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THE HEROES OF FAITH

A. W. Pink
1886-1952

Contents

1. The Excellency of Faith (Heb. 11:1-3)	2
2. The Faith of Abel (Heb. 11:4).....	7
3. The Faith of Enoch (Heb. 11:5-6).....	11
4. The Faith of Noah (Heb. 11:6-7)	15
5. The Call of Abraham (Heb. 11:8)	20
6. The Life of Abraham (Heb. 11:9-10).....	25
7. The Faith of Sarah (Heb. 11:11-12).....	29
8. The Perseverance of Faith (Heb. 11:13-14).....	33
9. The Reward of Faith (Heb. 11:15-16).....	37
10. The Faith of Abraham—Part One (Heb. 11:17-19).....	41
11. The Faith of Abraham—Part Two (Heb. 11:17-19)	45
12. The Faith of Isaac (Heb. 11:20)	49
13. The Faith of Jacob (Heb. 11:21)	53
14. The Faith of Joseph (Heb. 11:22)	57
15. The Faith of Moses' Parents (Heb. 11:23).....	60
16. The Faith of Moses—Part One (Heb. 11:24-27).....	64
17. The Faith of Moses—Part Two (Heb. 11:25-26).....	68
18. The Faith of Moses—Part Three (Heb. 11:26-27).....	72
19. The Faith of Moses—Part Four (Heb. 11:28)	76
20. The Faith of Israel—Part One (Heb. 11:29).....	79
21. The Faith of Israel—Part Two (Heb. 11:30).....	83
22. The Faith of Rahab (Heb. 11:31)	88
23. The Faith of the Judges (Heb. 11:32).....	92
24. The Achievements of Faith (Heb. 11:33-34)	96
25. The Pinnacle of Faith—Part One (Heb. 11:35-36)	100
26. The Pinnacle of Faith—Part Two (Heb. 11:37-38).....	104
27. The Family of Faith (Heb. 11:39-40).....	107

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CHAPTER 1

The Excellency of Faith

(Heb. 11:1-3)

Ere we take up the contents of the 11th chapter of Hebrews, let us very briefly review the Epistle itself. Chapters 1 and 2 are more or less introductory in their character. In them the wondrous *Person* of the God-man Mediator is presented to our view, as superior to the Old Testament prophets and as excelling the angels. The first main division of the Epistle commences at 3:1 and runs to the end of 4:15, and treats of the *mission* of Christ: this is seen to surpass that of either Moses or Joshua, for neither of them led the people into the real rest of God-the section is followed by a practical application in 4:16. The second principal division begins with 5:1 and extends to 10:18, and deals with the *priesthood* of Christ: this is shown to transcend the Aaronic in dignity, efficacy and permanency; the section is followed by a practical application, contained in 10:19 to 12:29. The closing chapter forms a conclusion to the Epistle.

“The general nature of this Epistle, as unto the kind of writing, is paranetical or hortatory, which is taken from its end and design. The exhortation proposed is to constancy and perseverance in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the profession of the Gospel, against temptations and persecutions. Both these the Hebrews had to conflict with in their profession-the one from the Judaical church-state itself, the other from the members of it. Their temptations to draw back and forsake their profession arose from the consideration of the Judaical church-state and Mosaic ordinances of worship, which they were called by the Gospel to relinquish. The Divine institution of that state, with its worship, the solemnity of the covenant whereon it was established, the glory of its priesthood, sacrifices and other Divine ordinances (Rom. 9:4), with their efficacy for acceptance with God, were continually proposed unto them, and pressed on them, to allure and draw them off from the Gospel. And the trial was very great, after the inconsistency of the two states was made manifest. For therein declaring the nature, use, end, and signification of all Divine institutions under the Old Testament; and allowing unto them all the glory and efficacy which they could pretend unto, the writer of this Epistle declares from the Scripture itself that the state of the Gospel church, in its high-priest, sacrifice, covenant, worship, privileges and efficacy, is incomparably to be preferred above that of the Old Testament; yea, that all the excellency and glory of that state, and all that belonged unto it, consisted only in the representation that was made thereby, of the greater glory of Christ and the Gospel, without which they were of no use, and therefore ruinous or pernicious to be persisted in.

“After he had fixed their minds in the truth, and armed them against the temptations which they were continually exposed to; the Apostle proceeds to the second means, whereby their steadiness and constancy in the profession of the Gospel, which he exhorted them unto, was already assaulted, and was yet likely to be assaulted with greater force and fury. This arose from the opposition which befell them, and from the persecutions of all sorts that they had endured, and were still likely to undergo, for their faith in Christ Jesus with the profession thereof, and observance of the holy worship ordained in the Gospel. This they suffered from the obstinate *members* of the Jewish church, as they did the other (temptation) from the *state* of that church itself. An account hereof the Apostle enters upon in the close of the foregoing chapter; and withal declares unto them the only way and means on their part, whereby they may be preserved, and kept constant in their profession notwithstanding all the evils that might befall them therein, and this is by faith alone. From their *temptations* they were delivered by the *doctrine* of the truth, and from the *opposition* made unto them, by *faith* in exercise” (John Owen).

The particular character of the section begun at 10:19 is not difficult to ascertain: it is addressed to our responsibility. This is at once evident in the “Let us” of 10:22, 23, 24. In 10:32-36 there is a call to patient waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises. Nothing but real faith in the veracity of the Promiser can sustain the heart and prompt to steady endurance during a protracted season of trial and suffering. Hence in 10:38 the Apostle quotes that striking word from Habakkuk, “the just shall live *by his faith*” (2:4). That sentence really forms the text of which Hebrews 11 is the sermon. The central design of this chapter is to evidence *the patience* of those who, in former ages, endured by faith before they received the fulfillment of God’s promises: note particularly verses 13, 39.

“Whoever made this (v. 1) the beginning of the eleventh chapter, has unwisely disjointed the context; for the object of the Apostle was to prove what he had already said—that there is need of patience. He had quoted the testimony of Habakkuk, who says that the just lives by faith; he now shows what remained to be proved—that faith can no more be separated from patience than from itself. The order, then, of what he says is this: ‘We shall not reach the goal of salvation except we have patience, for the Prophet declares that the just lives by faith; but faith directs us to thing afar off which we do not as yet enjoy; it then necessarily includes patience.’ Therefore the minor proposition in the argument is this, ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for’ ” (J. Calvin).

“The Apostle now, for the illustration and enforcement of his exhortation, brings forward a great variety of instances, from history of former ages, in which *faith* had enabled individuals to perform very difficult duties, endure very severe trials, and obtain very important blessings. The principles of the Apostle’s exhortation are plainly these: ‘They who turn back, turn back unto perdition. It is only they who persevere in believing that obtain salvation of the soul. Nothing but a persevering faith can enable a person, through a constant continuance in well-doing, and a patient, humble submission to the will of God, to obtain that glory, honour, and immortality which the Gospel promises. Nothing but a persevering faith can do this; and a persevering faith can do it, as is plain from what it has done in former ages’ (John Brown).

The order of thought followed by the Apostle in Hebrews 11 as ably and helpfully set forth by an early Puritan: “The parts of this whole chapter are two: 1. A general *description* of faith: verses 1 to 4. 2. An *illustration* or declaration of that description, by a large rehearsal of manifold *examples* of ancient and worthy men in the Old Testament: verses 4 to 40. The description of faith consists of three actions or effects of faith, set down in three several verses. The first effect is that faith makes things which are not (but only are hoped for), after a sort, to subsist and to be present with the believer: verse 1. The second effect is that faith makes a believer approved of God: verse 2. The third effect is that faith makes a man understand and believe things incredible to sense and reason” (Wm. Perkins, 1595).

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). The opening “Now” has almost the force of “for,” denoting a farther confirmation of what had just been declared. At the close of Chapter 10 the Apostle had just affirmed that the saving of the soul is obtained through believing, whereupon he now takes occasion to show what faith is and does. That faith can, and does, preserve the soul, prompting to steadfastness under all sorts of trials and issuing in salvation, may not only be argued from the effects which is its very nature to produce, but is illustrated and demonstrated by one example after another, cited in the verses which follow. It is important to bear in mind at the outset that Hebrews 11 is an amplification and exemplification of 10:38, 39: the “faith” which the Apostle is describing and illustrating is that which has the *saving of the soul* annexed to it.

“In verse 1 there is the thing described, and the description itself. The thing described is Faith; the description is this: ‘it is the substance of things hoped for,’ etc. The description is proper, according to the rules of art; habits (or graces) are described by their formal acts, and acts restrained to their proper objects; so faith is here described by its primary and formal acts, which are referred to their distinct objects. The acts of faith are two: it is the substance, it is the evidence. Think it not strange that I call them *acts*, for that is it the Apostle intends; therefore Beza says, in rendering this place, he had rather paraphrase the text than obscure the scope, and he interpreteth it thus—Faith substantiates or gives a subsistence to our hopes, and demonstrates things not seen. There is a great deal of difference between the acts of faith and the effects of faith. The effects of faith are reckoned up throughout this chapter; the formal acts of faith are in this verse. These acts are suited with their objects. As the matters of belief are yet to come, faith gives them a substance, a being, as they are hidden from the eyes of sense, and carnal reason; faith also gives them an evidence, and doth convince men of the worth of them; so that one of these acts belongs to the *understanding*, the other to the *will*” (Thos. Manton, 1670).

The contents of verse 1 do not furnish so much a formal definition of faith, as they supply a terse description of how it operates and what it produces. Faith, whether natural or spiritual, is the belief of a testimony. Here, faith is believing the testimony of God. How it operates in reference to the subjects of this testimony, whether they be considered simply as future, or as both invisible and future, and the effects produced in and on the soul, the Holy Spirit here explains. First, He tells us that “faith is the substance of things hoped for.” The Greek word rendered “substance” has been variously translated. The margin of the A.V. gives “ground of confidence.” The R.V. has “assurance” in the text, and “giving substance to” in the margin. The Greek word is “hypostasis” and is rendered “confident” (should be “this *confidence* of boasting,” as in Bag. Int.) in both 2 Corinthians 9:4 and 11:17; “person” (should be “subsistence” or “essential being”) in Hebrews 1:3 and “confidence” in 3:14. Personally, the writer believes it has a double force so will seek to expound it accordingly.

“Faith is the *confidence* of things hoped for.” In this chapter (and in general throughout the New Testament) “faith” is far more than a bare assent to anything revealed and declared by God: it is a firm persuasion of that which is hoped for, because it assures its possessor not only that there *are* such things, but that through the power and faithfulness of God he shall yet *possess* them. Thus it becomes the ground of expectation. The Word of God is the *objective* foundation on which my hopes rest, but faith provides a *subjective* foundation, for it convinces me of the certainty of them. Faith and

confidence are inseparable; just so far as I am counting upon the ability and fidelity of the Promiser, shall I be confident of receiving the things promised and which I am expecting. “We *believe* and are *sure*” (John 6:69).

From what has just been said, the reader will perhaps perceive better the force of the rather peculiar word “substance” in the text of the A.V. It comes from two Latin words, *sub stans* meaning “standing under.” Faith provides a firm standing-ground while I await the fulfillment of God’s promises. Faith furnishes my heart with a sure support during the interval. Faith believes God and relies upon His veracity: as it does so, the heart is anchored and remains steady, no matter how fierce the storm nor how protracted the season of waiting. “These all died in faith, *not* having received the (fulfillment of the) promises, *but* having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them” (Heb. 11:13). Real faith issues in a confident and standing expectation of future things.

“Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for”: as the marginal reading of the R.V. suggests, “giving substance to.” Crediting the sure testimony of God, resting on His promises, and expecting the accomplishment of them, faith gives the object hoped for at a *future* period, a *present* reality and power in the soul, as if already possessed; for the believer is satisfied with the security afforded, and *acts* under the full persuasion that God will not fail of His engagement. Faith gives the soul an *appropriating hold* of them. “Faith is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that He has promised to us in Christ; and this persuasion is so strong that it gives the soul a kind of possession and present fruition of those things, gives them a subsistence in the soul by the firstfruits and foretastes of them; so that believers in the exercise of faith are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (Matt. Henry).

