob had learned, from past experience with Isaac his father, that God's plan must be obeyed even though it might go against family culture. Indeed, Joseph must have been aware that in God's sight seniority does not always equal leadership. Joseph himself had been put over his older brothers in the sovereign providence of God.

h. The grandchildren must know that God will keep His promises

'And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers' Genesis 48.21.

Jacob was in Egypt; his son Joseph was now the Prime Minister of Egypt. In spite of all this Jacob still looked by faith toward the promise of God originally made to Abraham. The fulfilment of God's will and promise for the future was the key.

Whose Faith Follow

This reminds us that in whatever way we are blessed here on Earth the future is more beautiful for all believers. Heavenly Canaan land beckons, and God will keep His promise that all believers will enter the promised land.

Conclusion

The last words of a dying man are of great significance. Jacob looks forward by faith to the Messiah.

'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be' Genesis 49.10.

When he was young man at home Jacob had a problem with waiting. But now at the eventide of life grace had had its sanctifying effect and Jacob can say, *'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord' (Genesis 49.18).*

9. FAITH GROWING WITHIN GOD'S PLAN

Joseph's Testimony

'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones' Hebrews 11.22.

See also *Genesis 49.22-26; 50.7-26.*

Joseph's testimony demonstrates to us how faith grows and develops within God's particular plan for our lives. By the end of his life we see how God had taught him to live by faith even in great power. We see even as a Prime Minister he still had his faith firmly fixed upon God.

Joseph when he died was looking to the future by faith, trusting in God's plans. Who would have thought that when Joseph was a teenager at home one day he would be, in the wise plan of God, the Prime Minister of the world's wealthiest nation, Egypt, a Prime Minister who truly believed in God!

Joseph was a remarkable man of God. It is impossible in one message to do justice to his testimony. He was first and foremost a man of faith, a man whose faith in God held firm through an incredibly varied life. God was with Joseph in the family home, as a slave, in prison, then in a position of great political power. Joseph's testimony teaches us that God can help us whatever our calling.

More than once we read God was with Joseph:

'And the Lord was with Joseph' Genesis 39.2.

'But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy' Genesis 39.21.

'But God was with him' Acts 7.9.

Whose Faith Follow

In times of adversity and prosperity God was with him.

A man for whom I have a great respect was a director of a large telecommunications company within a multinational group of companies. He told me on a number of occasions how at difficult meetings he was driven to pray 'Lord help me'. Sitting at the boardroom table with other directors, making decisions depending upon their experience and knowledge, was a man of God with an extra dimension, a man of God who believed in the God of providence and grace.

Joseph's life reminds us how thousands of years ago there was this same blessed partnership: a believer who lived and trusted in the only true sovereign God. The secret to Joseph's faith was its object. He continually focused upon God. Because Joseph's faith was constantly in God, whatever and whoever, it developed until it shone fully perfected on his deathbed.

We can see first of all, as we saw with Jacob, how God worked in so many ways in his life according to His divine plan for the perfecting of his faith.

1. As a teenager: loved and hated – faith in God planted *Genesis* 37

It was evident from a young age that the Lord was working in the life of Joseph. We see this by his tender heart towards sin (*Genesis* 37.2).

Jacob loved Joseph more than all his children. Here again we see the traits of parental favouritism, which we noticed with Jacob's parents. However, Jacob's love for Joseph, put in a positive light, was recognition of a natural and spiritual relationship. The phrase '*he was the son of his old age*' (*Genesis* 37.3) means more than just Jacob was old when Joseph was born. The Jewish historians explain to us that this phrase meant that Joseph was the son of his beloved wife Rachel.

Faith Growing Within God's Plan: Joseph's Testimony

Joseph was the one who provided the most support and comfort for his father. It was Joseph who supported him when he walked; it was Joseph who talked with him and had fellowship with him. Jacob recognised early on that God had planted the seed of faith in Joseph's life. Joseph was the comfort in his old age, because he was a wise son to him.

As a believer Joseph was persecuted by his jealous brothers; his special coat and his dreams foretelling the future made them angry. He was sold as slave (*Genesis 37.28*). His father, Jacob, had been separated from his family because of deceit and anger. Joseph was separated because of his brothers' envy. But like Jacob, '*God was with him*'.

2. As a young man: respected and tempted – faith in God tested ***Genesis 39***

Even as a slave Joseph was respected by Potiphar (*Genesis 39.2-4*), but tempted by Potiphar's wife (*Genesis 39.7-9*). His faith in God prevented him from sinning. He was persecuted for righteousness sake, leading to imprisonment. Faith was planted in Joseph while a teenager but was put to the test in Egypt (*Genesis 49.22-26*).

3. As a growing man: trusted and forgotten – faith in God matured ***Genesis 40***

Now a prisoner, Joseph was trusted by the prison keeper but forgotten by the selfish butler. We see God's overruling even in prison.

There is a great lesson in the story of Ben Hur. Ben Hur was a young Jewish lad who was charged with a crime he had not committed. In a travesty of a trial he was condemned to the galleys. He was chained to a bench and to an oar in the hold of a ship. For weeks and months, and then years, he was forced to pull on that oar. If he should ever slack up, he would feel the sting of the lash. But finally Ben Hur escaped from this barbaric punishment. He found employment as a chariot

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rider. Ben Hur entered a chariot race with a proud Roman man called Mersala. The chariot race was ultimately a test of strength and endurance. As Ben Hur whipped his great horses around the inner ring it was clear that he was the stronger and more fit of the two. The years of pulling on the oar in the hold of a ship had produced a man of steel.

There may be a great deal of injustice in our lives; we may feel that we are chained to an oar like Ben Hur, only to realise later that we have been in God's training gym for future leadership.

'He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant' Psalm 105.17.

4. As a mature man: promoted and prospered – faith in God witnessed

Genesis 41

'And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace' Genesis 41.16.

Now a free man, there is no bitterness or self-pity. God is honoured, and Joseph himself is also honoured.

'for them that honour me I will honour' 1 Samuel 2.30.

5. As a wise man: protector and persuaded – faith in God assured

Genesis 50.15-23

'And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him...And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good' Genesis 50.15, 19-20.

Now as Prime Minister Joseph cares for his family in famine, displaying wisdom in his dealings with his brothers, while being assured of God's sovereignty.

Faith Growing Within God's Plan: Joseph's Testimony

6. As a dying man: steadfast and secure – faith in God perfected Genesis 50.22-26

'And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house...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' Genesis 50.22, 24-25.

