Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 13

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LESSON XIII

OLD TESTAMENT HEROES AND HEROINES OF FAITH
"WITNESSES" BEFORE THE HEBREW CHRISTIANS TO THE
POWER OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:1-40

The exhortation to patient endurance under trial, begun in the closing verses of the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is continued in chapter eleven without a break in thought. We call it the great "faith chapter" of the Bible, and so it is. Introduced by the Old Testament quotation, "The just shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:38; cf. Hab. 2:4), the theme is amplified and developed by the long list of Old Testament characters who are living witnesses to the power of faith. Every Hebrew Christian knew well the stories of these heroes and heroines of faith; therefore, the Holy Spirit did not repeat here the history already familiar to those early Christians. The mere reference to their names, or to some outstanding act of faith, brought to mind a panorama of some four thousand years of the world's history, in much of which the nation of Israel had played a leading role.

Just here let me urge every listener to these broadcasts, every member of our radio Bible class who is joining us in this series of studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to refer constantly to the Old Testament passages listed in this chapter. At the mention of each name or fact of history, turn back to the Old Testament, beginning at Genesis, and read the entire record relating to the reference in this eleventh chapter of Hebrews. To fail in this, is to miss the real lesson the Holy Spirit has for us here. In our discussion of the chapter we shall necessarily have to pass over most of the Old Testament history involved, trusting that all who study with us either know the stories or will read them carefully in connection with this series.
“So Great a Cloud of Witnesses”

The men and women of faith mentioned in the chapter before us are presented here as witnesses to the transcendent power of faith, power over every device of Satan and all his hosts. This fact is set forth in the first two verses of chapter twelve, which is inseparably linked with all that has gone before it:

“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...”

Thus, as we said in our last lesson, our Lord Himself is presented here as the supreme Example of faith, as well as the “Captain and Perfecter of our faith” (R. V.). He bestows upon us eternal life, giving us the faith to lay hold upon that gift. He sustains us throughout the sufferings and afflictions of our earthly pilgrimage from the time we are saved until we are at home with Him in heaven. And His own perfect example of faith under persecution and trial, none can gainsay; for, as a Man, He “suffered being tempted.” “For the joy that was set before him (He) endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the supreme Example of faith under such suffering as sinful man cannot comprehend.

Thus these first two verses of chapter twelve give us both the key to the understanding of chapter eleven and the climax of that long list of the Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith, witnesses to the power of faith, even through every known form of suffering.

Now the question has often been raised, “Does the word ‘witnesses’ in Heb. 12:1 mean onlookers, or does it mean those who give their testimony, as it were, before the court of heaven, a testimony that bears witness to the transcendent power of faith, under every human trial, in every circumstance of life. The same thought is expressed in Acts 1:8, where the risen Lord Jesus told His disciples that they should be “witnesses” unto Him in their ministry on earth. And the word “witnesses,” used in this sense, is one of the key words of the book of Acts. Over and over again we read the words of the apostles and other members of the early church, bearing testimony to the fact that they were “witnesses of His resurrection,” who had bought them with His own precious blood. Likewise, here in this faith chapter of the Bible we hear the testimony of many of the famous characters of history, bearing testimony to the power of faith in a world of suffering and sin. It is just as though the Holy Spirit were calling upon Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and all the others to stand forth and bear witness to that God-given power of faith in their own lives. It is an irrefutable challenge to faith to the early Hebrew Christians and to us today. But let us turn now to the first three verses of this famous chapter; we quote them here from the Revised Version:

FAITH DEFINED AND ILLUSTRATED
Heb. 11:1-3

“Now faith is assurance of (or ‘the giving substance to’) things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen. For therein the elders had witness borne to them. By faith we understand that the worlds (or ‘ages’) have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear.”

In these words we have God’s own definition of faith, without which “it is impossible to please him” (verse 6). In other words, these heroes and heroines of faith are great in the sight of God, not for what they did, but because they believed God’s Word. That is faith, accepting the promises of 
the Lord as sure of fulfillment, whether we see how they can be fulfilled, humanly speaking, or not. Faith is very precious and very simple. Man tries to add to it his own paltry works, the keeping of the Law of Moses; but God reiterates the eternal truth, "The just shall live by faith"—and by faith alone. No matter what the circumstances, we must put our hand in His and dare to stand upon His unfailing promises. That is faith. Faith will take us to heaven; whereas the lack of it will send us into outer darkness where there shall be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is faith alone that justifies the guilty sinner before our holy God.

"By faith the elders had witness borne to them. By faith we understand that the ages have been framed by the word of God"—thus the Holy Spirit begins the long list of Old Testament characters who took God at His Word. It was in the days of Moses that elders were appointed to help with the administration of spiritual comfort and teaching in Israel. Whatever they did that honored Jehovah was "by faith." We also know "by faith" that our Lord "framed the ages" by His spoken Word. He is the Creator of all things too; but here we see the thought emphasized that He planned the ages of history from the past eternity to the future eternity. Faith lays hold upon that fundamental truth.

"By Faith Abel" was Justified—on the Ground of Sacrifice
Heb. 11:4

If man had been writing this tribute to these Old Testament characters, he would have listed human achievements accomplished by them; not so the Holy Spirit. He just keeps on reiterating, "By faith Abel... by faith Enoch... by faith Noah..." Moreover, unregenerate man scorns the very act of Abel in manifesting his faith, in that he just brought to God a little lamb, shedding the blood of the innocent victim by faith in the promised Redeemer. Abel believed God—that He Himself would come into the world to shed His own blood as an atonement for sin; he acted upon that promise; and God honored his faith, justifying him before the court of heaven. And by his faith Abel "yet speaketh" to a world lost in sin, showing man his need of a Saviour. Let us read Heb. 11:4 in the Revised Version:

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh."

By way of contrast, the fourth chapter of Genesis plainly teaches that Cain refused to believe God, repudiated the shedding of blood by faith in the Saviour to come as the only way of salvation, and was rejected by God, a murderer, a wanderer and a fugitive over the face of the earth. Thus Cain represents every man who treads under foot the blood of the Son of God; for such certain judgment awaits, even as we saw in our last lesson, even as the whole body of Scripture teaches.

We need only refer to some of the clear references of other passages of Scripture to see that the promised Saviour was the Object of Abel's faith. For example, the Lord Jesus, when He was on earth, called him "righteous Abel" (Matt. 23:35). And the Holy Spirit, in Heb. 12:24, refers to the blood of Jesus as that which "speaketh better things than that of Abel" when he presented the firstlings of his flock to God. The very verse before us, in Heb. 11:4, emphasizes the "more excellent sacrifice" than that of Cain. The first murderer presented unto God a bloodless sacrifice, the fruit of his labors; and thus he sought to work his own way to heaven. My friend, this is the very heart of the Gospel justification by faith, and by faith alone.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7).
Again we quote Heb. 11:5, 6 from the Revised Version to see what God has said about the faith of Enoch:

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had translated him: for he had had witness borne to him that before his translation he had been well-pleasing unto God: and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him."