The confident expectation which faith inspires gives the objects of the Christian’s hope a present and actual being in his heart. Faith does not look out with cold thoughts about things to come, but imparts life and reality to them. Faith does for us spiritually what fancy does for us naturally. There is a faculty of the understanding which enables us to *picture* to the mind’s eye things which are yet future. But faith does more: it gives not an imaginary appearance to things, but a real subsistence. Faith is a grace which unites subject and object: there is no need to ascend to Heaven, for faith makes distant things nigh (see Rom. 10:6, 7). Faith, then, is the bond of union between the soul and the things God has promised. By believing we “receive”; by believing in Christ, He becomes *ours* (John 1:12). Therefore does faith enable the Christian to praise the Lord for future blessings as though he were already in the full possession of them.

But *how* does faith bring to the heart a present subsistence of future things? First, by drawing from the promises that which, by Divine institution, is stored up in them: hence they are called the “*breasts* of consolation” (Isa. 66:11). Second, by making the promises the food of the soul (Jer. 15:16), which cannot be unless they are really *present* unto it. Third, by conveying an experience of their power, as unto all the ends of which they are purposed: it is as Divine truth is appropriated and assimilated that it becomes powerfully operative in the soul. Fourth, by communicating unto us the firstfruits of the promises; faith gives a living reality to what it absorbs, and so real and potent is the impression made, that the heart is changed into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18).

Ere passing on, let us pause for a word of application. Many profess to “believe,” but *what influence* have their hopes upon them? How are they affected by the things which their faith claims to have laid hold of? I profess to believe that sin is a most heinous thing-do I fear, hate, shun it? I believe that ere long I shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ-does my conduct evince that I am living in the light of that solemn day? I believe that the world is an empty bauble-do I despise its painted tinsel? I believe that God will supply all my need-am I fearful about the morrow? I believe that prayer is an essential means unto growth in grace-do I spend much time in the secret place? I believe that Christ is coming back again-am I diligent in seeking to have my lamp trimmed and burning? Faith is evident by its fruit, works, effects.

Faith is “the evidence of things not seen.” The Greek noun here rendered “evidence” (“proving” in the R.V., with “test” in the margin) is derived from a verb which signifies to *convince*, and that by demonstration. It was used by the Lord Jesus when He uttered that challenge, “which of you convicteth Me of sin?” (John 8:46). The noun occurs in only one other place, namely, 2 Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is . . . profitable for doctrine, for *reproof*,” or “conviction”-to give assurance and certainty of what is true. Thus, the word “evidence” in our text denotes that which furnishes proof, so that one is assured of the reality and certainty of things Divine. “Faith,” then, is first the *hand* of the soul which “lays hold of” the contents of God’s promises; second, it is the *eye* of the soul which looks out toward and represents them clearly and convincingly to us.

To unbelievers the invisible, spiritual, and future things revealed in God’s Word seem dubious and unreal, for they have no medium to perceive them: “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). But the child of God *sees* “Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). Perhaps we might illustrate it thus: two men stand on the deck of a ship gazing toward the far horizon; the one sees nothing, the other describes the details of a distant steamer. The former has only his unaided eyesight, the latter is using a telescope! Now just as a powerful glass brings home to the eye an object beyond the range of natural vision, so faith give reality to the heart of things outside the range of our physical sense. Faith sets

Divine things before the soul in all the light and power of demonstration, and thus provides inward conviction of their existence. "Faith demonstrates to the eye of the mind the reality of those things which cannot be discerned by the eye of the body" (Matt. Henry).

The natural man prefers a life of sense, and to believe nothing more than that which is capable of scientific demonstration. When eternal things, yet invisible, are pressed upon him, he is full of objections against them. Those are the objections of unbelief, stirred into activity by the "fiery darts" of Satan, and naught but the shield of faith can quench them. But when the Holy Spirit renews the heart, the prevailing power of unbelief is broken; faith argues "*God* has said it, so it *must* be true." Faith so convinces the understanding that it is compelled, by force of arguments unanswerable, to believe the certainty of all God has spoken. The conviction is so powerful that the heart is influenced thereby, and the will moved to conform thereto. This it is which causes the Christian to *forsake* the "pleasures of sin" which are only "for a season" (Heb. 11:25), because by faith he has *laid hold of* those satisfying "pleasures at God's right hand" which are "forevermore" (Psa. 16:11).

To sum up the contents of verse 1. To unbelief, the objects which God sets before us in His Word seem unreal and unlikely, nebulous and vague. But faith visualizes the unseen, giving substantiality to the things hoped for and reality to things invisible. Faith shuts its eyes to all that is seen, and opens its ears to all God has said. Faith is a convictive power which overcomes carnal reasonings, carnal prejudices, and carnal excuses. It enlightens the judgment, molds the heart, moves the will, and reforms the life. It takes us off earthly things and worldly vanities, and occupies us with spiritual and Divine realities. It emboldens against discouragements, laughs at difficulties, resists the Devil, and triumphs over temptations. It does so because it unites the soul to God and draws strength from Him. Thus faith is altogether a supernatural thing.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report" (Heb. 11:2). Having described the principle qualities of faith, the Apostle now proceeds to give further proof of its excellency, as is evident from the opening "For." It is by faith we are approved of God. By the "elders" is signified those who lived in former times, namely, the Old Testament saints-included among the "fathers" or 1:1. It was not by their amiability, sincerity, earnestness, or any other natural virtue, but by *faith* that the ancients "obtained a good report." This declaration was made by the Apostle with the purpose of reminding the Hebrews that their pious progenitors were justified by faith, and to the end of the chapter he shows that *faith* was the principle of all their holy obedience, eminent services, and patient sufferings in the cause of God. Therefore those who were *spiritually* united to them must have something more than physical descent from them.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report." Observe the beautiful accuracy of Scripture: it was not *for* their faith (nor could it be without it!) but "by" their faith: it was not a cause, yet it was a condition; there was nothing meritorious in it, yet it was a necessary means. Let us also observe that faith is no new thing, but a grace planted in the hearts of God's elect from the beginning. Then, as now, faith was the substance of things hoped for-promises to be accomplished in the future. The faith of Abel laid hold of Christ as truly as does ours. God has had but one way of salvation since sin entered the world; "by grace, through faith, not of works." They are grossly mistaken who suppose that under the old covenant people were saved by keeping the law. The "fathers" had the same promise we have: not merely of Canaan, but of Heaven-see 11:16.

The Greek for "obtained a good report" is not in the active voice, but the passive: literally, "were witnessed of," an honourable testimony being borne to them-cf. verses 4, 5. God took care that a record should be kept (complete in Heaven, in part transcribed in the Scriptures) of all the actings of their faith. God has borne witness to the fact that Enoch "walked with Him" (Gen. 5:24), that David was "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), that Abraham was His "friend" (2 Chron. 20:7). This testimony of His acceptance of them because of their faith was borne by God. Not only externally in His Word, but in their consciences. He gave them His Spirit who assured them of their acceptance: psalm 51:12, Acts 15:8. Let writer and reader learn to esteem what God does: let us value a Christian not for his intellect, natural charms, or social position, but for his *faith*, evidenced by an obedient walk and godly life.

We cannot do better in closing our comments upon verse 2 than by giving the "practical observations" on it of John Owen: "1. Instances or examples are the most powerful confirmations of practical truths. 2. They who have a good testimony from God shall never want reproaches from the world. 3. It is faith alone, which, from the beginning of the world (or from the giving of the first promise), was the means and way of obtaining acceptance with God. 4. The faith of true believers, from the beginning of the world, was fixed on things future, hoped for, invisible. 5. That faith whereby men please God acts itself in a fixed contemplation on things future and invisible, from whence it derived an encouragement and strength to endure and abide firm in profession, against all opposition and persecutions. 6. Men may be despised, vilified, and reproached in the world, yet if they have faith, if they are true believers, they are accepted with God, and He will give them 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” (Heb. 11:3). There is a much closer connection between this verse and the two preceding ones than most of the commentators have perceived. The Apostle is still setting forth the importance and excellency of faith: here he affirms that through it its favoured possessors are enabled to apprehend things which are high above the reach of human reason. The origin of the universe presents a problem which neither science nor philosophy can solve, as is evident from their conflicting and ridiculous attempts; but that difficulty vanishes entirely before *faith*.

“Through faith we *understand*.” Faith is the vehicle or medium of spiritual perception: “if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest *see* the glory of God” (John 11:40); “which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe *and know* the truth” (1 Tim. 4:3). Faith is not a *blind* reliance on the Word of God, but an intelligent persuasion of its veracity, wisdom, beauty. So far from Christians being the credulous fools the world deems them, they are the wisest of earth’s inhabitants. The “fools” are they who are “slow of heart to believe” (Luke 24:25). Through faith in what has been revealed in the Scriptures we *know* that the universe is created and fashioned by God. ‘What does faith give us to understand concerning the worlds, that is, the upper, middle, lower regions of the universe? 1. That they were not eternal, nor did they produce themselves, but they were made by another. 2. That the Maker of the world is God; He is the Maker of all things; and whosoever is so must be God. 3. That He made the world with great exactness; it was a framed work, in everything duly adapted and disposed to answer its end, and to express the perfections of the Creator. 4. That God made the world by His Word; that is, by His essential wisdom and eternal Son, *and* by His active will, saying, Let it be done, and it was done. 5. That the world was thus framed out of nothing, out of no pre-existent matter, contrary to the received maxim, that out of nothing nothing can be made, which, though true of created power, can have no place with God, who can call things that are not as if they were, and command them into being. These things we understand by faith” (Matt. Henry).

“That the worlds were framed by the word of God.” The word for “worlds” *in the Greek* signifies “ages,” but by a metonymy it is here used of the universe. “The celestial world, with its inhabitants, the angels; the starry and ethereal worlds, with all that is in them, the sun, moon, stars, and fowls of the air; the terrestrial world, with all upon it, man, beasts, etc.; and the watery world, the sea, and all that is therein” (John Gill). These worlds were made at the beginning of mundane time and have continued throughout all ages. “The Apostle accommodated his expression to the received opinion *of the Jews*, and their way of expressing themselves about the world. ‘Olam’ denotes the world as to the subsistence of it, and as to its duration” (John Owen). We do not, then, espouse Bullinger’s strange view of this verse.

The “worlds,” or universe, were “framed,” that is, were adjusted and disposed into a wise and beautiful order, by “the Word of God.” That expression is used in a threefold sense. First, there is the essential and personal Word, the eternal Son of God (John 1:1). Second, there is the written, ever-living Word, the Holy Scriptures (John 10:35). Third, there is the Word of Power or manifestation of the invincible will of God. It is the last-mentioned that is in view in Hebrews 11:3. The Greek for “word” is *not* “logos” (as in John 1:1), but “rhema” (as in Heb. 1:3); “rhema” signifies a word *spoken*. The reference is to God’s imperial fiat. His effectual command, as throughout Genesis 1: “God *said* (the manifestation of His invincible will) let light be, and light was.” “For He spake, and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast” (Psa. 33:9). An illustration of the Word of His Power (see Heb. 1:3) is found in John 5:28, 29.

“So that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear.” There is some difficulty (in the Greek) in ascertaining the precise meaning of this phrase. Personally, we are inclined to regard it as referring back to Genesis 1:2. The verse before us concerns more directly the *fashioning* of the present heavens and earth, though that necessarily presupposes their original creation. The elements were submerged and darkness enshrouded them. The *practical* force of the verse to us is: our “faith” does not rest upon what “appears” outwardly, but is satisfied with the bare Word of God. Since God created the universe out of nothing, how easily can He preserve and sustain us when there is not anything (to our view) in sight! He who can call worlds into existence by the word of His Power, can command supplies for the neediest of His creatures.