In his last years Joseph displayed confidence in God and identification with God's people.

a. Confidence in God

'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel' Hebrews 11v22a.

Death is the most awesome event for any human being. Yet for a believer in God it can be a most remarkable testimony. We know that, because of Jesus Christ, the sting of death had been taken away (*1 Corinthians 15.55-58*).

Joseph as a dying man was absolutely assured of the promises of God. He was incredibly talented, successful, powerful, rich and respected. But Joseph learned to enjoy the blessing of the Lord while keeping his faith in God and his eye on Canaan. It is the position we take in times of prosperity which proves whether or not we truly trust in God. Egypt was the most powerful nation in the world, the land of Goshen most fruitful. But God has a better place – Canaan. This reminds us of Heaven.

Now why was Joseph so sure of the departing of the children of Israel from Egypt? They were prospering in the land of Goshen! But Joseph was absolutely assured of the Word of God.

'And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall

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be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance' Genesis 15.13-14.

Now remember God spoke to Abraham in a particular manner, but Joseph had to trust in the Word of God revealed to his forefathers. He had no special sign or personal word from the Lord; nothing is recorded in Scripture of that nature. He simply had to trust in the Word of the Lord conveyed to him by his father Jacob.

b. Identification with God's people

'and gave commandment concerning his bones' Hebrews 11v22b.

Some people, when they are prospered, consider themselves above their family roots. Joseph, when he was second only to the king of Egypt, identified himself with his family. Now, as he is dying, he instructs that his bones must be carried to Canaan. This is an incredible statement of faith.

The Egyptians must know that Egypt is not his real home. Joseph was willing for his body to remain in Egypt as a sign of hope for the future (*Genesis 50.25-26*). Joseph's coffin was a symbol of hope to the Israelites, when suffering, of a better day to come, from the bondage of slavery in Egypt to freedom in Canaan.

Over four hundred years were to pass before these bones were carried out of Egypt.

'And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him' Exodus 13.19.

Joseph's coffin was then carried for forty years around the wilderness. Eventually they were buried in Shechem.

'And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem' Joshua 24.32.

Faith Growing Within God's Plan: Joseph's Testimony

For all his wealth and position Joseph understood the importance of identification with God's people. The central theme of his will was not his wealth but his identification with the promise of the future inheritance of the children of Israel in Canaan.

Conclusion

- *'I die: and God...'* Genesis 50.24. God remains on the throne (*Psalm 90.2*). Joseph said, *'God will surely visit you'* (Genesis 50.25). We can see God's faithfulness to the children of Israel.

'Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt' Exodus 3.16.

- The partnership between God's faithfulness – 'God will' – and His people's faith – 'You shall' – encapsulates the essence of what it means to walk with the Lord. It is the partnership between God's will and walking by faith and obedience. The certainty of God's visitation will result in the eventual obedience of the children of Israel to enter into the promised land.

Remember that what Joseph was taught when a child and a teenager stayed with him in Egypt. This should be a great encouragement for teachers.

10. THE VICTORY OF CHRIST-CENTRED FAITH

Moses' Testimony

'By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents...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...By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king...Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned'
Hebrews 11.23-29.

See also *Exodus 1-15*.

Recall the well-known account of the birth of Moses, leader of the children of Israel. The new Pharaoh, king of Egypt, had little respect for the important lessons of history. Earlier in their history, the Egyptians had been delivered by God from the awful devastation of a famine. All this was under the wise direction and leadership of the man of God called Joseph, an Israelite. But this new Pharaoh did not know Joseph.

What is more important and sad is that he had no time for God whom Joseph and his father Jacob worshipped. He had no respect historically for the deliverance God had given through him. He was only interested in maintaining his power. Power in the hands of insecure, evil leaders always causes grief to a certain group of people. So a terrible time developed for the children of Israel as they entered into a period of slavery.

Fearful of the numerical growth of the Hebrews, Pharaoh

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commanded that every new-born Hebrew son should be thrown into the river. It was at such a time of increasing persecution that Moses was born. His parents, Amram and Jochebed, feared God above the king and were especially strengthened of the Lord. By faith in the fear of the Lord they hid their new-born baby as serving the Lord and not man. We read they were not afraid of the king's command. They trusted in the Lord and were not afraid!

Providentially it seems God used the beauty of Moses as a means of further inspiring parental protection. More important than this factor, Stephen said in his final sermon that Moses was well pleasing to God. But after three months Moses could no longer be kept hidden. Jochebed prepared an ark of bulrushes, daubed it with asphalt and pitch and placed Moses in it. Moses was not thrown in the river by the soldiers to drown but was placed in the reeds by his mother in this little ark, near the bank of the river, ultimately entrusting Moses to the sovereign providence of God by faith.

It is at this point we see again the almighty hand of God in perfect timing, overruling what Satan means for evil and turning it all around for His ultimate glory. Both in the short term and long term God is in control; God's prophesy and promises must be fulfilled. In times of persecution it is good to remember God remains in control and permits it under His perfect will.

God had said to Abraham:

'Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years' Genesis 15.13.

Stephen recorded:

'Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

Victory of Christ-centred Faith: Moses' Testimony

In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair' Acts 7.18-20.

It seems strange to human reasoning why God should choose such a dangerous time for Moses to be born, but allowing his birth at such a time we see clearly the unstoppable sovereign purposes of God. Notice also the perfect timing of God with Pharaoh's daughter:

'And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it' Exodus 2.4-5.

Note the overruling hand of God: his sister Miriam, showing great courage and presence of mind, presents herself in love and care on behalf of her baby brother and offers to find a Hebrew nurse for the baby. She goes and fetches her mother, who comes to Pharaoh's daughter. So in God's overruling providence Jochebed has her son back again in safety for his infant years, and gets paid for the privilege of caring for him!

'And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child and nursed it' Exodus 2.9.

As a young boy Moses had a godly upbringing. But then, according to the arrangement, he is taken into the palace and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. She provided him with the best education, wealth and opportunities the world had to offer at that time. As Moses matured he was given a position of authority and power as a prince in Egypt. Stephen records:

'And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds' Acts 7.22.

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He was an intellectual genius, a powerful political leader, and a mighty soldier. Jewish historians tell us that on one occasion Moses led the army of Egypt in a famous battle to victory. He was therefore highly honoured and respected as mighty in deeds. Some historians consider that Moses was being groomed to be the next Pharaoh.