Twice it is written of Enoch that he "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22, 24). It was during the evil days before the flood that he "walked with God ... by faith," and was, therefore, "well-pleasing unto God." Jude tells us that he also prophesied concerning the second coming of Christ "with ten thousand of his saints" to judge the wicked (Jude 14, 15). Surely such preaching was "by faith"; for it was proclaimed to the world thousands of years before Christ was even born in Bethlehem. It is Enoch's faith which the Holy Spirit emphasizes in Heb. 11:4, without which it is "impossible to please God."

My friend, you can not do one thing to please God until you believe His Word. If you had a million dollars and gave it all to some benevolent cause, that would not please God unless you first had faith in what He has written concerning His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. People often ask, "How may I know that my life is well-pleasing unto God?" Here is the answer: "Without faith it is impossible to please" Him. Believe His Word; accept His Son as the only Saviour; then faith not only saves the soul, but faith also enables the redeemed to walk with God, well-pleasing unto Him. We must begin by believing God.

The confusion in the world today dates back to the doubt Satan put into the mind of Eve when he asked, "Hath God said ... ?" And from that point on, man has trodden his downward course of unbelief. We know well the sad story of Peter's denial of the Lord he loved, a denial with cursing. Yet before the cross the Lord Jesus had uttered some significant words to Peter, saying,

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31, 32).

Christ did not say, "Peter, I have prayed that you will not return to your old habit of cursing and blasphemy." He said, rather, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." It seems that Satan was permitted to test Peter in the way he was permitted to test Job; therefore, the Lord said to Peter, "Satan hath obtained you by asking." The devil could not touch Peter without the Lord's permission; he was allowed to test him for reasons known to God, possibly to show the weak disciple and all of us who should follow the frailty of the flesh and the need for utter dependence upon the Lord alone. Moreover, Christ's statement to Peter gives us a glimpse of His intercession for His redeemed. And the whole incident proves that, even while Peter was denying his Lord, down deep in his heart there was the faith that saves, the faith that leads to victory over Satan and even unto eternity spent in the presence of God. When, like Peter, we go out and "weep bitterly" over our failures as Christians, we may still look up to our interceding Great High Priest and thank Him for the God-given faith that fails not, that enables us to go on with Him in a walk that is well-pleasing unto Him.

In our former Bible studies we have often called attention to the fact that Enoch's translation without seeing death, before the waters of judgment swept the earth in the days of Noah, makes him a type of the true church, which shall be translated to be with Christ before the great tribulation comes upon this godless world. Just as it was Enoch's faith in God's promises that took him home to heaven without dying before the flood came, even so it is faith in our crucified and risen Lord which will take every member of the bride of Christ to "meet him in the air" before the Antichrist is re-
revealed and the terrible judgment comes upon the earth just prior to the Lord's return with His saints to establish His millennial kingdom, even as Enoch prophesied. Such will be the reward of "them that diligently seek him" even now during this whole church age.

"BY FAITH NOAH" WAS SAVED FROM THE WATERS OF JUDGMENT
Heb. 11:7

"By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Heb. 11:7, R. V.).

Peter tells us that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (II Peter 2:5). By his very act of building the ark, "being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet," he proved to a wicked generation his faith in the Word of God. It seems very clear that there had been no rain up to the time of the flood; for in Gen. 2:5, 6 we read that after God had created all things, he "had not caused it to rain upon the earth ... But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." Now while there is no definite statement in the Bible that there was no rain before the flood, yet many students believe that possibly God watered the earth by "a mist" until the flood came. If so, then Noah's act of faith in building the ark was all the more an evidence that he believed God—concerning something he had "not seen as yet." In any case, he believed God; he warned men to turn to the Lord, for he was "a preacher of righteousness"; and he was an "heir of righteousness which is according to faith."

"BY FAITH ABRAHAM BELIEVED" GOD'S WORD CONCERNING THE PROMISED SAVIOUR AND THE PROMISED LAND
Heb. 11:8-12

Most of Genesis 11:26 25:10 has to do with the story of the life of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation; but the Holy Spirit, in Heb. 11:8-19 singles out Abraham's faith as the one thing that made him great—his faith in God's promise to give to his seed the land of Canaan; his faith in the heavenly Canaan; his faith in a son, through whom the Saviour should come into the world; and his faith in the resurrection from the dead. Let us consider first verses 8-12, which have to do with Abraham's and Sarah's faith in God's Word concerning the promised land and the promised son, even Isaac:

"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 (or 'tents') 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."

Abraham was born in Ur of Chaldea, in a pagan land. His people were idolaters (Joshua 24:2). But God called him to leave his country and kindred, and go to the land of Canaan, which He promised to Abraham's need. Moreover, the Lord promised Abraham a son, through whom "all nations of the earth" should "be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3). Humanly speaking, it was not easy to leave a great city, with an advanced civilization, to go to a strange land, where he was a pilgrim, a sojourner, living in tents all the remainder of his life. Besides, twenty-five long years passed between the time when God promised a son and the birth of Isaac. That required faith—to keep on believing God, regardless of circumstances. When Isaac was born, Abraham was one-hundred years of age, and Sarah was ninety. Nothing other than God-given faith enabled Abraham and Sarah to believe God, even in the face of human impossibilities. But the Holy Spirit in
Gen. 15:6 records the secret. God had reiterated His promise to give him a son and a nation, through whom the Messiah should come.

"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

It is wonderful to observe that, when the Holy Spirit listed Abraham and Sarah among the Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith, He passed over their lapses, their frailties, their doubts. He said nothing of Abraham’s having taken his father and Lot with him when God had told him to leave his kindred in Chaldea; nothing of his having gone down to Egypt and Gerar, and saying that Sarah was his sister, lest the enemy kill him; nothing of Hagar and Ishmael, or of his request that Eliezer, his steward, become his heir. The Holy Spirit passed over these and other sins of Abraham. He passed over Sarah’s lack of faith in giving Hagar to Abraham; her hard dealings with her handmaid afterwards; her laughter in unbelief when the Lord told Abraham that she should have a son in her old age. God, the Holy Spirit, did not mention these things in the great “faith chapter.” He recorded only the faith that enabled them to believe the promises of God.

And again, as in the case of Peter, to which we referred a little while ago, God’s dealings with these saints of old give us courage when we remember our own unbelief and weakness and frailty of the flesh. God looks into our hearts, as he did into the hearts of Abraham and Sarah and Peter and all the others; and seeing there faith in His Word, Heforgives and forgets all our sins. That is grace!