CHAPTER 2

The Faith of Abel

(Heb. 11:4)

The 11th chapter of Hebrews has three divisions. The first, which comprises verses 1 to 3, is introductory, setting forth the *excellency* of faith. The second, which is covered by verses 4 to 7, outlines the *life* of faith. The third, which begins at verse 8 and runs to the end of the chapter, fills in that outline, and, as well, describes the *achievements* of faith. The first division we went over in Chapter One. There we saw the excellency of faith proved by four facts. Faith gives a reality and substantiality unto those things which the Word of God warrants us to hope for (v. 1). Faith furnishes proof to the heart of those spiritual things which cannot be discovered by our natural senses (v. 1). Faith secured to the Old Testament saints a good report (v. 2). Faith enables its favoured possessor to understand that which is incomprehensible to mere reason, imparting a knowledge to which philosophers and scientists are strangers (v. 3). Thus, the tremendous importance and inestimable value of faith is at once apparent.

The second division of our chapter may be outlined thus. First the beginning of the life of faith (v. 4). Second, the character of the life of faith, showing of what it consists (v. 5). Third, a warning and an encouragement is given (v. 6). Fourth, the end of the life of faith, or the goal to which it conducts (v. 7). That which the Holy Spirit now sets before us is far more than a list of Old Testament worthies, or a miniature picture-gallery of the saints of bygone days. To those whom God grants a receptive heart and anointed eye, there is here deep and important doctrinal instruction, as well as most blessed practical teaching. The contents of Hebrews 11 concern our eternal peace, and it behooves us to give them our most prayerful and diligent attention. May it please the Spirit of Truth to act as our Guide as we seek to pass from verse to verse.

“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” (Heb. 11:4). Rightly understood, this verse describes *the beginning* of the life of faith. Let us seek to weigh attentively each separate expression in it.

First, it was “by faith” that Abel offered unto God his sacrifice. He is the first man, according to the sacred record, who ever did so. He had no established precedent to follow, no example to emulate, no outward encouragement to stimulate. Thus, his conduct was not suggested by popular custom, nor was his action regulated by “common sense.” Neither carnal reason nor personal inclinations could have moved Abel to present a bleeding lamb for God’s acceptance. How then, is his strange procedure to be accounted for? Our text answers: it was “by faith” he acted, and not by fancy or by feelings. But what is signified by this expression? Ah, the mere words “by faith” are far more familiar unto many, than their real import is understood. Vague and visionary indeed are the conceptions which multitudes now entertain thereon. We must not, then, take anything for granted; but rather proceed slowly, and seek to make quite sure of our ground.

The one Scripture which, perhaps, more than any other unlocks for us the meaning of the “by faith” which is found so frequently in Hebrews 11 is Romans 10:17. There we read, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Faith must have a foundation to rest upon, and that foundation must be the Word of Him that cannot lie. God speaks, and the heart receives and acts upon what He says. True, there are two kinds of “hearing,” just as there are two kinds of “faith.” There is an outward “hearing,” and there is an inward “hearing”: the one merely informs, the other influences; the one simply instructs the mind, the other molds the heart and moves the will. So there is a twofold meaning to the term “The Word of God” (see our remarks on 11:3), namely, the word as written, and the Word as operative, when God speaks in living power to the soul. Hence, there is a twofold “faith”: the one which is merely an intellectual assenting to what God has revealed, and that which is a vital and supernatural principle of action, which “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6).

Now we need hardly say that it is the *second* of these which is in view here in Hebrews 11:4, and throughout the chapter. But let us move carefully, step by step. It was “by faith” that Abel offered unto God his acceptable sacrifice, and as Romans 10:17 declares, “faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” It therefore follows that God had definitely revealed His will, that Abel believed that revelation, and that he acted accordingly. Now in Old Testament times, God spake to men sometimes directly, sometimes through others. In this instance, we believe the reference is to what God had said to Adam and Eve, and which they had communicated to Cain and Abel. By turning back to Genesis 3 we discover *what* the Lord said to their parents.

“Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it

bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:16-19). But further: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (v. 21). Here the Lord spoke to Adam and Eve by action: four things were clearly intimated. First, that in order for a sinner to stand before the thrice holy God, he needed a *covering*. Second, that that which was of human manufacture (3:7), was worthless. Third, that God Himself must *provide* the requisite covering. Fourth, that the necessary covering could only be obtained *by death*-by blood-shedding.

In Genesis 3:15 and 21 we have the first Gospel-sermon which was ever preached on this earth, and that, by the Lord Himself. Life must come out of death. Cain and Abel, and the whole human race, sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19), and the wages of sin is *death*-penal death. Either I must be paid those wages and suffer that death, or another-an innocent one, on whom death has no claim-must be paid those wages in my stead. And in order to my receiving the benefit of that substitute’s compassion, there must be a link of contact between me and him. *Faith* it is which unites to Christ. Saving faith, then, in its simplest form, is the placing of a Substitute between my guilty self and a sin-hating God.

Now what we have just gone over above was made known (probably through Adam) to Cain and Abel. How do we know this? Because, as we have seen, Abel brought his offerings to God “by faith,” and Romans 10:17 makes it clear that “faith” presupposes a Divine revelation. Further confirmation of this is found in Genesis 4:7: when Cain’s countenance fell at the rejection of his offering, the Lord said unto him, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” Thus a Divine institution of sacrifice, clearly defined and made known, is here plainly implied. It was as though God had said to Cain, “Did I promise to accept any other offering than which conformed to My prescription?”

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” Three things here claim our attention: the spring of Abel’s action (faith), the nature of his offering, and wherein it was more excellent than Cain’s. The first of these we have already considered, the second we will now examine. The language of our present verse refers us back to Genesis 4-there we read, “And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.” (v. 4). His action here (“brought”) is in sharp contrast from his parents in Genesis 3:8, who “hid themselves *from* the presence of the LORD God.” The contrast is most significant: a consciousness of guilt caused Adam and Eve to flee; a sense of need moved Abel to seek the Lord. The difference between them is to be attributed unto the respective workings of conscience and faith. An uneasy conscience never of itself, leads to Christ-“And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, *went out* one by one . . . and Jesus was left alone” (John 8:9).

“And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” (Gen. 4:4). The separate mention of the “fat” tells us that the lamb had been slain. By killing the lamb and offering it to God, Able acknowledged at least five things. First, he owned that God was righteous in driving fallen man out of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Second, he owned that he was a guilty sinner, and that death was his just due. Third, he owned that God was holy, and must punish sin. Fourth, he owned that God was merciful, and willing to accept the death of an innocent Substitute in his place. Fifth, he owned that he looked for acceptance with God in Christ the Lamb. Therefore did he, *by faith*, place the blood of his firstlings of his flock (type of Him who is “the Firstborn” or Head “of every creature”-Col. 1:15) between his sins and the avenging justice of God.

Here, then, is where the life of faith begins. There must first be a bowing unto the righteous verdict of the Divine Judge that I am a sinner, a transgressor of His holy law, and therefore justly under its “curse” or death-sentence. No excuses have I to offer, no merits have I to plead, no mitigation of the sentence can I fairly ask for. My best performances are only filthy rags in the sight of Him who knows that they were wrought out of self-love and to promote self’s interests, rather than for His glory. I can but plead guilty, and hide my face for very shame. But as the Gospel of His grace is applied to my stricken conscience by the power of the Spirit, hope revives. As He makes known to me the amazing fact that the Lamb of God died so that all who bow to God’s verdict, own themselves as lost, and hate themselves for their sins, might live-then faith stretches forth a trembling hand and lays hold of the Redeemer, and the criminal is pardoned, and accepted by God.

Having pondered the character of Abel’s sacrifice, let us now consider wherein it was “more excellent” than Cain’s. In Genesis 4:3 we read, “Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.” Cain was no infidel, for he owned the existence of God; nor was he irreligious, for he came before Him as a worshipper; but he refused to conform to the Divine appointment. By carefully noting the nature of his offering, we may observe four things. First, it was a bloodless one, and “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). Second, it was merely the fruit of his toils, the product of his labours. Third, he deliberately ignored the sentence of God in Genesis 3:17: “Cursed is the ground.” Fourth, he despised the grace made known in Genesis 3:21.

Thus, in Cain we behold the first *hypocrite*. He refused to comply with the revealed will of God, yet cloaked his rebellion by coming before Him as a worshipper. He would not obey the Divine appointment, yet brought an offering to the Lord. He believed not that his case was so desperate that death was his due, and could only be escaped by Another suffering it in his stead; yet he sought to approach unto the Lord, and patronize Him. This is the “way of Cain” spoken of by Jude (v. 11). It is the way of self-will, of unbelief, of disobedience, and of religious hypocrisy. What a contrast from Abel! Thus we see how there was a striking foreshadowment from the beginning of human history that the church on earth is a *mixed* assembly—made up of wheat and tares.

Cain and Abel stand before us as two representative men. They head the two, and the only two classes, which are to be found in the religious world. They typified, respectively, the two sections of Christendom. Cain, the elder, who is mentioned *first* in Genesis 4 and therefore represents the prominent section, sets forth that vast company who honour God with their lips, but whose hearts are far from Him; who think to pay God a compliment, but who refuse to meet His requirements; who pose as worshippers, but live to please themselves. Abel, on the other hand, *hated by Cain*, foreshadowed that “little flock,” the members of which are brought to feel their sinnerhood, bow to God’s will, comply with His commandments, fly to Christ for refuge, and are accepted by God.

Most solemnly, too, do Cain and Abel furnish us with a striking example of the *sovereignty* of Divine grace. Both of them were “shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin,” for both were the fallen sons of fallen parents, and both of them were born outside of Eden; yet one was “of that Wicked One” (1 John 3:12), while the other was one of God’s elect. Marvelously and most blessedly may we here behold the fact that sovereign grace is “no respecter of persons,” but passes by (to human ideas) the most likely, and pitches upon the unlikely. Being the younger of the two, Abel was inferior in dignity; God Himself said to Cain, “Thou shalt rule over him” (Gen. 4:7). But spiritual blessings do not follow the order of external privileges: Shem is preferred before Japheth (Gen. 5:32, 10:2, 21); Isaac before Ishmael, Jacob before Esau.

“By (a Divinely-given and Divinely-wrought) faith, Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” The superiority of Abel’s worship may, perhaps, be set forth thus. First, it was offered *in obedience* to God’s revealed will. This lies at the very foundation of all actions which are acceptable unto God: nothing can be pleasing unto Him except that which *He* has stipulated: everything else is “will worship” (Col. 2:23). Second, it was offered “by faith”: this tells us that there was something more than the mere performance of an outward duty; only that is approved of God which proceeds from the living principle of faith, kindled in the heart by the Holy Spirit. True obedience and faith are never apart; therefore we read of “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5). Yet though inseparable, they are distinguishable in thought: faith respects the word of *promise*; obedience the word of *command*, for promises and precepts go hand in hand. We act in obedience when the commandment is uppermost in our minds and hearts, which puts us to performing of duties; we act in faith when the promise is looked to and the reward is counted upon.

Third, Abel had a “willing mind” (2 Cor. 8:12). Faith works by “love” (Gal. 5:6). This is seen in the fact that he brought *of his best*: it was “of the firstlings of his flock,” which God afterwards took as His portion (Exo. 13:12); when slain, it was the “fat” which he presented which later God also claimed as His own (Lev. 3:16; 7:25). Thus, it was of the most precious and valuable things on earth which Abel brought to God. So it is our best which He requires of us: “Son, give Me thine heart” (Prov. 23:26): it is “with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10). Fourth, his sacrificial offering looked forward to and adumbrated the great sacrifice, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. In all these four things Abel excelled Cain. Cain did not act in obedience, for he disregarded the Divine appointment. He did not offer in faith. Nothing is said of any choice of excellent fruit: it was as though he brought the first which came to hand. His offering contained no foreshadowment of Christ.