Now we consider the faith of Moses which directed and inspired his life at this time. One of the lessons here is how a Christ-centred faith is victorious over all the world has to offer.

1. By faith he refused

‘By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter’ v24.

This was an incredible step of faith by Moses. Material power, honour and prosperity were his as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. In the original *‘When he was come to years’* refers not only to maturity as an adult but also to when he had become great in status. At this stage of material greatness and power, at the age of forty he refused to be called son of Pharaoh’s daughter.

There came a time in his life when his true identity meant more to him than all that Egypt had to offer. Moses asked himself the question, ‘Who am I?’ He asked himself, ‘To whom do I really belong?’ Moses had an identity crisis. He was born Jewish but educated and trained as an Egyptian. He had to decide at some point in his life whose side he was on.

This was an important choice because it would determine the rest of his life. If he decided, ‘I am an Egyptian’ and renounced his heritage, he would live a life of ease; he would have an outstanding career; he was in line to be the next Pharaoh; he would have fame and fortune. But by faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Instead by faith he identified himself with God and God’s people. He

Victory of Christ-centred Faith: Moses' Testimony

demonstrated his commitment to this decision by going down to visit his brethren in Goshen.

Encouragement: While only a little boy Moses was told about Abraham and God's promise to the children of Israel. He was told about the greatness of Jehovah God. Before he became learned in all the wisdom of Egypt the seeds of biblical truth were sown. Now in his maturity and greatness Moses weighs up his situation, and the roots of truth prove more powerful than the pull of materialism. By faith he refused! He denied selfish interests of wealth and greatness to identify himself with God's people.

Challenge: Is identification with God's people more important to us than identification with the world?

2. By faith he chose

'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season' v25.

This decision of Moses was not a snap decision but it was carefully weighed up. What was the reasoning and rationale behind his decision? Moses applied the eternal test to his situation. In the original the statement '*pleasures of sin*' has a temporary emphasis added. 'Temporary' or 'passing' attached to '*pleasures of sin*' is crucial to our understanding of the reasoning of Moses. On the one hand was suffering; on the other hand was pleasure. Identification with God's people meant suffering, while identification with the world meant temporary pleasure. This decision was taken by faith in the Word of God.

In the end the lure and attraction of the world were no match for the eternal promise of God to dwell with His people and ensure their future blessing for time and eternity.

Encouragement: Did Moses make the right decision? Did his decision prove worthwhile? Over fifteen hundred years later the Messiah

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Jesus Christ was on Earth. One day he took Peter, James and John up a mountain and was transfigured (glorified) before their eyes. The disciples saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah in perfect fellowship in a glorious relationship.

Pharoah was eternally lost – Moses eternally saved.

Challenge: How often do we remind ourselves of the passing element to the pleasure of this world?

3. By faith he esteemed

‘Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt’ v26a.

‘To esteem’ means to evaluate the situation. Moses established a value system in his life different from the world’s. World values are:

- Pleasure – ‘I want to feel good’;
- Possessions – ‘I want to have a lot’;
- Power – ‘I want to be important’.

Moses says:

- God’s purpose in Christ is more valuable than passing pleasures;
- God’s provision eternally in Christ is more valuable than present possessions;
- God’s peace in Christ is more valuable than political power.

For Moses identification with God’s people meant more than identification with a nation. Even more important than that was his identification with the Messiah Jesus Christ. Moses took up his cross and followed Christ. His sufferings were ultimately because of identification with Christ the Messiah.

Encouragement: God gives us extreme examples in His Word to inspire faith.

Challenge: If Moses can take such a step of faith under such

Victory of Christ-centred Faith: Moses' Testimony

pressure, can we not in our smaller situation have the same faith in the Almighty God?

4. By faith he looked

'for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward' v26b.

This statement confirms to us the secret behind the faith of Moses. He looked to the reward and respected it. Not only was Moses assured of the reward of faith for the children of Israel in Canaan, but also, even more importantly, he was assured of the reward of faith to all those who trust in Christ which is eternal glory. Here we have the secret of Christian perseverance. We have the perfect example in Christ Himself.

'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God' Hebrews 12.2.

Encouragement: Think how we look forward to our holidays, our birthdays, or meeting up with friends. If we look forward to the things of time, how much more should we look forward to the reward of God in Heaven!

Challenge: How earthbound is our vision?

'Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' 2 Peter 3.13.

5. By faith he forsook

'By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible' v27.

Considering the link being made with verse 28, this refers to the second departure of Moses from Egypt when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses put verse 26 into action: *'He endured, as seeing him who is invisible.'* *'Looking unto Jesus.'*

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With great courage he stood before Pharaoh the powerful leader of Egypt with brother Aaron and said: “The Lord says, “Let my people go””. Eventually he led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Encouragement: Eventually the right time had come and Moses was sent back by God to Egypt, having been providentially and spiritually prepared by God in the wilderness. By the time Moses arrived back in Egypt he had the faith, maturity and experience to be a leader, but in God’s time. Because of his calling, because of his faith in God’s Word, he fearlessly led a huge company of people out of Egypt. Despite the enormous challenge ahead, he persevered because he focused on God and his goal, not on his problems. He had been taught through truth and experience to fear God and not man. Now he is God’s deliverer in God’s time, trusting only in God and leading by faith.

Challenge: Moses’ great strength was to be a leader of people with a God- fearing and eternal perspective. By faith in God he stood up to Pharaoh, forsook Egypt and went out in dependence upon God.

6. By faith he kept

‘Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them’ v28.

When the Lord instituted the Passover Moses followed these instructions by faith. He understood that only through the sprinkling of blood of the lamb was there security. Only those who stayed in the houses with the door posts sprinkled by the blood of the lamb were secure from the destruction of the firstborn. That the Passover was a symbol of Christ was confirmed by Paul.

‘For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us’ 1 Corinthians 5.7.

Encouragement: The Passover reminds us of the security of salvation through the death of Jesus Christ our Passover. No one who was

Victory of Christ-centred Faith: Moses' Testimony

under the protection of the blood of the lamb came under the judgement of God. So today our only hope of salvation is the blood of Jesus Christ our Passover Lamb of God.

'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony' Revelation 12.11.

Challenge: Moses pointed to the sacrifice as the only way of security and atonement.

Conclusion

- By faith Moses refused, chose, esteemed, looked, forsook and kept.
- Faith made the difference between slavery and freedom.
- His faith inspired separation, sacrifice and service.