Abraham was content to leave home and kindred, content to live in tents in a strange land, because—

"He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

It is the hope of heaven and the presence of Christ that takes us through the trials of this godless world, even as it was that hope which enabled Abraham to have faith in God, even though circumstances often seemed against him. For Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ, and “he saw it and was glad.” The Lord Jesus spoke these very words in John 8:56. Abraham saw the day of Christ by faith!

It is significant also to note that none of Abraham’s great achievements are mentioned in the “faith chapter.” If man had been writing his biography, surely he would have had much to say about Abraham’s having been the father of the Hebrew nation; of his deliverance of Lot in battle against the confederacy of kings; of his meeting with Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. We know why God passes over these achievements of the patriarch; for it is faith that made Abraham great in the sight of God—not his works, however important they may appear to man.

Now in response to many questions that have been sent in from the radio audience, we shall digress just here long enough to show the difference between what Paul, in Romans and Hebrews, says about Abraham’s having been justified by faith alone, and what James says about his having been justified by works. The answer to such questions is very plain: Paul was writing about justification before God from the penalty of sin; James was writing about justification before men. There is no contradiction whatsoever; the two writers, both guided by the same Holy Spirit, were treating the subject from two entirely different angles. Accordingly Paul dealt with faith apart from works; James, with the futility of faith without works. There are many who lay emphasis upon the Mosaic Law, and teach that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is all right for salvation only if accompanied by doing the deeds of the Law of Moses. They seek to add to the finished work of Christ in atoning for man’s sins by man’s efforts after he is saved. Such teaching is contrary to the whole body of Scripture, and dishonors the Gospel of the grace of God. Sinful man can add nothing to the perfect work of the Lord Jesus for his standing before a holy God!

The whole of Heb. 1:1—10:18 is, as we have seen, devoted to the proof that Christ is the answer to all the Old Testament types, including those in the Law of Moses; that He fulfilled the Law, and ushered in the age of grace. Paul establishes the same eternal truth in his epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians. Indeed, the doctrine of justification
by faith through grace alone is the predominating theme of all of Paul's letters.

James, on the other hand, is showing how we must prove our faith by our works if we are to lead our neighbor to Christ. How else can one observing our lives know that we have faith except by our works? We can not reach down in our pockets and produce a material thing; we can and should so live that those who watch us as we live may know that we have a saving faith in the only One who can transform the sinner into the saint, one separated unto the Gospel of God. That is what James meant when he wrote, saying,

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18).

My friend, you and I can not show our neighbor our faith without works. By our deeds we prove whether or not our profession is genuine, whether we truly love the Lord.

The prodigal son illustrates this truth. He was the son of a wealthy man. Even in the far country, as he fed the swine, he was still the son of his father. Now if he had approached a stranger in that far country, dressed in rags as he doubtless was, and had said that he was the son of a wealthy man, that stranger would hardly have believed him. He might well have said, "Show me." However, upon his return to his father, with shoes upon his feet, clothed in the best robe his father could provide, with a ring upon his finger, he could assert that he was the son of a wealthy man, and none would deny it. There was the evidence upon him. Likewise, you and I may say to the world, "I'm a child of a King." But if we are dressed in spiritual rags, feeding our souls upon the things that defile, we shall scarcely convince the world that we belong to the King. We are not saved by faith and works. We are saved by faith through grace alone—"unto good works." In other words, good works are the fruit of the Spirit, not the means of salvation.

"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now to
triumphantly through possibly every form of suffering known to man.

"These All Died in Faith, not Having Received the Promises"
Heb. 11:13-16

Not only Abraham and Sarah, but also Isaac and Jacob seem to be the ones referred to in verses 13-16. In verse nine we read that Abraham dwelt in tents "with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." Then in verses 13-16 we read further:

"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."

Except for the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham bought for a family tomb, there is no record that he owned a foot of the land of Canaan. Jacob was the first to buy "a parcel of ground" in that land of promise. The Canaanite was still in the land; the patriarchs were pilgrims, living in tents. Yet they believed God's promise to give their nation that land for an inheritance. More important still, they believed God's promise of a Saviour to come and His promise of "a better country, that is, an heavenly." "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." They looked forward to the Christ of prophecy; we look back to the Christ of history. All the Old Testament saints had "the promise"; we who live on this side of Calvary have the promise fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament saints looked to Jehovah; we look to the Lord Jesus, who is Jehovah "manifest in the flesh." If they had faith to be well-pleasing unto God, even when they had only God's promise, how much more should we have faith in His Word, now that the promises have been and will yet be fulfilled in our Lord Jesus!

This same thought is expressed later, in verses 39, 40:

"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."

"By Faith Abraham . . . Offered Up Isaac"—Believing in the Resurrection
Heb. 11:17-19

"By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back" (R. V.).

The twenty-second chapter of Genesis records the story of at least one occasion when Abraham "saw the day of Christ . . . by faith." Apart from its prophetic lesson, there is no spiritual message for us, except the obedience of both father and son to the will of God. But there is a wonderful picture of the cross of Jesus that we can mention only briefly here.

Isaac was the "only son" of promise; Christ is the "only begotten Son" of God, the Father. Isaac was the son, of whom God said to Abraham, . . . whom thou lovest;" the Lord Jesus was the "well beloved Son" of the Father. Isaac was offered on Mount Moriah; Christ, on Mount Calvary. Isaac was offered as a "burnt-offering" unto God; Christ was our Burnt-offering, a "sweet savour" unto the Father. Abraham and Isaac went a three days' journey; the father's heart must have been very sad; our Lord was three days in the tomb. Abraham told his young men who had accompanied them to tarry at the foot of the mount while he and Isaac went up to "worship, and come again" unto them. How
could he say that when he believed God meant for him to offer Isaac on the altar? We find the answer in Heb. 11:19; he believed that God would raise Isaac up from the dead. What faith! And what a picture of the resurrection of our blessed Lord! Isaac bore the wood for the altar up Mount Moriah; Christ bore His cross up Mount Calvary. "And they went both of them together" father and son in perfect fellowship—yet another beautiful picture of the perfect fellowship between God, the Father, and His "only begotten Son" from all eternity! Isaac asked his father, "Where is the lamb?" John the Baptist said of our Lord, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Abraham said to Isaac that "God" would "provide himself a lamb..." God did provide Himself as the Lamb of Calvary. Isaac was obedient unto his father as he was bound to the altar; Christ was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

But here the picture changes. For Isaac there was a substitute; for the sinless Son of God there was none worthy to take His place. Indeed, He became our Substitute, our Sin-Bearer, and Abraham's and Isaac's, the Substitute for all who will have faith in His finished work on that cross. The ram, which took Isaac's place, thus becomes a type of our Substitute, even Christ Jesus, the Lord.