Ere passing on, let us seek to gather up the *practical* teaching of what has been before us. 1. To serve God acceptably we must disregard all human inventions, lean not unto our own understandings or inclinations, and adhere strictly to the revelation which He made of His will. 2. All obedience, service, and worship, must proceed from faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6): where this be lacking, no matter how exact the performance of our duty, it is unacceptable to God. 3. We are to serve God with the best that we have: with the best of our abilities, and with the best of our substance; only as *love* constrains us will there be a doing it “heartily as unto the Lord.” 4. In all our religious exercises Christ must be before us, for only as they are perfumed with His merits can they meet with God’s acceptance.

“By which he obtained witness that he was righteous.” There is a little uncertainty as to whether the “by which” refers to Abel’s “faith” or to the “more excellent sacrifice” which he offered. Though the latter be the nearest antecedent, yet, with Owen, Gouge, and Manton, we believe the reference is to his faith. First, because it is not the Apostle’s design in this chapter to specify the kind of sacrifices which were acceptable unto God. Second, because his obvious purpose was to illustrate and demonstrate the efficacy of faith. Third, because the Apostle here exemplifies what he had just said of the Old Testament saints, namely, that by faith “they obtained a good report” (v. 2). Fourth, because this agrees much more closely with the Analogy of Faith: by the one perfect offering of Christ is the Christian *constituted* “righteous” before God; but it is through faith that he obtains *witness* of the same to his heart.

“By which he obtained witness that he was righteous.” Herein we are supplied with an illustration of “For them that honour Me, I will honour” (1 Sam. 2:30). In keeping God’s precepts there is “great reward” (Psa. 19:11). God will be no man’s debtor: he who obediently, humbly, trustfully, lovingly, respects His appointments and obeys His commandments, shall be recompensed-not as a recognition of merit, but as what is Divinely meet and gracious. God did not leave Abel in a state of uncertainty, ignorant as to whether or not his offering was approved. The Lord was pleased to assure Abel that the sacrifice had been accepted, and that he was accounted just before Him. The Greek word for “he obtained witness” is the same as is rendered “obtained a good report” in verse 2.

“By which he obtained witness that he was righteous.” This too is recorded for our instruction and comfort. From these words we learn it is the good pleasure of God that His obedient and believing children should *know* His mind concerning them. Where there is a justifying faith in Christ which moves the Christian to walk according to the Divine precepts, God honours that faith by granting assurance to its possessor. When we are enabled by faith to plead the most excellent Sacrifice and to present acceptable worship unto God, then we obtain testimony from Him through His Word and by His Spirit that our persons and services are accepted by Him. In Abel’s case, he received from God an outward attestation; in the case of the Christian today it is the inward authentication of his conscience (2 Cor. 1:12), to which the Holy Spirit also adds His confirmation (Rom. 8:15).

“God testifying of his gifts.” We are not told in Genesis 4 in so many words *how* He did so, but the Analogy of Faith leaves little room for doubt. By comparing other Scriptures, it may be that the Lord evidenced His acceptance of Abel’s offering (and thereby testified that he was “righteous”) by causing fire to descend from Heaven and consume the sacrifice, which in turn, ascended to Him as a sweet-smelling savour. In Leviticus 9:24 we read, “And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat.” So too, we are told, “Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice” (1 Kings 18:38). Compare also Judges 6:21; 13:19, 20; 1 Chronicles 21:26; Psalm 20:3 margin. There is, however, no certainty on this point.

“By which (faith) he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts.” The second clause is explanatory of the former: the parallel is found in Genesis 4:4, where we read, “and the LORD had respect unto Abel *and* to his offering.” He testified in the approbation of his offering, that He had respect unto his person; that is, that He judged, esteemed, and accounted him righteous, for otherwise God is no respecter of persons. “Whoever God accepts or respects, He testifieth Him to be righteous, that is, to be justified and freely accepted with Him. This Abel was by faith, antecedently unto his offering. He was not made righteous, he was not justified by his sacrifice, but therein showed his faith by his works; and God, by acceptance of his works of obedience, justified him, as Abraham was justified by works, namely, *declaratively*, He declared him so to be. Our persons must be first justified before our works of obedience can be accepted with God; for by that acceptance He testifies that we are righteous” (John Owen).

“And by it he being dead yet speaketh.” Marvelously full are the words of God. His commandment is “exceeding broad” (Psa. 119:96). In every sentence of Holy Writ there is both a depth and breadth which our unaided minds are incapable of perceiving and appreciating. Only as the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer and Giver of the Word, deigns to “guide” us (John 16:13), only as He teaches us to compare passage with passage, so then in His light we “see light” (Psa. 36:9), are we enabled to discern, in fuller measure, the beauty, meaning, and many-sidedness of any verse or clause. Such is the case in the sentence now before us. We are convinced that there is at least a threefold meaning and reference in it. Briefly, we will consider these in turn.

“And by it he being dead yet speaketh.” The first and most obvious signification of these words is that, by his faith’s obedience, as recorded in Genesis 4 and Hebrews 11, Abel preaches to us a most important sermon. His worship and the fruits thereof are registered in the everlasting records of Holy Scripture, and thereby he speaketh as evidently as though we heard him audibly. There comes to us a voice from the far distant past, from the other side of the flood, saying, “Fallen man can only approach unto God through the death of an innocent Substitute: yet none save God’s elect will ever feel their need of such, set aside their own inclinations, bow to God’s revealed will, and submit to His appointments; but they who do so, obtain witness that they are ‘righteous’ (cf. Matt. 13:43), and receive Divine assurance that they are accepted in the Beloved and that their obedience (imperfect in itself, yet proceeding from a heart which desires and seeks to *fully* please Him) is approved for His sake.”

“And by it he being dead yet speaketh.” And *how* did he die? By the murderous hand of a religious hypocrite who hated him. Then began that which the Apostle affirms still to continue: “he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit” (Gal. 4:29). Here was the first public and visible display of that enmity between the (mystical) seed of the woman and the (mystical) seed of the Serpent. Abel’s death was therefore also a pledge and representation of the death of Christ Himself-murdered by the religious world. Those whom God approves must expect to be disproved of men, more particularly by those professing to be Christian. But the time is coming when the present situation shall be reversed. In Genesis 4:10 God said to Cain “the voice of thy brother’s blood *crieth* unto Me from the ground.” Abel’s own blood “speaketh,” crying to God for vengeance.

“And by it he being dead yet speaketh.” Though ruthlessly slain by his brother, the soul of Abel exists in a separate state, alive, conscious, and vocal. He is among that company of whom the Apostle said, “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they *cried* with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:9, 10). Thus, Abel is not only a type of the persecution and suffering of the godly, but gives a pledge of the certain vengeance which God will take in due time upon their oppressors. God shall yet avenge His own elect (those in Heaven as well as those on the earth) who cry unto Him day and night for Him *to* avenge them (Luke 18:7, 8). Let us then seek grace to possess our souls in patience, knowing that ere long God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked.

CHAPTER 3

The Faith of Enoch (Heb. 11:5-6)

The Apostle makes it his principal design in Hebrews 11 to convince the Hebrews of the nature, importance and efficacy of saving faith. In the execution of his design, he first described the essential actings of faith (v. 1), and then in all that follows he treats of the effects, fruits, and achievements of faith. It is blessed to behold how that once more his appeal was to the Holy Scriptures. Not by abstract arguments, still less by bare assertions, would he persuade them; but instead, by setting forth some of the many examples and proofs which the sacred records furnished. Having reminded them of what the faith-obedience of Abel procured, namely, the obtaining of a witness from God that he was righteous, the Apostle cites the case of Enoch who exemplifies another aspect and consequent of faith.

The *order* observed by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 11 is not the historical one. A careful reading of its contents will make this clear. For example, reference is made in verse 9 to Isaac and Jacob before attention is directed to Sarah in verse 11; the falling down of Jericho’s walls (v. 30), is mentioned before the faith of Rahab (v. 31); in verse 32 Gideon is mentioned before Barak, Samson before Jephthah, and David before Samuel. Thus it is evident that we are to “search” for something deeper. Since the chronological order is departed from again and again, must there not be a spiritual significance to the way in which the Old Testament saints are here referred to? Without a doubt such must be the case. The reason for this is not far to seek: it is the *experimental* order which is followed in this chapter. If the Lord permits, this will become plainer and plainer as we proceed from verse to verse.

That which the three examples supplied in verses 4 to 7 set before us is an outline of the life of faith. Abel is mentioned first not because he was born before Enoch and Noah, but because what is recorded of him in Genesis 4 illustrated and demonstrated where the life of faith begins. In like manner, Enoch is referred to next not because he is mentioned before Noah in the book of Genesis, but because what was found in him (or rather, what Divine grace had wrought in him), must precede that which was typified by the builder of the ark. Each of these three men adumbrated a distinct feature or aspect of the life of faith, and the order concerning them is inviolable. Another before us has characterized them thus: in Abel we see faith’s worship, in Enoch faith’s walk, in Noah faith’s witness. This, we believe, is an accurate and helpful way of stating it, and the more it be pondered, the more its beauty and blessedness should be perceived.

But man ever reverses God’s order, and never was this fact more plainly evident to the anointed eye than in these degenerate times in which our lot is cast. Witnessing and working (“service”) is what are so much emphasized today. Yet dear reader, Hebrews 11 does not begin with the example of Noah. No indeed. Noah was preceded by Enoch, and for this reason: there can be no Divinely-acceptable witness or work unless and until there is a walking with God! Enoch’s walk with God must come before any service which is pleasing *to Him*. Alas that this is so much lost sight of now. Alas that, so generally, as soon as a young person makes profession of being a Christian, he or she is pushed into some form of “Christian activity”-open-air speaking, personal work, teaching a Sunday school class-when God’s Word so plainly says, “*Not a novice* (margin, “one newly come to the faith”) lest being lifted up with pride (which almost always proves to be the case) he fall into the condemnation of the Devil” (1 Tim. 3:6).

O how much we miss and lose through failing to give close heed to the *order* of God’s words. Frequently have we emphasized this fact in these pages, yet not too frequently. God is the God of order, and the moment we depart from His arrangements, confusion, with all its attendant evils, at once ensues. We cannot pay too strict attention to the order in which things are presented to us in Holy Writ, for only as we do so, are we in the position to learn some of its most

salutary lessons and admire its heavenly wisdom. Such is the case here. Enoch's walk of faith must precede Noah's witnessing by faith; and this, in turn, must be preceded by Abel's worship of faith. There must be that setting aside of our own preferences and ways, that bowing to God's will, that submitting to His appointments, that obedience to His requirements, before there can be any real walking with Him. Obedience *to* Him, then walking *with* Him, then witnessing *for* Him, is Heaven's unchanging order.

"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" (v. 5). The case of Abel shows us *where* the life of faith begins; the example of Enoch teaches us *of what* the life of faith consists. Now just as we had to refer to Genesis 4 to understand Hebrews 11:4, so we have to turn back to Genesis 5 for its light to be thrown upon our present verse.

"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). Here we have set forth, in the form of a brief summary, the new life of the believer: to "walk with God." Previously, Enoch had "walked according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2), had gone his "own way" (Isa 53:6) of self-pleasing, and unconcerned about the future, had thought only of the present. But now he had been "reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), for "Can two walk together, except they be *agreed*?" (Amos 3:3). The term "walk" signifies a voluntary act, a steady advance, a progress in spiritual things. To "walk with God" imports a life surrendered to God, a life controlled by God, a life lived for God. It is to that our present verse has reference.