11. FAITH EXERCISED

Joshua's Testimony

'By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days' Hebrews 11.30.

See also *Joshua* 5 and 6.

Joshua's testimony demonstrates to us how faith is exercised when facing a huge challenge in life.

Moses had died and gone to Heaven and now Joshua is the leader of the Israelites. He is continuing in the God-fearing manner of Moses.

1. Faith guided under the Commander

'And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?' Joshua 5.13-14.

Joshua wanted to know on what side this angelic man was. The answer Joshua got was not about what side he was on but rather the fact that the Lord was in control of the situation. Therefore the most important step for Joshua was to be sure he was in the Lord's will: *'What saith my lord unto his servant?'*

Application: Before Joshua could lead the children of Israel into battle he must understand who was the ultimate Commander. The inspiration to his faith was that actually God was in control.

2. Faith displayed in worship

'What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the

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Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so
Joshua 5.14-15.

The next step for Joshua in preparation for battle was worship. He was on holy ground! Joshua must understand that as a servant of the living God he was called to reverent obedience. He must ultimately understand that this battle was not his but the Lord's.

The Lord gave him a promise:

'And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour'
Joshua 6.2

in partnership with some very unusual instructions:

'And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout'
Joshua 6.3-5a.

He then gave him the promised outcome of obedience:

'and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him' Joshua 6.5b.

Application: Joshua was given a promise, then a plan and then the purpose of the plan: the walls of Jericho would be flattened. However behind the promise, the plan and the purpose Joshua must first appreciate the position of the Lord as the Commander-in-Chief of operations. He must be worshipped at the outset.

Faith Exercised: Joshua's Testimony

3. Faith displayed to the enemy

Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the Lord said unto Joshua...ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days...and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn...all the people shall shout with a great shout' Joshua 6.1-5.

The conquering of Jericho is an example of faith displayed as a public witness to the unbelieving world. For example, a silent army marching around a city was a display of faith in the sovereign command of God. God called the Israelites to do something unusual – march silently around the city of Jericho. God commanded and they obeyed, however unusual the command.

Application: 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds' 2 Corinthians 10.4.

4. The discipline of faith

'And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days' Joshua 6.3, 14.

It must have extremely challenging to this army to follow such instructions. Unbelief would say, What's the point? Why be made to look silly before the enemy? Perhaps they will mistake our inaction for inability. If the priests want to carry the ark around the city, fine, but we soldiers may as well stay in the camp. We can wait our turn to get stuck into the real business of fighting.

However this was a very disciplined army that obeyed in faith

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however strange the directions. This was a display of order according to the perfect timing of God. The principle of a believer waiting on the Lord and patiently obeying His Word can often seem very strange to an unbeliever looking on. The philosophy of the world is to promote yourself; you are in control of your destiny. This was a patient army, willing to walk within the perfect timing of God, to wait for His word to move forward. This army realised that the security of Jericho would only be broken with God's help. God's ways are best.

In the Word of God seven is considered to be a perfect number. For example, the world was created in six days and the seventh was a day of rest making the complete week. Here the army walked around the city six days and on the seventh day victory was obtained. On the seventh day they walked around the city seven times and then in God's time comes the victory.

God's ways are perfect and this army conformed by disciplined faith to the perfect will of God. True disciplined faith is resting on God's promises and complying with His precepts.

Application: There are many examples in Scripture which teach us about the importance of a disciplined faith, without which we will not succeed. Consider Naaman. To dip in the River Jordan seven times seemed an humiliating and pointless exercise. But until Naaman disciplined his will by faith to God's he remained a leper.

5. Faith encouraged

And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord. And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the Lord. And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before

Faith Exercised: Joshua's Testimony

the Lord, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them...And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, 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. So the ark of the Lord compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp' Joshua 6.6-13.

The Ark of the Lord is mentioned no less than seven times in these verses. The Ark of the Lord was a visible symbol of the holiness and mercy of God. The Ark of the covenant was also a sign of God's promise and presence; it served to encourage the children of Israel. So while the position of the Lord as the Supreme Commander inspired faith, the presence of the Lord encouraged faith.

To experience and be encouraged by God's presence we need to see how important are the times of quiet contemplation and reflection upon God and His Word. This is why it is so important to have period of quiet before the start of worship.

'But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him' Habakkuk 2.20.

There was an atmosphere of reverence as the Ark, the symbol of God's presence was carried around the city, not a word being said. Whatever lies before the children of Israel, however strange their conduct may appear to their enemies on the walls of Jericho, the Ark was the sign that God was with them and they needed to quietly contemplate and consider this.

'The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?' Psalm 118.6.

Application: When Jacob knew he had to face Esau the next day the presence of the Lord meant everything to him. So as we face the future the presence of the Lord is absolutely crucial. Before the

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children of Israel went into battle they were encouraged by knowing the position and presence of the Lord.

6. The assurance of faith

'And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that 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 6.16, 20.

The Word of God clearly states the people of Jericho were in fear of the children of Israel. This was owing to the way in which God had worked on their behalf. But instead of repenting they locked themselves up in the city. They depended upon the thickness of the walls as their defence.

So the committed faith in God of the Israelites and the stubborn wall of unbelief against God shown by the people of Jericho meet head to head. The ultimate victory was on the side of those who had faith in God.

The people had patiently, reverently and silently waited for the signal to shout. Finally on the seventh day the signal came: the trumpets sounded and the people shouted with one accord with a great shout. Joshua, their leader, had total confidence in the Lord. God had said to Joshua:

'And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him' Joshua 6.5.

Faith Exercised: Joshua's Testimony

Now Joshua can say: *'Shout, for the Lord has given you the city.'* The people go from complete silence to deafening noise. When they were required to keep silent by faith they did, and when required to shout by faith they did. We are called to a flexibility of faith within the unchanging will of God.

Many years before, when Joshua was an assistant to Moses, together with Caleb he told the people to go forward and take the land. Because of unbelief they rejected the call of faith and died in the wilderness. Forty years later Joshua is calling the people to act in faith. This time there is no mistaking their commitment to obey.

'Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies' Psalm 60.12.

Application: The assurance of faith requires of us adaptability. This example teaches us that faith requires us sometimes to be silent for God while at other times to shout for God: *'a time to keep silence, and a time to speak'* (*Ecclesiastes 3.7*). Are we prepared to adapt our will to God's will, or do we have a one-track method of obedience?