It was faith in God's promise of the resurrection that enabled Abraham to offer Isaac. And it is our faith in our risen Lord and in His promise to raise the dead at His coming it is this faith which causes us to look up and rejoice that "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

"By faith ... Abraham rejoiced to see my day," the Saviour said; "and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56; cf. Heb. 11:17).

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Heb. 11:20

In this statement God graciously omits all reference to Isaac's self-will in seeking to give the greater blessing to his favorite son, Esau. He merely says here that "by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau," putting Jacob first, and bearing witness to Isaac's belief in God's Word "concerning things to come." What things? The promise of the Saviour through Jacob's line, and the promise of an earthly land for his inheritance, as well as an eternal inheritance in heaven. It was this faith of Isaac which pleased God, and which God honors.

We remember the Genesis story, how Isaac was determined to give the greater blessing to Esau, even though God had told Rebekah, before the sons were born, that "the elder" should "serve the younger." Everything about that story illustrates the wickedness of the heart of man—Isaac's self-will, Rebekah's and Jacob's deceit, Esau's having despised his birthright. But God over-ruled, because He knew that, in spite of Jacob's selfishness and deceit, he would believe Him. He saw in Jacob a man of faith, despite his sinful ways. Therefore, He did not allow Isaac to bless Esau with the promise of the Saviour to come through Esau's family, for God knew that Esau despised spiritual things. But, to repeat for emphasis, the beautiful fact about Heb. 11:20 is that the Holy Spirit passes over all the sins of Isaac, having blotted them out because Isaac believed in the promises of God; and we read only the beautiful statement that "by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." This is but another illustration of the central truth of the Bible, that God is looking for faith not works to justify the sinner in His sight.

"By faith Jacob believed the promises of God "and worshipped Him" Heb. 11:21

"By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."

How much of selfishness and dishonesty and greed God had to forgive in Jacob! And yet once again He mentions
only the faith of Jacob here. If man had been writing this account, he would doubtless have put in the record the visions which God gave to the patriarch; how he saw the ladder reaching to heaven, a type of the Lord Jesus (John 1:51); how the angel of the Lord met Jacob and wrestled with him, afterwards changing his name to “Israel,” which means “a prince with God.” But God selects what might seem to us an insignificant incident, concerning Jacob’s blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh just before he was “gathered unto his fathers.” And in so doing, he “worshipped” God.

Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, had forfeited his birthright through sin; and it was bestowed upon Joseph, with a double portion, in that his two sons became the fathers of tribes in Israel. Moreover, by faith Jacob gave the greater blessing to Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, even against Joseph’s will. Jacob’s early, stubborn self-will had given place to a sublime faith in God’s will, not only for himself, but also for his children’s children; and in this last act of his earthly pilgrimage he “worshipped” the God of his fathers. After he had blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob said to Joseph,

“God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers” (Gen. 48:21).

That prophecy was not fulfilled until more than four hundred years later; but Jacob’s faith claimed the promise of God. (See Gen. 48:1-22; I Chron. 1:1, 2.)

“BY FAITH JOSEPH” BELIEVED GOD’S PROMISE OF ISRAEL’S DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT

Heb. 11:22

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

Gen. 50:24, 25 tells us of Joseph’s statement of faith concerning God’s promised deliverance of His people, Israel, out of the land of Egypt, and of Joseph’s command that his brethren “carry up” his “bones from hence” when they should leave Egypt. After four hundred years of bitter bondage, Moses led his people out from under the oppression of Pharaoh.

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him . . .  
And the bones of Joseph . . . buried they in Shechem (in the days of Joshua). (See Exod. 13:19; Joshua 24:32.)

It is Joseph’s faith in the promise of God to deliver His people that the Holy Spirit honors in Heb. 11:20. God had told Abraham of the four hundred years’ bondage and the deliverance therefrom, long before Joseph was born (Gen. 15:13, 14). Doubtless this prophecy had been handed down from father to son, and these men of faith took God at His Word. Then before Jacob went down to Egypt, God met him and reassured him of deliverance, even into the land of his fathers (Gen. 46:1-4). And always, linked with the faith of the patriarchs in their inheritance in the land of Canaan, was their faith in the promised Messiah, faith that pleased God.

“BY FAITH” THE PARENTS OF MOSES “WERE NOT AFRAID OF THE KING’S COMMANDMENT”

Heb. 11:23

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child (i.e., ‘the child was beautiful’); and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”

The story of the opening chapters of Exodus bears testimony to the very great faith of Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses (Exod. 6:20). It took faith in an omnipotent God to place their “beautiful” baby in the River Nile, in the ark of bulrushes, in spite of the king’s commandment. But God honored their faith, and used the very same baby, adopted by the king’s own daughter, in later years to defeat the evil designs of the wicked Pharaoh and to lead God’s people out of bondage. We remember that it was just because he feared the Israelites would “get them up out of the land” that Pharaoh had ordered the death of all the little sons born
to God's people (Exod. 1:10). And all this manifestation of the power of God began, humanly speaking, with the faith of the parents of Moses who "were not afraid of the king's commandment." Surely they belong in the list of the Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith!

"BY FAITH MOSES . . ."


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

Perhaps the words "the reproach of Christ" impress us most forcibly here; for Moses lived some fifteen hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. How could he esteem "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," except by faith? And it is the Holy Spirit who wrote these words. He never makes a mistake! The first five books of the Bible, written by Moses as he was guided by the Holy Spirit, are filled with definite prophecies and remarkable types of the promised Messiah. It was faith which led Moses to believe God's Word concerning His coming into the world.

We need not re-tell the story of Moses here; nor does time permit; but if anyone following these studies does not know it well, then let that one turn to the Old Testament and read the story from Exodus through Deuteronomy; for Moses wrote them all, and Genesis too. It was not easy, humanly speaking, to forsake the king's palace, and possibly the right to the throne, at a time when Egyptian civilization was at its height; it was not easy, humanly speaking, to forsake the glories of Egypt for "affliction" and suffering with a despised and enslaved people. But God gave Moses faith in the coming Saviour and in the heavenly reward that awaits all who believe in Him.

Again, we are impressed with the fact that it is not Moses, the law-giver and judge and leader and human author of five Old Testament books, whom we see honored in Heb. 11:24-26 and in the verses which follow; it is not Moses, the greatest man of Old Testament times; it is Moses, the man of faith, whom the Holy Spirit places in this roll of honor. Not the mighty works of Moses entitled him to salvation and recognition by the Lord. "By faith Moses" is listed among God's great men.


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

Man on earth can see the "invisible" God only by faith—"invisible" to the human eye except by faith.

The first time Moses fled from Egypt, at the age of forty, he did fear the king, who had threatened to slay him because Moses had killed an Egyptian in defense of his enslaved Israelites; but that is not the incident referred to here. This passage in Heb. 11:27 speaks of Moses' second forsaking Egypt, when he led God's people out with him. When Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand, he feared Pharaoh; and because of that fear, because he was not ready to enter upon the great undertaking of delivering Israel, God could not use him then. But for forty years more, out in the wilderness, God taught Moses many lessons, not least of which was learned from the burning bush.