"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." It should be obvious to any Spirit-taught heart that we need to look beneath the surface here if we are to discover the *spiritual principle* of the verse, and seek grace to apply it to ourselves. As a mere historical statement it is doubtless a very interesting one, yet as such it imparts no strength to my needy soul. The bare fact that a man who walked this earth thousands of years ago escaped death may astonish, but it supplies no practical help. What we wish to press upon the reader is, the need for asking each portion of Scripture he reads, the question, What is there here, what practical lesson, to *help me* while I am left on earth? Nor is this always discovered in a moment: prayer, patience, meditation are required.

As we endeavour to *study* our verse with the object of ascertaining its practical and meaning message for us today, the first thing the thoughtful ponderer will notice is the repetition of the word "translated": this occurring no less than three times in one verse, is evidently the key word. According to its etymology, "translated" signifies to carry across, to bear up, to remove, to change from one place to another. This at once brings to mind (if the Word of Christ be dwelling in us richly) that verse, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and *hath translated us* into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). This refers to the grand fact of the Christian's present standing and state before God: he has "passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Now it is the Christian's privilege and duty to live in the power of this fact, and have it made good in his actual case and experience; and this *will be so*, just in proportion as he is enabled to live and walk *by faith*.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death": the word "see" here has the force of taste or experience. Enoch was not to be overcome by death: but let us not limit our thoughts unto physical death. Just as Enoch's "translation" from earth to Heaven has a deeper meaning than the natural, so "that he should not see death" signifies more than an escape from the grave. "Death" is the wages of sin, the curse of the broken law. We are living in a world which is under God's righteous curse and death is plainly stamped across everything in it. But when faith is in exercise, the soul is lifted above the scene, and its favoured possessor is enabled to "walk in newness of life." As we saw when pondering the opening verse, it is the nature of faith to bring near things future, and to obtain proof and enjoyment of what is invisible to natural sight. Just so far as we walk by faith, is the heart "translated," raised above this poor world; and then it is we experience the "*power of His (Christ's) resurrection*" (Phil. 3:10).

Let us now link verses 4 and 5 together, observing their *doctrinal* force. When a sinner, by surrender to God and faith in the sacrifice of Christ, is pronounced righteous by the Judge of all, he is made an heir of eternal life, and sin and death can no more have dominion over him: that is, no longer have any legal claim upon him. It is *this* which is illustrated here: the very next saint who is mentioned after Abel, was taken to Heaven *without* dying, thereby demonstrating that the power of "death" over the Christian has been annulled. First a sinner saved through the blood of the Lamb (Abel), then a saved sinner removed from earth to Heaven, and nothing between. How inexpressibly blessed! Words fail us, and we can but bow in silent wonderment, and worship. How "great" is God's salvation!

Now that which is a fact of Christian doctrine needs to become a fact of Christian experience: we need to enjoy the good, the power, the blessedness of it in our souls day by day. And this can only be as a supernatural faith is in exercise. A bare knowledge of doctrine is practically worthless, unless the heart earnestly seeks from God a practical outworking of it. It is one thing to believe that I have judicially passed from death unto life, it is quite another to live practically in the realm of LIFE. But that is exactly what a *life of faith* is: it is a being lifted above the things which are seen, and a being

occupied with those things which are unseen. It is for the affections to be no longer set on things on the earth, but to have them fixed on things in Heaven.

Perhaps the reader is inclined to say, The ideal you set before us is indeed beautiful but it is impossible for flesh and blood to attain unto it. Quite true, dear friend; we fully grant it. Of himself the Christian can no more live practically upon resurrection-ground than Enoch could transport himself to Heaven. But observe carefully the very next words in our wonderful text: “because *God* had translated him.” Again we beg you not to carnalize these words, and see in them *only* a reference to his bodily removal to Heaven; or to see in them nothing more than a type and pledge of the Rapture-the fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17: that is the prophetic significance. But there is a spiritual meaning and practical application also, and this is what we so much desire to make clear unto each spiritual reader.

Enoch’s translation to Heaven was a miracle, and that which is spiritually symbolized is a supernatural experience. The whole Christian life, from start to finish, is a *supernatural* thing. The new birth is a miracle of grace, for one who is dead in trespasses and sins can no more regenerate himself than he can create a world. A spiritual repentance and spiritual faith are imparted by “the operation of God” (Col. 2:12), for a fallen creature can no more originate them than he could give himself being. To have the heart divorced from the world, to be brought to hate the things we once loved and to now love the things we once hated, is the alone fruitage of the almighty work of the Holy Spirit. And for the heart to function in the realm of resurrection-life, while its possessor is left in a scene of death, can only be made possible and become actual as the supernatural grace of God sustains and calls into exercise a supernatural faith. Only God can daily wean our hearts from the things of this world of death and bring us into real communion with the Prince of Life.

A word of caution here. Let us be on our guard against fatalistically folding our arms and saying, God has not ordained that I should live the *translated* life. True, God is sovereign and distributes His favours as He pleases. True, He grants more grace to some of His own people than to others of them. Yet it is also written that, “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2). Moreover, observe well the next words in our text: “before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Ah, does not *that* explain why *our* faith is so feeble, and why the things of earth forge such heavy chains about our hearts? God is not likely to strengthen and increase our faith while we are so largely indifferent to *His* pleasure. There must first be the daily, diligent, prayerful striving to please Him in all things-this is absolutely essential if we are to enter into the experience of the *translated* life.

Let us seek to anticipate a possible objection. Some may be saying, The *translated life is difficult* these days. Then let us remind you of the times in which Enoch lived. It was just before the Flood, and probably conditions then were far worse than they are now. “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). It must be remembered that those words had an historical force, as well as a prophetic. Thus, a life of pleasing God, of walking with Him, of the heart being lifted above the world, was no easier then than now. Yet Divine grace made this actual in Enoch; and that grace is as potent today as it was then.

Oftentimes it is helpful to reverse the clauses of a verse so as to perceive more clearly their relation. In order to illustrate this, and because we are so anxious for the reader to lay hold of the vitally important teaching of Hebrews 11:5, we will treat it accordingly. “Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Do I? Do you? That is a most timely inquiry. If we are *not* “pleasing God,” then the more knowledge we have of His truth, the worse for us. “That servant which *knew* his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither *did* according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luke 12:47). God will not be mocked. Fair words and reverent postures cannot deceive Him. It is not how much light do I have, but how far am I in complete subjection to the Lord?

“God had translated him.” Of course He did. God always honours those who honour Him; but let us remember that same verse adds, “And they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30). God is too holy to encourage self-pleasing and put a premium upon self-indulgence. While we gratify the flesh, the blessing of the Spirit will be withheld. While our hearts are so much occupied with the concerns of earth, He will not make the things of Heaven real and efficacious to us. O my reader, if God be not working mightily in your life and mine, showing Himself strong on our behalf (2 Chron. 16:9), then something is seriously wrong with us.

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death.” Remember what was before us in the preceding chapter: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation. Faith must have a foundation to rest upon, and that foundation must be the Word of Him that cannot lie. God had spoken, and Enoch believed. But what a testing of faith! God declared that Enoch should be removed from earth to Heaven, without passing through the portals of the grave. One, two, three hundred years passed; but Enoch *believed God*, and before the fourth century was completed His promise was fulfilled. “That he should not see death” was the reward of

his pleasing God. And He does not change-where there is a genuine “pleasing” of Him, a real walking with Him, He elevates the heart above this scene into the realm of life, light and liberty.

Ere passing on to the next verse, let us enumerate other points of interest and value contained in this one, though we can do no more than barely mention them. 1. God is not tied to the order of nature: Genesis 3:19 was set aside in the cases of Enoch and Elijah. 2. God puts great outward (providential) differences between those equally accepted by Him: He did so between Abel and Enoch. 3. To exhibit the world’s enmity God suffered Abel to be martyred, to comfort His people God preserved Enoch. 4. What God did for Enoch He can and will yet do for a whole generation of His saints (1 Cor. 15:51). 5. There is a future life for believers: the removal of Enoch to Heaven plainly intimated this. 6. The body is partaker with the soul in life eternal: the corporeal translation of Enoch showed this. 7. The godliest do not always live the longest: all mentioned in Genesis 5 stayed on earth a much greater time than did Enoch. 8. They who live with God hereafter must learn to please God ere they depart hence. 9. They who walk with God please Him. 10. They who please God shall not lack testimony thereof.

“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” (v. 6). The Apostle had just spoken of Enoch’s translation as a consequent of his pleasing God, and now from the fact of his pleasing God, proves his faith. The adversative particle “But” is used to introduce a syllogism. The argument is framed thus: God Himself had translated Enoch, who before his translation had pleased Him (as his translation evidenced); but without faith it is impossible to please God-therefore Enoch was by faith translated. Thus, this declaration in verse 6 has special reference to the last clause in the verse preceding. The argument is drawn from the impossibility of the contrary: as it is impossible to please God without faith, and as Enoch received testimony that he *did* please God, then he must have had faith-a justifying and sanctifying faith.

While there is an intimate relation between our present verse and the one immediately preceding, and while as we shall yet see (the Lord willing) that it is closely connected with the case of Noah in verse 7, yet it also makes its own particular contribution unto the theme which the Apostle is here developing, supplying both a solemn warning and a blessed encouragement. The Holy spirit still had before Him the special need of the wavering Hebrews, and would press upon them the fact that the great thing God required was not attendance on outward ordinances, but the diligent seeking unto Him by a wholehearted trust. Where faith was missing, nothing could meet with His approval-but where faith really existed and was exercised, it would be richly rewarded. This principle is unchanging, so that the central message of our verse speaks loudly to us today, and should search the heart of each one of us.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Most solemnly do these words attest the total depravity of man. So corrupt is the fallen creature, both in soul and body, in every power and part thereof, and so polluted is everything that issues from him, that he cannot of and by himself do anything that is acceptable to the Holy One. “So then they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God” (Rom. 8:8): “they that are in the flesh” means, they that are still in their natural or unregenerate state. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet waters. But faith looks out of self to Christ, applies unto His righteousness, pleads *His* worth and worthiness, and does all things Godward in the name and through the mediation of the Lord Jesus. Thus, by faith we *may* please God.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Yet in all ages there have been many who attempted to please God without faith. Cain began it, but failed woefully. All in their Divine worship profess a desire to please God, and hope that they do so; why otherwise should they make the attempt? But, as the Apostle declares in another place, many seek unto God “but not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law” (Rom. 9:32). But where faith be lacking, let men desire, design, and do what they will, they can never attain unto Divine acceptance. “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his *faith* is counted for (“unto”) righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). Whatever be the necessity of other graces, faith is that which alone obtains acceptance with God.

In order to please God, four things must concur, all of which are accomplished by faith. First, the person of him that pleaseth God must be accepted of Him (Gen. 4:4). Second, the thing done that pleaseth God must be in accord with His will (Heb. 13:21). Third, the manner of doing it must be pleasing to God: it must be performed in humility (1 Cor. 15:10), in sincerity (Isa. 38:3), in cheerfulness (2 Cor. 8:12; 9:7). Fourth, the end in view must be God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Now faith is the only means whereby these four requirements are met. By faith in Christ the person is accepted of God. Faith makes us submit ourselves to God’s will. Faith causes us to examine the manner of what we do Godwards. Faith aims at God’s glory: of Abraham it is recorded that he “was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20).

How essential it is then that each of us examine himself diligently and make sure that he has *faith*. It is by faith the convicted and repentant sinner is saved (Acts 16:31). It is by faith that Christ dwells in the heart (Eph. 3:17). It is by faith that we live (Gal. 2:20). It is by faith that we stand (Rom. 11:20; 2 Cor. 1:24). It is by faith we walk (2 Cor. 5:7). It is by faith the Devil is successfully resisted (1 Peter 5:8, 9). It is by faith we are experimentally sanctified (Acts 26:18). It is by faith we have access to God (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:22). It is by faith that we fight the good fight (1 Tim. 6:12). It is by faith

that the world is overcome (1 John 5:4). Reader, are you certain that *you* have the “faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1)? If not, it is high time you made sure, for “without faith it is *impossible* to please God.”