Conclusion

- The refuge for the terrified unbelievers was in Jericho. They could see the walls; they were thick, they looked secure, the city was renowned for its fortifications. The strength of the city walls was their only hope (*Joshua 6.1*). It was these walls, which fell down around them.
- The refuge and security for the believer is simply doing the will of the Lord by faith.

12. FAITH THAT SAVES

Rahab's Testimony

'By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace' Hebrews 11.31.

See also *Joshua 2*.

The testimony of Rahab is an example of the amazing grace of God shown to an unworthy sinner. Rahab had been a harlot, or in modern terminology a prostitute. However Rahab was wonderfully saved by God's grace.

At the point in her life when she receives the spies into her home her life as a prostitute was finished. Her house was simply a lodging house. To infer anything else would also cast doubt on the character of the two spies. These spies were hand-picked believers, being sent specifically by the man of God, Joshua. Rahab is referred to as a harlot as she *had been*, to magnify the wonderful grace of God to her. In a similar way John Newton was often known as the converted slave captain.

So when the spies knocked on the door of Rahab's house God had already begun His work of grace in her life. The Word says she received the spies by faith in peace. She was ready to receive the spies as a converted person by faith in God, according to His timing. Her faith in God inspired her to be kind to the spies and care for them and protect them.

In the account it is clear that Rahab lied to the Jericho police to save the spies.

'And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: and it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when

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it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them' Joshua 2.4-5.

The Word of God does not condone the lie, does not excuse the lie, but it states the facts of the matter truthfully. This is one of the strengths of the Word of God and proves its truthfulness. The Word of God is not adjusted to suit; it is not a manipulation of the truth. It is a truthful account. It tells the story as it is, warts and all. We must be careful to distinguish what the Bible *reports* and what it *recommends*, and between what it *records* and what it *requires*.

It is important not to get caught up in pointless conjecture or criticism of passages of Scripture. In doing so we miss the positive truth and lessons coming from the account.

One writer described such an attitude as being like a man whose wife opens the fridge to show her husband the salad and dessert she has prepared for their dinner guests. Her husband scarcely glances at the delicacies but rubs his finger on the top of the fridge and goes off muttering about the dust he has found there.

Such are the people who major on *Joshua 2.4-5* yet fail to embrace the amazing grace in *Joshua 2.9-11*. Better to have the wisdom of Matthew Henry, who said: 'God accepted her faith and pardoned her iniquity.'

Rahab's faith is commended for the way in which she received the spies into her home in peace. She provided for them shelter, and she was willing to be identified with the people of God, all the while being surrounded by antagonistic and terrified unbelievers. This kind hospitality was entered into by faith in God.

Loyalty and identification with the people of God is an important part of Christian faith. Lydia, after her conversion, received Paul into her house even after his imprisonment.

Faith that Saves: Rahab's Testimony

Let us then consider this woman of faith in more detail for encouragement and instruction.

Rahab's conversion

Remember Rahab was a Canaanite. She had led a life abusing her body; she also encouraged and enticed men to do the same. No one in her city believed in God. Everyone in the city was living life opposed to God. Humanly speaking everything was stacked up against the conversion of Rahab.

Rahab's conversion reminds us of the secret work of the Holy Spirit in conviction. Everyone in the city had heard about the amazing power of God Who helped the children of Israel. Only Rahab took the message to heart in a proper manner; only Rahab really considered and pondered over what she heard; only Rahab carefully considered the issues at stake. She weighed things up in her mind. The gods she had been worshipping disappointed her.

Remember this lady lived her life to the full, nothing held back. She was probably at every big worldly party in town to be of service. But there came a time when she started to think seriously about life. She compared the gods she worshipped with God whom the children of Israel worshipped and followed. She considered her own condition before such a holy and mighty God. She understood the fact that Jericho was next in line for punishment.

'And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any

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more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath' Joshua 2.9-11.

She looked at the walls around the city and realised that however thick and strong, they would be no match, against such a God! She considered the prospect of death under God's judgement. Where was she going? She realised her need to be right with God. Her conversion came by listening carefully to the messages about the God of Israel:

- the message of God's power in dividing the Red Sea to enable the escape of the children of Israel;
- the message of God's power over the might of the Amorites and their god.

The Holy Spirit applied the news with conviction and God's grace conquered. The choice for Rahab was to trust in the walls of Jericho surrounding the city, or trust in God.

It is interesting to note the judgement and mercy of God. Those trusting in the walls alone for security witnessed the wall fall down in front of their eyes. Rahab lived in a house *on* the city wall but trusted in God, not *in* the wall. The part of the wall in which she was living remained protected until her deliverance!

Consider what the wall meant to the inhabitants of Jericho as unbelievers.

a. Ownership: A wall marks what belongs to a city. Its presence says: 'This is ours!'

b. Boundaries: A wall shows how far a city extends, where it begins and where it ends.

c. Security: A wall imparts a sense of protection.

d. Arrogance: A wall, well-constructed, can be a source of pride for the inhabitants.

Faith that Saves: Rahab's Testimony

e. Capability: A wall indicates power to erect it and be securely contained within it.

f. Limitation: A wall restricts movement of enemies and inhabitants.

The walls were the only security for the inhabitants of Jericho.

Conclusion

- You can build your own walls around yourself and hide behind them: walls of self-sufficiency; walls of independence; walls of pride; walls of wisdom. But like the walls of Jericho they prove unable to resist the power of God.
- Faith calls us to trust in the message of the Gospel and put our trust in the unseen God rather than hide behind the visible walls like the inhabitants of Jericho. Man-made walls cannot resist the judgement of God!

13. FAITH FOR ALL TIMES

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: 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' Hebrews 11.32-34.

Paul realises he could spend a great deal of time continuing to give specific examples of faith in God. For example, many sermons could be preached on the faith of David. But he intends us now to grasp the final points of his argument. One of these points is that true, living faith is for all times and all situations.

These people of God accomplished great things by faith. The believers recorded in *Hebrews 11* overcame through faith, and proved their faith in all circumstances in life, and all are now in glory.

Another point to note is that they did have failures in their life at times, when left to themselves. However *Hebrews 11* graciously only dwells on the positive and commends their faith. Is this not of great comfort and assurance for us? The Lord remembers our faith and forgives and forgets our iniquities as He views us and receives us in Jesus Christ. While God does not condone their failures, He does commend their faith. This is God's mercy and grace!

Now here Paul summarises the various tests of their faith. This section will use a lot of Scripture references as we remind ourselves of various accounts of faith.