The burning bush foreshadowed the Incarnation of Christ. It grew out of the earth, a symbol of the humanity of our Lord; yet the Shekinah Glory burned from its midst, a manifestation of deity.

God did not send Moses to Egypt to deliver His people until Moses had the horizon of his soul filled with the glory and power of the Lord. Then Moses did not "fear the wrath of the king."
My friend, are you afraid of man, afraid to give your testimony to the power of God? Then let the glory of God fill your soul. Only then can God use you “by faith” in Him.

That Moses did not fear “the wrath of the king” is evident from his conversations with him throughout the ten plagues upon Egypt. Moses believed God, that He would deliver His people, even as He had said. Therefore, “by faith he forsook Egypt,” leading at least two million slaves out, through the wilderness, to freedom and deliverance from bitter bondage. There may have been very many more than two million Israelites who forsook Egypt on that first passover night; for there were 600,000 soldiers, not counting the older men, women, and children. (See Exod. 12:37.) Humanly speaking, it was a tremendous undertaking to be responsible for so many people; but “by faith Moses” led his people, by the grace of God.


“Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”

Moses’ faith in the supernatural power of God was manifested, in that he believed the Lord, that only by the shedding of the blood of the passover lamb, he could deliver Israel. He had no army or navy; whereas Pharaoh had great chariots of iron and horsemen—soldiers armed for combat. But Moses had God’s Word, and that was enough.

That passover lamb and the sprinkling of blood foreshadowed the cross of the Lord Jesus, whose shed blood redeems the sinner from Satan, the enemy of our souls. All four of the Gospel writers tell us that Christ was crucified on the feast of the passover; and Paul says plainly that “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (I Cor. 5:7).

Often, in our former Bible studies, we have considered how the passover lamb pointed on to Jesus, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). We shall not go into the details of that wonderful study just here; but a prayerful reading of the twelfth chapter of Exodus will tell the story. It was not without significance that the lamb had to be “without blemish and without spot,” a picture of our sinless Saviour. It was not without significance that the blood had to be applied—in the outline of a cross, on the two side posts and upon the lintel; that not a bone should be broken, but that the lamb should be “roast with fire” and eaten with “bitter herbs.” And God’s Word was most important:

“When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exod. 12:13).

When He sees the blood of Jesus applied to our hearts by faith, He passes over us in judgment. He has borne that judgment for us, nailing our sins to His cross. In the Lord Jesus we are forever safe!

“By faith Moses kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood.”

For Moses believed in the promised Lamb of God, who should come to take away his sins and the sins of all who would believe in His finished work on Calvary.

“By Faith” Israel “Passed Through the Red Sea”

Heb. 11:29

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.”

That was a glorious day for the nation of Israel, when God parted the waters of the Red Sea by His mighty power; and it was a day when Israel bore witness “by faith” to that power which triumphs over Satan and all his hosts. If we consider the repeated murmurings of the people against Moses and against God, throughout their wanderings in the wilderness, we are amazed at their unbelief—after all that God had done for them. Yet Jehovah could look into their hearts and see that they did have faith to be saved, redeemed from bondage, under the leadership of Moses, because God
had said He would deliver them. And God honored that faith.

He honors the faith of every man in every age who will "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" for salvation. The sinner saved by His grace may be weak and faltering and murmuring; but it is faith that saves the soul. The Red Sea was the place of judgment and death; there the enemy was drowned because he defied the living God. But the children of Israel had faith in Him who had promised to lead them through; thus they represent all whose faith in the Christ of Calvary may claim the promise, given by the Lord Jesus Himself,

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment (R. V.); but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

There is a comforting, yet a searching, thought in the fact that God says nothing about Israel's forty years of murmuring in this eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The very next verse tells how "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down." The comforting fact is that, when God forgives us, He forgets even our sins. The Bible tells us that they are "blotted out as a thick cloud"; that He has "cast them into the depths of the sea"; that "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us"; that He has "put them behind his back"; that He "will remember them no more forever."

Yet there is also a searching thought in the omission here of all reference to the forty years of murmuring and wandering; that long period in Israel's history was time wasted, insofar as work accomplished for the Lord was concerned. Unbelief, rebellion against Moses and against God, murmuring, wandering, dying—what a picture of the redeemed people of God! How the heathen nations looking on must have doubted their profession of faith in Jehovah! How much reproach Israel brought upon His holy name! I wonder, my Christian friend, is the Christ-less world looking at our lives in some such manner as this? Are long periods of our lives wasted, needing to be blotted out by a merciful Lord? God forbid that we should bring dishonor and reproach upon His name, when we are His only messengers to a dying world concerning the Saviour who is waiting to lead men's souls out of darkness into his marvelous light.

"By Faith the Walls of Jericho Fell Down"
Heb. 11:30

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

God had told Joshua to lead Israel into the land of Canaan, and to drive out the idolatrous, corrupt inhabitants, in order to clean up the land for the people of God. But the cities were fortified, surrounded by walls. Jericho was one of these strongly fortified cities. Israel had no army, no weapons of war. But Joshua and Israel took God at His Word, and did the thing He commanded them to do, even though it must have appeared foolish to the unbeliever in Israel's God. They marched around the city once a day for six days, the priests blowing on rams' horns; then on the seventh day they compassed Jericho seven times, according to the commandment of the Lord. With what result? The walls of the city fell down flat, and God gave His people a great victory. The battle was the Lord's; all He asked of Israel was faith in His promise; and because of their faith, He placed them among the Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith in this wonderful chapter of Hebrews.

Jehovah Himself had appeared to Joshua before the miraculous victory at Jericho; and Joshua had worshipped Him as the "Captain of the host of the Lord." Acknowledging His leadership, depending upon His power, Joshua had honored God "by faith." Likewise, today, as in every age, we are called to do God's work in His way, not according to man-made schemes and devices. We hold in our hands, as it were, the Gospel trumpet; by "the foolishness of preaching" Satan's strongholds are broken down, and sinners are saved.
That is God's way, the way of faith, often ridiculed by the world, but well-pleasing unto Him, whose we are and whom we serve.

Jericho is a type of this godless world, at enmity with God, fortified by Satan himself. But God is able to break down Satan's strongholds; and that is what He does every time a soul is saved by faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus. When the church undertakes the Lord's work in His own way, then He can and does work miracles by His saving grace, even as He did when He caused the walls of Jericho to fall down. God's way of saving souls is not by the reading of book reviews from the pulpit, but by "the foolishness of preaching." His way of sending missionaries to the heathen is not by raising money through church bazaars and suppers, but by the free-will offerings of His own people. His way of receiving members into the fellowship of the church is not by inviting men of any and all creeds, but by receiving those who have put their faith in the finished work of the Christ of God on Calvary's Cross. He recognizes no other methods, no other fellowship, as His own.