CHAPTER 4

The Faith of Noah (Heb. 11:6-7)

The verses which are now to engage our attention are by no means free of difficulty, especially unto those who have sat under a ministry which has failed to preserve the balance between Divine grace and Divine righteousness. Where the free favour of God has been strongly emphasized and His *claims* largely ignored, where privileges have been stressed and duties almost neglected, it is far from easy to view many Scriptures in their true perspective. When those who have heard little more than the decrying of creature-abilities and the denunciation of creature-merits are asked to honestly and seriously face the terms of Hebrews 11:6, 7, they are quite unable to fit them into their system of theology. Where such be the case, it is proof positive that something is wrong with our theology. Often those who are least cramped by sectarian bias find that the truth of God is too large, too many-sided, to be squeezed into human definitions and creeds.

Others of our readers are probably wondering what it is we have reference to above when we say that our present portion of Hebrews 11 is by no means free of difficulty. Then let us raise a few questions upon these verses. If the exercise of faith be pleasing to God, does this signify that it is a thing meritorious? How is this concept to be avoided in the light of the statement that God is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him? How does a “reward” consist with pure grace? And what is the doctrinal force of the next verse? Does the case of Noah teach salvation by works? If he had not gone to so much expense and labour in building the ark, would he and his house have escaped the flood? Was his becoming “heir of righteousness” something that he earned by his obedient toil? How can this conclusion be fairly avoided? We shall endeavour to keep these questions before us in the course of our exposition.

“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” (v. 6). There is a threefold “coming to God”: an initial, a continuous, and a final. The first takes place at conversion, the second is repeated throughout the Christian’s life, the third occurs at death or the second coming of Christ. To come to God signifies to seek and have fellowship with Him. It denotes a desire to enter into His favour and become a partaker of His blessings in this life and of His salvation in the life to come. It is the heart’s approach unto Him in and through Christ: John 14:6, Hebrews 7:25. But before there is a conscious access to Him, God has to be diligently sought.

None come to God, none truly seek Him, until they are made conscious of their lost condition. The Spirit must first work in the soul a realization that sin has alienated us “from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). We have to be made to feel that we are *away from* God, out of His favour, under His righteous condemnation, before we shall really do as the prodigal did, and say “I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee” (Luke 15:18). The same principle holds good in connection with the repeated “coming” of the Christian (1 Peter 2:4); it is a sense of need which causes us to seek Him who is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift. There is also a maintained communion with God in the performance of holy duties: in all the exercises of godliness we renew our access to God in Christ: in reading of or hearing His Word, we come to Him as Teacher, in prayer we come to Him as Benefactor.

But to seek God aright, He has to be sought in faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him,” therefore, “he that cometh to God *must* believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” There has to be first a firm persuasion of His being, and second of His bounty. To believe that “He is” means much more than assenting to the fact of a “First Cause” or to allow that there is a “Supreme Being”; it means to believe in the character of God *as* He has revealed Himself in His works, in His Word, and in Christ. He must be conceived of aright, or otherwise we are only pursuing a phantom of our own imagination. Thus to believe that “God is” is to exercise faith upon Him as *such* a Being as His Word declares Him to be: supreme sovereign, ineffably holy, all-mighty, inflexibly just, yet abounding in mercy and grace toward poor sinners through Christ.

Not only is the heart to go out unto God as His being and character is revealed in Scripture, but particularly, faith is to lay hold of His graciousness: that He is “a Rewarder” etc. The acting of faith toward God as a “Rewarder” is the heart’s apprehension and anticipation of the fact that He is ready and willing to conduct Himself to needy sinners in a

way of bounty, that He will act in all things toward them in a manner suitable unto the proposal of which He makes of Himself through the Gospel. It was the realization of this (in addition to his felt need) which stirred the prodigal to act. Just as it would be useless to pray unless there were an hope that God hears and that He will answer prayer, so no sinner will really seek unto God until there is born in his heart an expectation of mercy from Him, that He will receive him graciously. This is a laying hold of His promise.

In Scripture, privileges are propounded with their necessary limitations, and we disjoint the whole system of Truth if we separate the recompense from the duty. There is something to be done on our part: God is a "Rewarder," but *of whom?* Of those who "diligently seek Him." "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, all the nations that forget God" (Psa. 9:17): not only "deny," but "forget" Him; as they cast God out of their thoughts and affections, so He will cast them out of His presence. What is meant by "diligently seek Him"? To "seek" God is to forsake, deny, go out of self, and take Him alone for our Ruler and satisfying Portion. To seek Him "diligently" is to seek Him early (Prov. 8:17), wholeheartedly (Psa. 119:10), earnestly (Psa. 27:4), unweariedly (Luke 11:8). How does a thirsty man seek water? The promise is, "And ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13 and cf. 2 Chron. 15:15).

And *how* does God "reward" the diligent seeker? By offering Himself graciously to be found of them who penitently, earnestly, trustfully approach Him through the appointed Mediator. By granting them access into His favour: this He did not unto Cain, who sought Him in a wrong manner. By actually bestowing His favour upon them, as He did upon the prodigal. By forgiving their sins and blotting out their iniquities (Isa. 55:7). By writing His laws in their hearts, so that they now desire and determine to forsake all idols and serve Him only. By giving them assurance of their acceptance in the Beloved, and granting them sweet foretastes of the rest and bliss which awaits them on High. By ministering to their every need, both spiritual and temporal. Finally, by taking them to Heaven, where they shall spend eternity in the unclouded enjoyment of the wondrous riches of His grace.

But does this word "Rewarder" have a legalistic ring to it? Not if it be understood rightly. Does it signify that our "diligent seeking" is a meritorious performance which is entitled to recognition? Of course it does not. What, then, is meant? First, let us quote from the helpful comments of John Owen: "That which these words of the Apostle hath respect to, and which is the ground of the faith here required, is contained in the revelation that God made of Himself unto Abraham, 'Fear not: Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward' (Gen. 15:1). God is so a rewarder unto them that seek Him, as that He is Himself their reward, which eternally excludes all thoughts of merit in them that are so rewarded. Who can merit God to be his reward? Rewarding in God, especially where He Himself is the reward, is an act of infinite grace and bounty. And this gives us full direction unto the object of faith here intended, namely, God in Christ, as revealed in the promise of Him, giving Himself unto believers as a reward, (to be their God) in a way of infinite goodness and bounty. The proposal hereof, is that alone which gives encouragement to come unto Him, which the Apostle designs to declare."

"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Rom. 4:4): is not the implication clear that *grace* itself also "rewards"? Grace and reward are no more inconsistent than the high sovereignty of God and the real responsibility of man, or between the fact that Christ is and was both "Servant" (Isa. 42:1) and "Lord" (John 13:13). The language of Colossians 3:24 makes this clear as a sunbeam: "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." The "inheritance" is Heaven itself, salvation in its consummation. But is not salvation a free gift? Yes, indeed; nevertheless it has to be "bought" by its recipient (Isa. 55:1), yet "without money and without price." Salvation is both a "gift" and a "reward."

While it is true that Heaven cannot be earned by the sinner, it is equally true that Heaven is not for idlers and loiterers. God has to be "diligently sought." To enter the strait gate the soul has to agonize (Luke 13:24). We are called upon to "labour" for that meat which endureth unto eternal life (John 6:27) and to enter into the heavenly rest (Heb. 4:11). Such efforts God "rewards," not because they are meritorious, but because He deems it meet to recognize and recompense them. There are those who teach that in serving God we ought to have no "respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:26), but this verse refutes them, for the Apostle explicitly declares that this forms a necessary part of that truth which is to be believed in order to obey our pleasing God.

Heaven, or completed salvation, is spoken of as a "reward" to intimate the character of those to whom it is given, namely, the diligent labourer. Second, because it is not bestowed until our work is completed: 2 Timothy 4:7, 8. Third, to intimate the sureness of it: we may as confidently expect it as does the labourer who has been hired by an honest master: James 1:12. This "reward" is principally in the next life: Hebrews 11:16, 2 Corinthians 4:17-it is then that all true godliness shall be richly recompensed: Mark 10:29, 30. It only remains for us now to add that the *ground* on which God bestows the "reward" is the infinite merits of Christ, and out of respect unto His own promise. *That which* He "rewards" is the work of His own Spirit within us, so that we have no ground for boasting.

“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” (v. 7). The Apostle now presents a concrete example which illustrates what he had said in verse 6. God’s dealings with Noah and the world in his time were plainly a sample and pledge of His dealing with the world in all ages, particularly so when its history is finally wound up. Inasmuch as God is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, it necessarily follows that He is also the Revenger of all who despise Him. In the destruction of the old world, God showed His displeasure against sin (Job 22:15, 16); in the preservation of Noah, He made manifest the privileges of His own people (2 Peter 2:9). That the whole was a *pledge* and type is clear from 2 Peter 3:6, 7.

In the verse which is now before us three things claim attention. First, Noah’s faith and its ground, namely the warning he had received from God. Second, the effects of his faith, namely, internally, the impulse of “fear”; externally, his obedience in making the ark under God’s orders. Third, the consequences of his faith, namely, the saving of his house, the condemning of the world, his becoming heir of the righteousness which is by faith. But ere taking up these points, let us face and endeavour to remove a difficulty which some feel this verse raises. Let us put it this way: was Noah saved by his own works? We believe the answer is both Yes, and No. We beg the reader to exercise patience and prayerfully ponder what follows, and not cry out rank heresy and refuse to read further.

If Noah had not “prepared an ark” in obedience to God’s command, would he not have perished in the flood? Then was it his own efforts which preserved him from death in the great deluge? No indeed; it was the preserving power of God. That ark had neither mast, sail, nor steering-wheel: only the gracious hand of the Lord kept that frail baroque from being splintered to atoms on the rocks and the mountains. Then what is the relation between these two things? This: Noah made use of the *means* which God had prescribed, and by His grace and power those means were made effectual unto his preservation. Must not the farmer toil in his fields? yet it is God alone who gives him the increase. Must I not observe the laws of hygiene and eat wholesome food? yet only as God blesses them to me am I kept in health. So it is in spiritual things: salvation by grace alone *does not exclude* the imperative necessity of our using the means which God has appointed and prescribed.

The temporal deliverance of Noah from the flood is undoubtedly an adumbration of the eternal deliverance of God’s elect from the wrath to come: and here, as everywhere, the type is accurate and perfect. Nor can any sophistical quibbling honestly get rid of the fact that Noah’s building of the ark—a most costly and arduous work!—was a means towards his preservation. Then does the case of Noah supply a clear example of salvation by works? Again we answer boldly, Yes and No. But the difficulty is greatly relieved if we bear in mind that Noah was *already a saved man* before God bade him build the ark! A reference to Genesis 6:8, 9 and a comparison with 6:14, 22 makes this unmistakably plain. But does not this fact overthrow all that has been said in the previous paragraphs? Not at all. The Christian’s salvation is not only a past thing (2 Tim. 1:9), but a present (Phil. 2:12) and future (Rom. 13:11) thing too! We trust that the solution of the difficulty will be more evident as we proceed with our exposition of the verse.

As we have before pointed out, the first three verses of Hebrews 11 are introductory, their design being to set forth the importance and excellency of faith. Then, in verses 4-7 we have an outline of the life of faith: the beginning of it is seen in verse 4, the nature of what it consists in verse 5, a warning and encouragement is supplied in verse 6, and the end of it is shown in verse 7. Before bringing before us the glorious goal which the life of faith reaches, verse 7 gives us the other side of what was before us in verse 5: there we saw faith elevating above a world of death, carrying the heart of its favoured possessor into Heaven. But we are still in the world, and that is the place of opposition, of danger, and hence, of testing. Thus in verse 7 we are not only shown what faith obtains, but *how* it obtains it.