1. Through faith subdued kingdoms

a. Gideon: with a little army of three hundred men trusting in God.

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'And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me' Judges 7.2.

'And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place' Judges 7.7.

It is better to trust in the wisdom of the Lord and serve for His glory with a few, than to put confidence in numbers.

'So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled' Judges 7.19-21.

A little in the hands of the Lord is better and more powerful than a lot in the hands of the world. Kingdoms are subdued by faith in God's way. Satan's kingdom is subdued not by numbers but by the Word of God and Christ our Saviour.

'Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you' Judges 8.22-23.

Matthew Henry states: 'The same faith that gave Gideon so much

courage and honour enabled him to act with great meekness and modesty towards his brethren afterwards. It is the excellency of the grace of faith that, while it helps men to do great things, it keeps them from having high and great thoughts of themselves.’

b. Barak: who overcame the oppression of Sisera and his army under the instruction of Deborah the prophetess

‘And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. And the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots [nine hundred], and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet’ Judges 4.14-15.

Sisera’s confidence was chiefly in his chariots; therefore particular notice is taken of them. Nine hundred chariots of iron which, with scythes fastened to their axletrees, when driven into an army of footmen did terrible damage.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, records that when Barak saw this sight before him his heart failed him for fear. But Deborah strengthened him in the Lord.

Matthew Henry states: ‘In every undertaking it is good to be satisfied that God goes before us, that we are in the way of our duty and under his direction. If we have ground to hope that God goes before us, we ought to go on with courage and cheerfulness. Be not dismayed at the difficulties you meet with in resisting Satan, in serving God, or suffering for him for has not the Lord gone out before thee? Follow him fully then.’

It is better to trust in the Word of the Lord and the way of the Lord, doing battle by faith with His presence.

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'Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel' Judges 5.1-3.

'So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years' Judges 5.31.

Barak's faith taught him to give all the praise and glory unto God. Faith flies to God and praises God for all His mercies and deliverances. Faith will always be a worshipping faith.

c. Samson: who was God's means of judgement against the Philistines

'Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars...And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon

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the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life [3000]’ Judges 16.23-25, 28-30.

Before his capture Samson was like a lone warrior upsetting the Philistines under the permissive will of God. At the time of his death he was dragged into an idolatrous party held in honor of the Philistine god Dagon. Blinded, slapped, kicked and mocked by the Philistines, as a type of Christ, in the hands of the enemy Samson hurt at the loss of his eyes. He was also disturbed in his mind by the blasphemy against the God of Israel. Samson gives his life trusting in God as God’s instrument of justice against the Philistines.

Ultimately Samson laid down his life by faith in God, for Samson realised that God’s honour was despised by the Philistines leaders.

d. Jephthah: who was rejected by his family, and lived as an unbeliever with a crowd of unbelievers around him

Later he was raised up by God to be a leader and put his trust in God. By faith he was victorious in battle.

‘And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the Lord deliver them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The Lord be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh’ Judges 11.9-11.

Jephthah was a trophy of God’s grace rejected by man and chosen by God. His victories in battle were a testimony to a man who began his leadership ascribing by faith the power unto the Lord in victory, and in prayer trusting in the Lord.

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Matthew Henry comments: ‘The grace of God often finds out, and fastens upon, the most undeserving and ill-deserving persons to do great things for them and by them. Jephthah was the son of a harlot. The grace of faith, wherever it is, will put men upon acknowledging God in all their ways.’

e. David: his battle with Goliath

‘Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied’ 1 Samuel 17.45.

David’s battle with Goliath was exercised by faith in the name of the Lord of hosts. David, as a man of war, had learned how to be God’s tool of justice while at the same time living by faith. He fought by faith, he led by faith, he lived by faith and he subdued kingdoms by faith: Syria, Moab, Ammon, Amalek, Edom, and the Philistines.

f. David: his leadership

‘And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord, and the king’ 1 Chronicles 29.20.

David was a man who started his leadership by faith and ended his leadership in worship by faith.

Matthew Henry says: ‘The same faith made him a very successful and victorious prince, and, after a long life of virtue and honour (though not without some foul stains of sin), he died in faith, relying upon the everlasting covenant that God had made with him and his, ordered in all things and sure; and he has left behind him such excellent memoirs of the trials and acts of faith in the book of Psalms as will ever be of great esteem and use, among the people of God.’

2. Through faith wrought righteousness

Samuel: known as a godly man

‘And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord’ 1 Samuel 3.19-20.

Samuel was just one of the many faithful prophets who stood for the Lord and His Word, who preached righteousness to the nation. We have many others in the Word of God, including:

Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

As we seek to serve the Lord and be true to His Word we all do so by faith. It is good to remind ourselves that the great point being made in *Hebrews 11* is the blessing of living by faith, for only living by faith will bring forth the real fruit of righteousness in our life and witness. Whatever the situation, whatever the time, whatever the opposition, it is ultimately to be faith in God and His Word.

The prophets were ridiculed, imprisoned, despised and rejected but in the end were proved right by faith. Their testimony remains a righteous and Christ-centred testimony by faith.

3. Through faith obtained promises

By faith the prophets received the promises from God concerning the Messiah. They were inspired by the Word of God not just for time events but for the future coming of the Messiah and the future inheritance in glory. By faith they looked forward to the heavenly City whose builder and maker is God.

‘That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises’ Hebrews 6.12.

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‘Faith in God makes great optimists.’ This is the true perspective, leading to victory.

Adoniram Judson was imprisoned in a foul jail with heavy chains attached to his feet and bound to a bamboo pole. A fellow prisoner who was an unbeliever said to him in sarcasm, ‘Dr Judson, what about the prospect of the conversion of the heathen?’ Dr Judson replied, ‘The prospects are just as bright as the promises of God.’

4. Through faith stopped the mouths of lions

Daniel: trusted God in the face of death

‘My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt’ Daniel 6.22.

Persecuted because of his faithfulness to God, his faith led him into a den of great blessing. This even provides an incredible picture of the work of the Saviour shutting Satan’s mouth. A den of lions with God’s presence is a taste of Heaven on Earth; a den of lions without God’s presence is a taste of hell on Earth.

5. Through faith quenched the violence of fire

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: walked with God in the fire

‘He answered and said, 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 3.25.

Faith in God brings liberty! Whether they were saved or delivered they would trust in the Lord. Remember how the only thing that was burnt was the ropes tied around them by the enemies of God. Faith in God brings freedom to walk in the trial, for we know the Lord is with us in it. The way to freedom and fellowship with God is through the gates of faith and faithfulness.