On one occasion Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who had been led "by faith" to establish in London an orphanage, a church which seated five thousand people, and a Christian school for young men, needed about ten thousand pounds to carry on this work. It was on a Monday morning, following a hard day of preaching, that the word came to him concerning this great need. After going to God in prayer about it, Mr. Spurgeon attended a meeting of ministers in the city. There he asked them to pray with him for this special need; whereupon some of the clergymen rebuked him for not forming a committee to raise the money. The man of God simply bowed his head, and silently he asked God for the amount. Before that meeting was over, his secretary brought him word that God had sent the full sum of ten thousand pounds, about $50,000 in our American money.

In the same city, at that time, a great cathedral needed ten thousand pounds. A committee was formed; men and women and young people raised the money by man-made schemes. And some people asked, "What is the difference?" This is the difference: at the close of the campaign for the cathedral a banquet honored the chairman of the committee and the workers who had brought in the funds; but at Mr. Spurgeon's church a prayer meeting was held, and God was given the glory. Faith always gives God the glory. Faith does God's work in God's way, even to compassing a walled city day after day, with the blowing of trumpets.

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down."

**"BY FAITH . . . RAHAB PERISHED NOT"**

Heb. 11:31

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

If man had been writing this record, he would not have included "Rahab the harlot." She was not even an Israelite; she was a Canaanite, living in sin, in a wicked city that was under the curse of God. Yet because she had faith in the God of Israel, she was saved; and her name is listed along with the names of Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Moses and a host of the great men of the Old Testament. Not only so, but James mentions her in his epistle; and she was honored by being in the genealogy of Christ. She was the mother of Boaz, the husband of Ruth; and Ruth and Boaz were the great-grand-parents of David, through whose royal line Christ came "according to the flesh." (See Matt. 1:5, 6.) Many great characters of the Old Testament are not even mentioned in this "faith chapter." Melchizedek and Solomon and Isaiah and Daniel—these are just a few of the many passed over by the Holy Spirit; yet "Rahab the harlot" is among the honored throng. Why? Because of her faith. It seems as though God would impress upon us the value He places upon faith, apart from works, as a means of salvation.
Rahab even told a falsehood in protecting the spies sent into Jericho by Joshua; and God never tells us to be dishonest, even for a worthy cause. The whole story emphasizes the central truth that it was faith alone that justified Rahab the harlot, even as it is faith alone that can justify any sinner before a righteous God.

The secret of Rahab’s faith is expressed in her own words, spoken to the spies:

“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 . . . And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any 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).

Those closing words of Rahab’s statement of faith in Israel’s God explain her position; she believed in Him as the true and living God, and was justified from all her guilt and sin by faith in Him.

But some will ask, “Why does James tell us that ‘Rahab the harlot’ was ‘justified by works’?” (See James 2:25.) The answer is simply that, by “receiving the spies with peace,” she evidenced to the people around her that she had faith in Israel’s God. God saved Rahab the harlot, with a life of sin behind her, and with a falsehood upon her lips, because she believed Him. But her testimony went out to all the world that she believed God because she dealt faithfully with God’s messengers.

Moreover, she hung a “line of scarlet thread” out the window of her house, which was built upon the city wall, in order that the Israelites might know her house and save her and her family. That scarlet thread represents the scarlet thread of sacrifice which runs throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. And Rahab is in heaven today because she believed in the Saviour who was to come.

“By faith Gideon” Gave God the Glory in Battle

Heb. 11:32

Realizing that time and space forbade his recounting the names of all the Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith, the inspired writer expresses the thought forcefully, asking,

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets . . .”

Then the apostle continues with one of the most graphic descriptions of faithfulness through trial to be found in all the Word of God. But we shall come to that in a few moments; just now let us look briefly at the names listed in verse 32.

The most striking illustration of Gideon’s faith is seen in his willingness to go into battle against a great host of the Midianites without instruments of warfare, and with only three hundred faithful men. But that is what God told him to do, and Gideon believed God. When the Lord first told him to go out against the enemy of Israel, Gideon had 32,000 men; but God said they were too many, "lest Israel vaunt themselves," boasting in their own strength. The Lord then told Gideon to send home all who were "fearful and afraid," and 22,000 went home. The remaining 10,000 were still too many, God said; and acting according to minute instructions from God, Gideon tested the men left with him, setting apart the three hundred who kept an eye upon the foe, even as they stooped to drink.

Still acting according to God’s command, Gideon placed in the right hand of each of his faithful few a trumpet; in his left, an empty pitcher, with a lamp within the pitcher. The watchword was, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.” We know the story, how in the middle of the night Gideon and his three hundred blew on their trumpets, broke their pitchers, held aloft their lamps; and the enemy “ran and cried and fled.” God had given them the victory. But their faith in God had enabled them to obey His command.
There is a searching lesson for us in this beautiful story. "The sword of the Spirit" is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). It is our watchword, our weapon against the enemy of our souls. The lamps of Gideon and his men might well represent the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" which "hath shined in our hearts." "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels (empty pitchers, as it were), that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (II Cor. 4:6, 7). But are our earthen vessels, indeed, empty? Are they empty of self and self-will and spiritual pride? Unless they are, then we shall not be willing for them to be broken in the service of the Lord, spending and being spent, that the Light of the World, even Jesus, may shine forth to the lost through our testimony. It is a searching lesson. God grant that we may act upon the faith of Gideon, the God-given faith to show forth the glories of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

"BY FAITH ••• BARAK" TOOK THE PROPHETESS OF GOD TO BATTLE

Heb. 11:32

The fourth and fifth chapters of Judges tell the story of how a man would not go into battle without a woman to go along also. It does not sound like the story of a courageous warrior, or the story of a hero. But God saw faith in that man's heart; and God honored that faith. The man was Barak, one of the judges in Israel. The woman was Deborah, the prophetess of God. True, Deborah told Barak that God would deliver the enemy into the hands of a woman; and He did, for it was Jael who slew Sisera, the captain of the host of Israel's enemy. Still it was Barak's faith in the God of Deborah which is recognized in this eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Not Deborah, not Jael, but Barak is in this roll of honor.

Perhaps we should do well to learn another lesson just here. It is not always those who talk most about their faith who can stand the test when trouble comes, bearing a faith-witness to the sustaining power of God. Therefore, let us be careful not to criticize the quiet, unassuming man or woman of faith. God looks into their hearts; and seeing faith there, He is well-pleased.