Now as we found it necessary to go back to Genesis 3 and 4 to interpret Hebrews 11:4, and to Genesis 5:24 to get the meaning of 11:5, so now we have to consult Genesis 6 in order to discover what is here adumbrated. Let the reader turn back to Genesis 6:5-22. There we find unsparing Divine judgment announced (v. 13), a way of deliverance presented to one who had “found grace” in the Lord’s eye (v. 14), faith’s obedience called for if escape was to be had from judgment (v. 14), the Divinely prescribed means to be used (v. 15); by employing those means deliverance was obtained. Now in like manner, a most solemn warning has been given us, an announcement of coming judgment: see 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:10-17—let the reader duly observe that both of these passages are found in Epistles addressed to God’s children.

In saying above that Hebrews 11:7 gives us the other side of what is spiritually set forth in verse 5, we mean that it gives us the *balancing* truth. It is most important to observe this, for otherwise we are very liable to entertain a mystical concept of verse 5 and become lopsided. Satan is ready to tell us that verse 5 presents to us a beautiful ideal, but one which is altogether impracticable for ordinary people—alright for preachers, but impossible for others. After reading our article on verse 5, many are likely to exclaim: We cannot be thinking of heavenly things all the time, we have our daily duties to attend to here on earth: the only way we could reach the standard of verse 5 would be by entering a monastery or

convent, entirely secluding ourselves from the world; and surely God does not require this of us. No, indeed; that was the great mistake of the “Dark Ages.”

“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.” This gives us the other side of verse 5. It shows that we *have* duties to perform on earth, and intimates *how* they are to be discharged-by faith, in the fear of God, implicitly obeying His commands. And more: our present verse insists on the fact (now so little apprehended) that, the performing these duties, the rendering of faith’s obedience to God, is indispensably necessary to our very salvation. The “salvation” of the soul is yet future: note “saving” and *not* “salvation” in Hebrews 11:7, and also compare 1 Peter 1:5. In order to be saved from the destructive power of sin, the ruinous allurements of the world, and the devouring assaults of Satan, we *must* tread the path of obedience to Christ (Heb. 5:9), for only there do we escape these fatal foes. Let the reader prayerfully ponder Mark 9:43-50; Luke 14:26, 27, 33; Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 3:12, 14.

Hebrews 11:5 and 7 supplement each other. Verse 5 shows us that by the exercise of faith our affections are elevated above the earth and set upon things above. Verse 7 teaches us that our lives on earth are to be regulated by heavenly principles. The real Christian is a heavenly man living on earth *as* a heavenly man; that is to say, he is governed by spiritual and Divine principles, and not by fleshly motives and worldly interests. The Christian performs many of the same deeds as the non-Christian does, yet with a far different object and aim. All that I do should be done in obedience to God, in joyous response to His revealed will. Let us be specific and come to details. Let the Christian wife read Ephesians 5:22-24 and the husband 5:25-31, and let each recognize that in obeying the husband and loving the wife, they are *obeying God*. Let Christian employees ponder Ephesians 6:5-7, and recognize that in obeying their masters they are obeying the Lord; contrariwise, in sulking or speaking against them, they murmur against the Lord!

Now such obedience to God’s commandments in the ordinary relationships of life is necessary unto salvation. If this staggers the reader, let him contemplate the opposite. Those precepts and commands have been given us by God, and to disregard them is rebellion, and to refuse compliance is defiance; and no rebel against God can enter Heaven. Unless our wills have been broken, unless our hearts have been brought into subjection to God, we have no Scriptural warrant for concluding that He has *begun* a good work in us (Phil. 1:6). “He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). The only path which leads to Heaven is that of walking in obedience to God’s commands.

Now the salvation of the soul lies at the *end* of that path. Does the reader exclaim, I thought it was at the beginning of it, and that none but a regenerate person could or would walk therein. From one standpoint that is quite true. When genuinely converted a sinner *is* saved from the eternal penalty of his sins, and *is* “delivered from the wrath to come.” But is he there and then removed to Heaven? With very rare exceptions he is not. Instead, God leaves him here in this world. And this world is the place of danger, for temptations to return unto its ways and pleasures abound on every side. Moreover, the judgment of God hangs over it, and one day will burst upon and consume it. And who will escape that destruction? Only those who, like Noah, have a faith which is moved with fear and produces obedience. But it is now high time that we considered more closely the details of verse 7.

“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.” Ah, here is the key to our verse, hung right upon the very door of it. Like every other one of God’s elect, Noah was saved by grace through faith; and yet not by a faith that was inactive-Ephesians 2:10 follows verse 9! *Faith* was the spring of all his works: a faith which was far more than an intellectual assent, one which was a supernatural principle that sovereign grace had wrought in him. God had determined to send a flood and destroy the wicked world, but ere doing so, He acquainted Noah with His purpose. He has done the same with us: see Romans 1:18. That Divine warning was the ground of Noah’s faith. He argued not, nor reasoned about its incredibility; instead, he believed God. The *threatening*, as well as the promise of God, is the object of faith; the justice of God is to be eyed, as well as His mercy!

Human reason was altogether opposed unto what God had made known to Noah. Hitherto there had been no rain (Gen. 2:6), then why expect an overwhelming deluge? It seemed utterly unlikely God would destroy the whole human race, and His mercy be thus utterly swallowed up by His avenging justice. The threatened judgment was a long way off (120 years: Gen. 6:3), and during that time the world might well repent and reform. When he preached to men (2 Peter 2:5) none believed his message: why then should he be so fearful, when everyone else was at ease? To build an ark of such huge dimensions was an enormous undertaking, and, as well, would involve the scoffs of all his fellows. And even if the flood came, how could the ark float with such an immensely heavy burden-it had no anchor to stay her, no mast and sail to steady her, no steering-wheel to direct. Was it not quite impracticable, for Noah was quite inexperienced nautically. Moreover, for him and his family to dwell for an indefinite period in a sealed ark was far from a pleasant prospect unto flesh and blood. But against all these carnal objections faith offered a steady resistance, and *believed God!*

“Moved with fear.” This evidenced the reality and power of his faith, for saving faith not only “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), but in “fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). A reverential awe of God is a sure fruit of saving faith. That “fear” acted as a salutary impetus in Noah and operated as a powerful motive in his building of the ark. “His believing the word of God, had this effect on him . . . a reverential fear it is of God’s threatenings, and not an anxious solicitous fear of the evil threatened. In the warning given him, he considered the greatness, the holiness, and the power of God, with the vengeance becoming those holy properties of His nature, which He threatened to bring on the world. Seeing God by faith under this representation of Him, he was filled with a reverential fear of Him. See Habakkuk 3:16, Psalm 119:120, Malachi 2:5” (John Owen).

“Prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” As Matthew Henry says, “Faith first influences our affections and then our actions.” “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20), particularly works of obedience. “Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). Privilege and duty are inseparably connected, yet duty will never be performed where faith is absent. Faith in Noah caused him to persevere in his arduous labours amid many difficulties and discouragements. Thus his building of the ark was a work of faith and patience, a labour of godly fear, an act of obedience, a means to his preservation-for God’s covenant with him (Gen. 6:18) did not preclude his diligent use of means; and a type of Christ. As it was by faith-obedience he prepared the ark, so by faith’s obedience came the “saving of his house.” God always honours those who honour Him. This temporal salvation was a figure of the eternal salvation unto which we are pressing forward, for note that the destruction of the anti-deluvians was an *eternal* one-for their spirits are now “in prison” (1 Peter 3:19)! Observe it is *our* responsibility to seek after our own salvation and those committed to us: see Acts 2:40, 2 Timothy 4:16.

“By the which he condemned the world.” The reference is to all that precedes. By his own example, by his faith in God’s warning, his reverential awe of God’s holiness and justice, his implicit and unflagging obedience in preparing the ark, Noah “condemned” the unbelieving, unconcerned, godless people all around him. One man is said to “condemn,” another when, by his godly actions, he shows what the other should do, and which by doing not, his guilt is aggravated; see Matthew 12:41, 42. The Sabbath-keeper “condemns” the Sabbath-breaker. He who abandons a worldly church and goes forth unto Christ outside the camp, “condemns” the compromiser. Noah’s diligent and costly labours increased the guilt of the careless, who rested in a false security. Though we cannot convert the wicked, yet we must be careful to set before them such an example of personal piety that they are left “without excuse.”

“And became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” The “righteousness” here referred to is that perfect obedience of Christ which God imputes unto all who savingly believe on His Son: Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 5:19, 2 Corinthians 5:21. This righteousness is sometimes called, absolutely, the “righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17, etc.), sometimes the “gift of righteousness . . . by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17), sometimes “the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:9); in all of which our free and gratuitous justification by the righteousness of Christ reckoned to our account through faith, is intended. In saying that Noah “became heir” of the righteousness, there may be a double significance. First, by faith’s obedience he *evidenced* himself *to be* a justified man (Gen. 6:9), as Abraham did when he offered up Isaac (James 2:21). Second, he *established his title* to that righteousness which is here spoken of as an “inheritance”: this is in contrast from Esau who despised his. That righteousness which Christ purchased for His people is here denominated an “inheritance,” to emphasize the dignity and excellency of it, magnify the freeness of its tenure, to declare the certainty and inviolability of it.

The actual entrance upon our Inheritance is yet future. “That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the *hope* of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). The great question for each of us to settle is, Am I an “heir”? To help me do so, let me inquire, Have I the *spirit* of one? Is my main care to make sure that I have the *birth* right? Am I putting the claims of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33) above everything else? Have I such thoughts of the blessedness of my portion in Christ that nothing can induce me to sell or part with it (Heb. 12:16)? Is my heart wrapped up in that inheritance so that I am groaning within myself, “waiting for the adoption” (Rom. 8:23)? Am I walking by faith, with the fear of God upon me, diligently attending to His commandments, thereby condemning the world? If so, thrice blessed am I; and soon shall I be saved “to sin no more.”

CHAPTER 5

The Call of Abraham

(Heb. 11:8)

“The scope of the Apostle in Chapter 11 of Hebrews is to prove that the doctrine of faith is an ancient doctrine and that faith hath been always exercised about things not seen, not liable to the judgment of sense and reason. He had proved both points by instances of the fathers before the flood, and now he comes to prove them by the examples of those that were eminent for faith after the flood. And in the first place he pitcheth upon Abraham—a fit instance: he was the father of the faithful, and a person of whom the Hebrews boasted; his life was nothing else but a continual practice of faith, and therefore he insisteth upon Abraham longer than upon any other of the patriarchs. The first thing for which Abraham is commended in Scripture is his obedience to God, when He called him out of his country; now the Apostle shows this was an effect of faith” (T. Manton, 1660).

The second division of Hebrews 11 begins with the verse which is now to be before us. As pointed out in the previous chapters, verses 4-7 present an outline of the life of faith. In verse 4 we are shown where the life of faith *begins*, namely, at that point where the conscience is awakened to our lost condition, where the soul makes a complete surrender to God, and where the heart rests upon the perfect satisfaction made by Christ our Surety. In verse 5 we are shown the *character* of the life of faith: a pleasing of God, a walking with Him, the heart elevated above this world of death. In verses 6, 7 we are shown the *end* of the life of faith: a diligent seeking of God, a heart which is moved by His fear to use those means which He appointed and prescribed, issuing in the saving of the soul and establishing its title to be an heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Wonderfully comprehensive are the contents of these opening verses, and well repaid will be the prayerful student who ponders them again and again.