6. Through faith escaped the edge of the sword

a. Elisha and his servant: protected by God when facing certain death

‘And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha’ 2 Kings 6.15-17.

The ministry of angels: God’s servants are here on Earth, invisible and yet present.

A minister I knew in the West country told us the story of a time when he felt the presence of God’s servants protecting him. He was standing one day in his dry cleaning business under a glass roof inspecting some cleaning. As he stood there he heard someone call his name. He was busy, so did not respond straight away. However, he heard his name called again, quite urgently, so he left the table and went towards the sound of the voice. Just after he moved away a large shard of glass fell from the roof, straight down where he had been standing! None of his workers had called him.

Another illustration of this protection by God’s ministering angels is told of a missionary working in a tribal land. He had met with some hostility, and one night a large group of angry men, armed and threatening, approached the missionary’s home. He was quite afraid as he had nothing and no one to defend himself and his family against such an attack, but suddenly the approaching army turned and fled. Some time later, after the Lord had blessed the work and the tribal leader

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had been converted, the missionary asked him what had happened that night. The leader said, When we saw the large army all around your house we knew we could not attack you.

We need faith to trust in God at all times, to trust in God's way of deliverance and protection or otherwise. The following are examples of this wise faith:

b. Esther and the Jews

The Jews were delivered through the faith and courage of Esther and of godly Mordecai.

'For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' Esther 4.14.

c. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up' Daniel 3.16-18.

d. Job

He said in his trouble, *'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him' Job 13.15.*

These displayed faith in God whatever the outcome.

7. Through faith out of weakness were made strong

King Jehoshophat: surrounded by the joint armies of Moab and Ammon

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'O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee' 2 Chronicles 20.12.

Faith acknowledges weakness, dependence, and the need of wisdom and help. Faith is focused.

8. Through faith waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens

a. Moses: fighting against the Amalekites in the wilderness

Exodus 17 tells us of the time Amalek fought with the Israelites in Rephidim. Moses stood on a hill, and while his arms were raised Joshua prevailed in battle. When weary his arms went down, then the Amalekite enemy prevailed. So Moses rested his arms on two stones and Aaron and Hur held up his hands. Joshua and the children of Israel then prevailed again.

There is a great lesson here spiritually. Only as we pray by faith upholding the Lord's servants will we be victorious over the enemy of souls, Satan. Whenever we go to worship, the enemy of souls will prevail if we do not pray for ourselves and the minister. We can only put to flight the armies of the aliens by faith and in prayer. We can only be valiant in the battle by faith and prayer.

C H Spurgeon used to plead with his church to uphold his arms in prayer that the battle might be won.

b. Gideon: going into battle

'And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled' Judges 7.20-21.

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9. Through faith women received their dead raised to life again

a. The Shunammite woman: going to Elisha the man of God by faith

'And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again' 2 Kings 4.18-22.

'And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her' 2 Kings 4.30.

Where do we run in a crisis? Practically we run to the doctor or hospital, and rightly so. But spiritually we run by faith to the Lord: 'Lord help me.' This was the direction of faith of the Shunammite.

10. Through faith others were tortured but did not accept deliverance

We can see how these examples of persecuted believers in the Old Testament kept their future inheritance in view. Rather than be delivered from death by denying God they chose by faith to die and be part of the better and eternal resurrection, unique to those who die in faith. Two resurrections are in view: one to life and one to condemnation. They had a part in the better resurrection.

11. Through faith had various trials and persecutions

Not all gained providential deliverance from God. Some had trials of faith in times of terrible persecution and death. The point being made is that faith works wherever and whatever for those who trust

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in God at all times. One commentator said:

‘Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace. Trust in Him at all times.’

* * * * *

So we can see with this overview that faith is effective in all places and all situations: in battle, in leadership, in teaching, in bereavement, in persecution, in poverty. These men and women came through, not because they were perfect; they all made mistakes as we do. These men and women came through because they had faith in God. Their faith in God enabled them to overcome in the difficult times and overcome sin and Satan.

The Apostle Paul is also assuring us that, while faith works in all situations, the believer needs to understand that God has a right to lead us through whatever situations he sees fit; victory and failure, prosperity and adversity; faith for all times!

14. THE MESSAGE OF FAITH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

'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' Hebrews 11.39-40.

1. Their testimony of faith

The only testimony recognised by God as good is the one based upon faith. This surely is one of the key messages coming out of this chapter.

2. The object of their faith

What is remarkable about the believers in the Old Testament is their faith in the future fulfilment of God's Word. Paul has given these remarkable examples and then reminds us they did not receive the promise. This means they went to glory before the incarnation and revelation of Jesus Christ. However, despite living in times of partial revelation, they looked by faith to the full revelation in Jesus Christ.

3. The challenge of the Old Testament believers

Now we are believers living in the New Testament age. Jesus Christ has been revealed to this world in His life, death and resurrection. Therefore if the Old Testament believers demonstrated such faith before the coming of Christ, how much more should we who have the full Gospel of Jesus Christ! They lived under the types and shadows of the coming Christ; we live under the fulfilment of the types and shadows in Christ.

4. The assurance for New Testament believers

The word 'better' is used often in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. It serves to make the point that everything about Christ is better than what has gone before. We live under the reality of the better.

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5. The comfort of God's sovereign purposes in partnership with faith

The world will continue until everyone of God's chosen people is saved. The Church is not complete, not perfected, until all the sheep of Jesus Christ are safely in the fold. The Church is to be one body: believers from Old Testament times and the New Testament times are ultimately in the same family, the family of God. It is on the basis of the teaching of *Hebrews 11* that the Apostle Paul develops his teaching further to Christ. For that reason we will end by looking at *Hebrews 12.1-3: 'Looking unto Jesus'*.

15. LOOKING UNTO JESUS

‘Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds’ Hebrews 12.1-3.

1. Remember: the powerful witness of God’s people

‘Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses’ v1a.

Christian believers are clearly instructed to remember the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before! The witness of their testimony still has a voice to us today, encouraging us to continue.

2. Lay aside: throw off the weights and sins which so easily surround us

‘...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us’ v1b.

The picture being used is of an athlete running in an arena. Anything which hinders progress is laid aside to give freedom in the race. So the Christian is called to lay aside weights and sins which hinder and obstruct.