"BY FAITH ••• SAMSON" DELIVERED ISRAEL FROM THE PHILISTINES

Heb. 11:32

The story of Samson, recorded in chapters 13-16 of Judges, is one of the strange, sad records of lost opportunity. There was very much about the life of Samson that we can not approve; often he seemed to use his God-given power for selfish ends. His life was certainly not above reproach. Yet God saw faith in his heart; and God honored that faith. By faith Samson did fight the Lord's battles; and in his death he delivered Israel from the host of leaders of the Philistines, enemies of God and of Samson's people.

Thus Samson, in defeating the enemy by his own death, becomes an object-lesson, as it were, or a type, of the Lord Jesus in His vicarious death on the cross. In the heathen temple, a blind and captive slave, Samson prayed to God; and God answered his prayer. Then it was that "all the lords of the Philistines," "about three thousand men and women" upon the roof, and "the house ... full" of the enemies of God's people were slain, even as they were making sport of Samson. Deliverance came to Israel through Samson's death. In His death on Calvary the Lord Jesus laid hold, as it were, upon the pillars of the temple of darkness and routed all the hosts of evil, accomplishing more in His death than He had accomplished by His sinless life. By the blood of His cross He defeated Satan and all the powers of darkness. Samson had faith in the promised Saviour, a faith which triumphed, in spite of his often wayward habits, in spite of his yielding to the temptations of the flesh. God saw that faith, and justified Samson, using him to bring deliverance to His oppressed people.
"BY FAITH ... JEPHTHAE" CONQUERED IN BATTLE
Heb. 11:32

The eleventh chapter of Judges tells another strange story; of Jephthae, Israel's ninth judge; of his "awful vow" to sacrifice the first one to meet him upon his return from battle, if only the Lord would give him the victory; and of how his only child, a daughter, was that one. It was a strange vow to make; it was not God's will that His people offer human sacrifices. But whether we understand all of the story or not, we do know that the Holy Spirit tells us that Jephthae was a man of faith, and that his faith pleased God. And again, the Lord is showing us that our salvation is not of works, but by faith alone. How slow men are to learn that lesson! Yet this eleventh chapter of Hebrews reiterates the truth by the illustrations of faith recorded here.

"BY FAITH ... DAVID" WAS "A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART"
Heb. 11:32

If God had selected some special truth about David to illustrate his faith, what would it have been? Surely not his great sin of adultery and murder and deceit; surely not his having many wives. It was David's faith in the promised Messiah, of whom he wrote in many of the Psalms; it was David's desire to rule his people for the glory of God; it was his penitent prayer for forgiveness from sin - these are some of the things about David which caused God to describe him as "a man after his own heart." David did love the Lord; his faith laid hold upon the promises of God; and that faith - not his works - did God honor.

"BY FAITH ... SAMUEL" MINISTERED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD
Heb. 11:32

We wonder what the Holy Spirit would select about Samuel, to place him in this roll of honor? Was it his faithfulness to God when, even as a child, he ministered in the tabernacle? Was it his yearning for God's glory, his sadness over the rebellious Saul? Surely it was not his act in his old age, of appointing his wicked sons judges over Israel (I Sam. 8:1-3). Perhaps it was his faithfulness as a judge and prophet of God's people, his zeal for the honor and glory of God, his mourning for the sin in Israel, which gave evidence to men of the inward faith which God saw and honored.

Perhaps God had in mind a certain act of faith on Samuel's part when He placed him in this roll of honor. The ark of God was in the hands of the heathen Philistines, enemies of Israel. "Ichabod," meaning, "The glory is departed from Israel," was written on the heart of the prophet. Eli, the priest, had fallen backward and had broken his neck when he heard the tidings that the ark of God had been captured, that sacred ark which Eli's two wicked sons had taken into battle.

Then the children of Israel said to Samuel,

"Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines" (I Sam. 7:8).

"And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him" (I Sam. 7:9).

"By faith" in the Lamb of God who was to come Samuel offered the sacrifice which was accepted by Him. Not only so, but Samuel was careful to give God the glory for the victory against the enemy, saying,

"Ebenezer ... Hitherto hath the Lord helped us" (I Sam. 7:12).

That was the evidence of faith!

"BY FAITH ... THE PROPHETS" FORETOLD THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR AND THE REIGNING KING
Heb. 11:32

Two often repeated themes run throughout the prophets' writings - a searching warning of judgment to come...
upon a sinful people; and a promise of hope, in that the suffering Saviour would come to take away sin and return to sit upon the throne of His glory. We should have to read all the writings of the prophets to complete their message. Suffice it to say here that, along with the terrible warnings of certain judgment upon the unbelieving, there is the promise of the crucified, risen, ascended, exalted, and returning Lord, to be acknowledged by all the universe as "King of kings and Lord of lords." It was "by faith" that the prophets wrote these things, often in the face of bitter persecution and even death. They did not live to see the promises fulfilled; but their faith laid hold upon the promises of God.

"By Faith" an Unnamed Multitude Men and Women Triumphed Over Persecution

Heb. 11:33-38

God alone knows the names of the many Old Testament saints referred to in verses 33-38 of our chapter. The description of the suffering endured by them reminds us of some whose names we also know. Let us read these verses, one clause or phrase at a time, pausing to call to mind some of the incidents they suggest:

There were those "who through faith subdued kingdoms." Joshua and the faithful in Israel did that; so did the judges and David and other kings who loved the Lord.

There must have been many thousands who "wrought righteousness" and "obtained promises"; for those described here, made righteous by faith in the Saviour to come, lived lives that honored Him, obtaining the answers to their prayers. We, too, "obtain promises" from God when our prayers avail.

Samson and David and Daniel "stopped the mouths of lions."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego "quenched the violence of fire" because they believed in their God.

Jehoshaphat "escaped the edge of the sword"; so did Elijah escape from the evil designs of Ahab and Jezebel. Jehoiakim sought Jeremiah to kill him; but "the Lord hid him." Surely there must have been very many more who "escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Some of Israel's best known and bravest warriors for the Lord were Gideon, Jephthae, and David.

We know of at least two mothers "who received their dead raised to life again" during Old Testament times. One was the widow of Zarephath, whose son Elijah raised from the dead (I Kings 17:17-24). The other was the Shunammite woman, whose son Elisha restored to life (II Kings 4:18-37).

"Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection." The plain inference here is that they were given an opportunity to escape torture by denying the Lord who saved them by His grace; but they would not accept deliverance at the price demanded of them. They were saved "by faith"; and being saved, they could not repudiate their Lord. They looked forward to "a better resurrection"—the resurrection of the just. Here is another of the "better things" of this epistle.

It is very evident to us that the Old Testament saints did not have as much light concerning future things as God has given us through the apostles—light concerning this church age, the first resurrection of the believers of all time, the great tribulation that will follow during the reign of the Antichrist, the return of the Lord in glory, and the resurrection of the wicked before the "great white throne." However, the Old Testament believers did know that there would be the resurrection of the dead—both of believers and of unbelievers; and their hope was fixed upon the "better resurrection" of the saints of God, who would dwell with Him forever. Paul surely knew of the first and second resurrections, with the time that shall elapse between them, when he penned the lines of this epistle; for God had made all these things known to him by special revelation, of which he has written
in his epistles. All who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, from the time of Abel, throughout world history, will share in that “better resurrection” of believers!

“And others had trial of cruel mockings and scouragements, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” How many there were of these, only God knows; but He knows, and will not forget to reward them abundantly. Stephen reminded the unbelieving Jews of how their fathers had persecuted the prophets. Jeremiah was imprisoned, and left in a dungeon to sink into the mire before he was delivered by one faithful to God. Tradition says that Isaiah was sawn asunder. David wandered about in the mountains and dens and caves of the earth, fleeing from Saul. Of these “the world was not worthy.” They were worthy of a better world. What a testimony to their faithfulness under suffering!

My Christian friend, we talk about our trials, our persecutions; but we who live in this country know nothing about such trials as those mentioned here.

"These all received not the promise"—Yet their Faith Triumphed!

Heb. 11:39, 40

The fact that the faith of these Old Testament saints shone so brightly, even though they did not live to see the promises fulfilled in Christ, makes their witness all the more impressive and forceful to us who live on this side of the cross. That is what the Holy Spirit was saying to the persecuted Hebrew Christians in verses 39, 40 of this eleventh chapter, even as He did in verse 13 also. Humanly speaking, it took greater faith to believe in the One who was to come than it does to look back to the Christ of history; therefore, the suffering Hebrew Christians were urged to take courage, being strengthened by the example of their forefathers who had gone before.

“And these all, having obtained a good report (or ‘witness’) through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

Here is another “better thing” in this epistle concerning the “better things” of Christ. And its message is wonderful! Let us examine its meaning for a moment. The souls of the Old Testament saints have been in conscious peace and rest and bliss ever since they were separated from their bodies through physical death. Their eternal security of salvation was assured; but not until the finished work of Christ on the cross was an accomplished fact were they, together with the New Testament believers, “made perfect.” This truth is reiterated in Heb. 12:23, where the “general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,” are linked with “the spirits of just men made perfect.” The reference here to “the spirits of just men made perfect” undoubtedly refers to the Old Testament saints, who had been justified by faith in the promised Redeemer, yet were “saved on a credit,” as it were, waiting for the full price to be paid for the atonement of their sins by the Son of God Himself.

Now while the Lord Jesus forever finished His work of redemption when He offered Himself without spot to God; while the souls of all the redeemed in heaven are in a state of conscious bliss and rest; yet their bodies are still in the grave, still waiting for the resurrection of the just. In that coming day body, soul, and spirit shall be re-united, forever to be with Christ. Let us ever remember that “the dead in Christ” are in heaven, in the presence of the Lord; but they will not be “made perfect” insofar as their bodies are concerned until the “better resurrection” of the righteous is an accomplished fact. All the Old Testament saints are waiting for that resurrection, throughout this whole church age, during which God has provided “some better thing for us.” That “better thing” is the position that is ours as the bride of Christ, the
true church, members of His body, of which He is the Head. Our position in glory will be “better” even than that of the patriarchs and all the Old Testament believers. We are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” That is the “better thing” which God has provided for us. Meanwhile, until the church is complete, the Old Testament saints, together with the New Testament “dead in Christ” and those who shall be “alive and remain” unto the coming of the Lord—all of the redeemed are waiting for that “better resurrection.”

How we long for that day when “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 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” (I Thess. 4: 16, 17).

Had you ever wondered, my Christian friend, why both “the shout” of the Lord Himself and “the voice of the archangel” are mentioned here? The Lord will call His redeemed of all ages; but “the voice of the archangel” seems to link this great event especially with the part the Old Testament saints will have in that first resurrection. Michael is the only archangel mentioned in the Bible; and he is referred to by Daniel as “Israel’s prince.” His voice shall speak to the Old Testament believers, Israelites, whose cause he champions; and the Lord Himself shall call His own of all dispensations to be with Himself for all the endless ages.

Meanwhile, the disembodied spirits of all the saints—both of Old Testament and New Testament times—are waiting for the completion of the bride of Christ, the position of which in glory is the “better thing” which God has prepared for us who are members of the true church, whether Jew or Gentile. As they wait, all the saints in glory are rejoicing in the presence of the Lord; they are there where no tears shall ever fall; yet they are waiting for the “redemption of the body.” Then they, together with us, shall be “made perfect,” body, soul, and spirit.

Our next lesson, which will be chapter twelve, continues the theme of this marvelous “faith chapter,” as we saw early in our lesson today. We shall discuss its opening lines more in detail next time; but let us read them here in closing, for they form the conclusion to all that has gone before. As we read these lines, let us remember that they present our Lord Himself as the supreme Example of faith. He was tested by such suffering and affliction as sinful man can not comprehend. My Christian friend, you and I can never suffer as He suffered, “the just for the unjust.” We in this free land are not even called upon to suffer as the early Hebrew Christians suffered. There are those in Europe and Asia and the islands of the sea today who are enduring torture for Jesus’ sake. But our trials can not compare with those of believers who are in concentration camps because they refuse to deny their Lord.

As we read the reassuring words of Heb. 12:1, 2, let us pray for all of God’s suffering saints throughout the world, that they, together with us, may take courage, no matter what the test of faith may be:

“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.”

Our Lord’s ministry of intercession “at the right hand of the throne of God” guarantees our triumph “by faith” over all the tears and heartaches and sorrows of this Christ-less world. Therefore, let us keep “looking unto Jesus”!

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (II Cor. 4:17, 18).
We next proceed with the prayer, *"Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."* Let us, therefore, pray always with this prayer, and with all the prayers of the church.

As we proceed with the prayer, we need to understand the meaning behind it. The prayer is a reflection of our need for divine guidance and support in our daily lives. It is a humble request for the provision of our needs, both physical and spiritual, and for the forgiveness of our sins. It also expresses our desire to be protected from temptation and evil. The prayer is a call to action, urging us to live in accordance with the will of God and to seek his guidance in all aspects of our lives.

The prayer is not just a ritual, but a living expression of our faith. It is a reminder that we are not alone in our struggles and that we have a source of strength and guidance in the divine. By praying this prayer, we are acknowledging our dependence on God and asking for his help in our daily lives. It is a powerful tool for spiritual growth and for strengthening our relationship with the divine.

As we continue with the prayer, let us be mindful of its meaning and significance. Let us pray with a sincere heart, knowing that our prayers are heard and answered. Let us be guided by the words of the prayer and live our lives in accordance with its teachings. Let us be reminded that prayer is not just a ritual, but a living expression of our faith and a source of strength and guidance in our daily lives.