A weight may be a lawful thing but which is taking over our life, dragging us down in our spiritual lives. It could also be a past hurt which we are refusing to let go and our spiritual lives are suffering as a result. I once counselled a person who could remember details

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in marriage relationship difficulties going back years. Clinging on to them acted as a weight.

The sin described here is that which so easily surrounds us, becomes part of our daily lives and grips us; for example, sinful habits which so easily become part of everyday life. Lay them aside and let go!

How can we lay aside? There is really only one place to lay aside the sin and hurt of the past, and that is by faith looking unto Jesus. Jesus Christ died to atone for our sins and to take away their guilt. In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* it was at the cross that Christian's burden rolled from his back.

The missionary David Brainerd, who spent his brief life (he died at the age of thirty) ministering to the American Indians, wrote in his journal these words: 'I never got away from Jesus and Him crucified. When my people were gripped by this great evangelical doctrine of Christ and Him crucified, I had no need to give instructions about holiness. I found that one followed as the sure and inevitable fruit of the other.' He also said in another place: 'I find my converts begin to put on the garments of holiness and their common life begins to be sanctified even in small matters when they are possessed with the doctrine of Christ and Him crucified.'

Let go – throw away – reject – remove those things that hinder us, and slow us down, ensnaring us!

3. Patiently endure: persevere

...and let us run with patience the race that is set before us' v1.

The Christian race is not a 100 metre sprint, but more like a marathon. Patient perseverance is required to the end. The great ambition is to endure right to the finish line.

In a practical way Abraham demonstrated this with the promise of his son Isaac. By faith he trusted in God's promise despite the circumstances.

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*'And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise'
Hebrews 6.15.*

The believer's spiritual hope of future inheritance requires a walk of patient endurance.

*'For ye have need of patience, that, after you have done the will
of God, ye might receive the promise' Hebrews 10.36.*

'The race set before us'! The word 'race' has to do with persevering in a conflict, in a struggle. It is rather like the perseverance in the gym on the treadmill when you need endurance to complete the workout.

I read an article entitled, 'They sent me to finish'. It recounts the bravery of a runner called John Stephen Akhwari from Tanzania. While competing in the Olympic Games Marathon in 1968 he fell and injured his leg. The trainer and doctor tried to persuade him to give up. But with his leg bandaged he hobbled the remaining eight miles and eventually entered the stadium, encouraged by the spectators. As he collapsed over the finishing line he was asked by a reporter, 'Why did you not give up?' He answered, 'My country did not send me just to start the race but also to finish.'

4. Look: in the right direction to the right Person

'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith' v2.

Here we have the secret of Christian perseverance: fix your eyes on Jesus, the inspiring example.

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Helen H Lemmel (1863-1961)

First of all we are to look in the right direction. This means we are

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to look by faith to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is the great object of living faith. *'Looking unto Jesus'*.

As an illustration, when driving it is imperative to concentrate on the road ahead. Taking your eyes off the road to look at the scenery will result in the car drifting off course. We must look at the road!

Or think of an athlete. If you watch an athlete in a race, the one thing that characterises their style of running is the way they concentrate on the track ahead.

Here we are told to continually look, meaning fix our eyes upon Jesus. We can note the Old Testament example of David's testimony when fleeing from King Saul:

'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise' Psalm 57.7.

Why is it so important to have our eyes fixed upon Jesus?

a. Because He is the author and the finisher of our faith

As our Leader He is the perfect example of true and living faith. As a perfect Man he had perfect faith in His heavenly Father; perfect faith and confidence in His Father's sovereign will over His life; in His Father's promise to Him that He would return to Heaven to perfect joy to reign at His right hand; and in the great plan of salvation.

b. Because of His perfect example and work

Jesus Christ is the perfect example of endurance to the end of His life, of patient endurance in suffering.

'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth' Isaiah 53.7.

He is the perfect example of obedience, of performing the Father's will in humility and despising the shame.

A Christian believer looks and lives to the Lord because they love the Lord. They love Him for saving them; because of the beauty of

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His example; for His righteousness, truth, power, compassion, Word, intercession, wisdom, power and security. They see Christ in Creation; in worship; in His Word; in prayer. They love to hear of Christ in preaching and in conversation. They see Christ in the circumstances of their life teaching them and instructing them.

So every aspect of life is unto the Lord, for His glory, for His honour, and for His praise. This is the Christ-centred, Jesus-focused life.

‘For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s’ Romans 14.8.

5. Anticipate: as Jesus did the inheritance

‘who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God’ v2.

The joy of knowing the perfect work of redemption was complete; the joy of experiencing the perfect presence of His Father at His right hand in glory. This was what awaited Jesus at the end of His work here upon Earth. He is now exalted on high, sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Perfect peace and perfect happiness in the presence of God await the believer in Heaven. On Earth we cannot imagine, but we can anticipate. The Queen of Sheba said after her visit to King Solomon, ‘The half was not told me’ (1 Kings 10.7). Heaven will be like that.

We may anticipate a holiday after looking at the brochures. The promise of a view is often not as good as it claims. Heaven is different. We can have complete confidence that it will exceed even our best thoughts of what it will be like.

6. Consider: the endurance of Jesus when opposed

‘For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds’ v3.

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The best medicine for weary souls is to look to Christ and consider Him. When we are opposed for righteousness' sake, look to Him and consider Him. Consider how Jesus was opposed.

Consider His patience with sinners. Sinners opposed Him during His life. At the time just prior to His death they cursed Him, beat Him, crowned Him with thorns. They falsely accused Him; they mocked Him; they abused Him. They drove nails through His hands and His feet; they hung Him on the cross; they shouted and reviled Him; and He said: *'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do'* (Luke 23.34).

'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed' 1 Peter 2.21-24.

7. Be assured: the loving purposes of God

'lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds' v3.

We cannot always understand the sovereignty of God. A loving God sometimes allows suffering, illness, setbacks, disappointment, bereavement, and loss. But God overrules, teaching us to trust and obey. God knows and understands that we don't understand.

'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him' James 1.2-5.

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Be assured of the loving purposes of God even when we are under His discipline and correction.

‘For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth...Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby’ Hebrews 12.6, 11.

Conclusion: Seven essential requirements for running in the right race

- Remember the powerful witness of God’s people;
- Lay aside the weights and the sins which so easily beset us;
- Patiently endure;
- Look to Jesus Christ;
- Anticipate the glory that awaits God’s people;
- Consider the sufferings of Jesus Christ;
- Be assured of the loving purposes of God.