From verse 8 to the end of the chapter, the Holy Spirit gives us fuller details concerning the life of faith, viewing it from different angles, contemplating varied aspects, and exhibiting the different trials to which it is subject and the blessed triumphs which Divine grace enables it to achieve. Fitly does this new section of our chapter open by presenting to us the case of Abraham. In his days a new and important era of human history commenced. Hitherto God had maintained a general relation to the whole human race, but at the Tower of Babel that relation was broken. It was there that mankind, as a whole, consummated their revolt against their Maker, in consequence of which He abandoned them. To that point is to be traced the origin of “Heathendom”: Romans 1:18-30 should be read in this connection. From this point onwards God’s dealings with men were virtually confined to Abraham and his posterity.

That a new division of our chapter commences at verse 8 is further evident from the fact that Abraham is designated “the *father* of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11), which means not only that he is (as it were) the earthly head of the whole election of grace, but the one after whose likeness his spiritual children are conformed. There is a family likeness between Abraham and the true Christian, for if we are Christ’s then we are “Abraham’s seed and heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29), for “they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7), which is evidenced by them doing “the works of Abraham” (John 8:39), for these are the marks of identification. In like manner, Christ declared of the Pharisees, “Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts (desires and behests) of your father, ye will (are determined) to do” (John 8:44). The wicked bear the family likeness of the Wicked one. The “fatherhood of Abraham” is twofold: natural, as the progenitor of a physical seed; spiritual, as the pattern to which his children are morally conformed.

“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” (v. 8). In taking up the study of this verse our first concern should be to ascertain its meaning and message *for us today*. In order to discover this, we must begin by seeking to know what was shadowed forth in the great incident here recorded. A little meditation should make it obvious that the central thing referred to is the Divine call of which Abraham was made the recipient. This is confirmed by a reference to Genesis 12:1, where we have the historical account of that to which the Spirit by the Apostle here alludes. Further proof is furnished by Acts 7:2, 3. This, then, must be our starting point.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are *the called* according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28) There are two distinct kinds of “calls” from God mentioned in Scripture: a general and a particular, an outward and an inward, an inoperative and an effectual. The general, external, and inefficacious “call” is given to all who hear the Gospel, or come under the sound of the Word. *This* call is *refused* by all. It is found in such passages as the following: “Unto you, O men, I call; and My voice is to the sons of man” (Prov. 8:4); “For many be called, but few chosen” (Matt. 20:16); “And sent His servant at suppertime to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all

things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luke 14:17, 18); “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand and no man regarded” etc. (Prov. 1:24-28).

The special, inward, and efficacious “call” of God comes only to His elect. It is responded to by each favoured one who receives it. It is referred to in such passages as the following: “The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live” (John 5:25); “He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when He putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know His voice . . . and other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice” (John 10:3, 4, 16); “Whom He called, them He also justified” (Rom. 8:30); “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise” (1 Cor. 1:26-29). This call is illustrated and exemplified in such cases as Matthew (Luke 5:27, 28), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5, 6), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:4, 5).

The individual, internal, and invincible call of God is an act of sovereign grace, accompanied by all-mighty power, quickening those who are dead in trespasses and sins, imparting to them spiritual life. This Divine call is regeneration, or the new birth, when its favoured recipient is brought “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Now *this* is what is before us in Hebrews 11:8, which gives additional proof that this verse commences a new section of the chapter. The wondrous call which Abraham received from God is necessarily placed at the head of the Spirit’s detailed description of the life of faith; necessarily, we say, for faith itself is utterly impossible until the soul has been Divinely quickened.

Let us first contemplate the state that Abraham was in until and at the time God called him. To view him in his unregenerate condition is a duty which the Holy Spirit pressed upon Israel of old: “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the *hole of the pit* whence ye are digged: look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you” (Isa. 51:1, 2). Help is afforded if we turn to Joshua 24:2, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they *served other gods.*” Abraham, then, belonged to a heathen family, and dwelt in a great city, until he was seventy. No doubt he lived his life after the same manner as his fellows-content with the “husks” which the swine feed upon, with little or no serious thoughts of the Hereafter. Thus it is with each of God’s elect till the Divine call comes to them and arrests them in their self-will, mad, and destructive course.

“The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Canaan” (Acts 7:2). What marvelous grace! The God of glory condescended to draw near and reveal Himself unto one that was sunk in sin, immersed in idolatry, having no concern for the Divine honour. There was nothing in Abraham to deserve God’s notice, still less to merit His esteem. But more: not only was the *grace* of God here signally evident, but the *sovereignty* of His grace was displayed in thus singling him out from the midst of all his fellows. As He says in Isaiah 51:2, “I called him *alone*, and blessed him.” “Why God should not call his father and kindred, there can be no answer but this: God hath mercy on whom He will (Rom. 9:18). He calleth Isaac and refuseth Ishmael; loveth Jacob, and hateth Esau; taketh Abel, and leaveth Cain: even because He will, and for no cause that we know” (W. Perkins, 1595).

“The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham” (Acts 7:2). All that is included in these words, we know not; as to how God “appeared” unto him, we cannot say. But of two things we may be certain: for the first time in Abraham’s life God became a *living Reality* to him; further he perceived that He was an all-glorious Being. Thus it is, sooner or later, in the personal experience of each of God’s elect. In the midst of their worldliness, self-seeking and self-pleasing, one day He of whom they had but the vaguest notions, and whom they sought to dismiss from their thoughts, appears before their hearts-terrifying, awakening, and then attracting. Now it is they can say, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee” (Job 42:5).

O dear reader, our desire here is not simply to write an article, but to be used of God in addressing a definite message from Him straight to your inmost heart. Suffer us then to inquire, Do you know anything about what has been said in the above paragraph? Has God become a living Reality to your soul? Has He really drawn near to you, manifested Himself in His awe-inspiring Majesty, and had direct and personal dealings with your soul? Or do you know no more about Him than what *others* write and say of Him? This is a question of vital moment, for if He does not have personal dealings with you here in a way of grace, He will have personal dealings with you hereafter, in a way of justice and judgment. Then “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6).

This, then, is one important aspect of regeneration: God graciously makes a personal revelation of Himself to the soul. The result is that He “who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The favoured individual in whom this miracle of grace is wrought is now brought out of that dreadful state in which he lay by nature, whereby “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). So fearful is that state in which all the unregenerate lie, it is described as “having

the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18). But at the new birth the soul is delivered from the terrible darkness of sin and depravity into which the Fall of Adam has brought all his descendants, and is ushered into the marvelous and glorious light of God.

Let us next consider the accompaniment of *terms* of the call which Abraham now received from God. A record of this is found in Genesis 12:1, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.” What a testing of faith was this! What a trial to flesh and blood! Abraham was already seventy years of age, and long journeys and the break-up of old associations do not commend themselves to elderly people. To leave the land of his birth, to forsake home and estate, to sever family ties and leave loved ones behind, to abandon present certainty for (what seemed to human wisdom) a future uncertainty, and go forth not knowing whither, must have seemed hard and harsh unto natural sentiment. Why, then, should God make such a demand? To prove Abraham, to give the death-blow to his natural corruptions, to demonstrate the might of His grace. Yet we must look for something deeper, and that which applies directly to us.

As we have pointed out above, God’s appearing to Abraham and His call of him, speaks to us of that miracle of grace which takes place in the soul at regeneration. Now the evidence of regeneration is found in genuine *conversion*: it is that complete break from the old life, both inner and outer, which furnishes proof of the new birth. It is plain to any renewed mind that when a soul has been favoured with a real and personal manifestation of God, that a move or response is called for from him. It is simply impossible that he should continue his old manner of life. A new Object is before him, a new relationship has been established, new desires now fill his heart, and new responsibilities claim him. The moment a man truly realizes that he has to do with God, there must be a radical change: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

The call which Abraham received from God required a double response from him: he was to leave the land of his birth, and forsake his own kindred. What, then is the *spiritual* significance of these things? Remember that Abraham was a *pattern* case, for he is the “father” of all Christians, and the children must be conformed to the family likeness. Abraham is the prototype of those who are “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1). Now the spiritual application to us of what was adumbrated by the terms of Abraham’s call is twofold: doctrinal and practical, legal and experimental. Let us, briefly, consider them separately.

“Get thee out of thy country” finds its counterpart in the fact that the Christian is one who has been, by grace, the redemptive work of Christ, and the miraculous operation of the Spirit, delivered from his *old position*. By nature, the Christian was a member of “the world,” the whole of which “lieth in the Wicked One” (1 John 5:19), and so is headed for destruction. But God’s elect have been delivered from this: Christ “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God our Father” (Gal. 1:4); therefore does He say unto His own, “because ye are *not of* the world, because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19).

“Get thee out of thy country” finds its fulfillment, first, in the Christian’s being delivered from his *old condition*, namely “in the flesh”: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6). He has now been made a member of a new family: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). He is now brought into union with a new “kindred,” for all born-again souls are his brethren and sisters in Christ: “They that are in the flesh can not please God; but ye are *not in* the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Rom. 8:8-9). Thus, the call of God is a separating one-from our old standing and state, into a new one.

Now what has just been pointed out above is already, from the Divine side, an accomplished fact. Legally, the Christian no longer belongs to “the world” nor is he “in the flesh.” But this has to be entered into practically from the human side, and made good in our actual experience. Because our “citizenship is in Heaven” (Phil. 3:20), we are to live here as “strangers and pilgrims.” A practical separation from the world is demanded of us, for “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4); therefore does God say, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . . come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor. 6:14, 17). So too the “flesh,” still in us, is to be allowed no rein. “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1); “Make no provision for the flesh to the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14); “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth” (Col. 3:5).

The claims of Christ upon His people are paramount. He reminds them that, “ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Therefore does He say, “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he can not be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). The response is declared in, “They that are Christ’s *have* crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). Thus

the terms of the call which Abraham received from God are addressed to *our* hearts. A complete break from the old life is required of us.

Practical *separation from the world* is imperative. This was typed out of old in the history of Abraham's descendants. They had settled down in Egypt-figure of the world-and after they had come under the blood of the Lamb, and before they entered Canaan (type of Heaven), they *must* leave the land of Pharaoh. Hence too God says of our Surety "Out of Egypt have I called My Son" (Matt. 2:15): the Head must be conformed to the members, and the members to their Head. Practical mortification of *the flesh* is equally imperative. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die (eternally): but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (eternally): (Rom. 8:13); "but he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

"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." This verse, read in the light of Genesis 12:1, clearly signifies that God demanded the supreme place in Abraham's affections. His life was no longer to be regulated by self-will, self-love, self-pleasing; self was to be entirely set aside, "crucified." Henceforth, the will and word of God was to govern and direct him in all things. Henceforth he was to be a man without a *home* on earth, but seeking one in Heaven, and treading that path which alone leads thither.

Now it should be very evident from what has been said above, that regeneration or an effectual call from God is a *miraculous* thing, as far above the reach of nature as the heavens are above the earth. When God makes a personal revelation of Himself to the soul, this is accompanied by the communication of supernatural grace, which produces supernatural fruit. It was contrary to nature for Abraham to leave home and country, and go forth "not knowing whither he went." Equally is it contrary to nature for the Christian to separate from the world and crucify the flesh. A miracle of Divine grace has to be wrought within him, before any man will really deny self and live in complete subjection to God. And this leads us to say that, genuine cases of regeneration are much rarer than many suppose. The spiritual children of Abraham are very far from being a numerous company, as is abundantly evident from the fact that few indeed bear his likeness. Out of all the thousands of professing Christians around us, how many manifest Abraham's faith or do Abraham's works?

"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." This verse, read in the light upon which we would fix our attention is Abraham's *obedience*. A saving faith is one which heeds the Divine commands, as well as relies upon the Divine promises. Make no mistake upon this point, dear reader: Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey* Him" (Heb. 5:9). Abraham placed himself unreservedly in the hands of God, surrendered to His lordship, and subscribed to His wisdom as best fitted to direct him. And so must we, or we shall never be "carried into Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22).

Abraham "obeyed, and he went out." There are two things there: "obeyed" signifies the consent of his mind, "and went out" tells of his actual performance. He obeyed not only in word, but in deed. In this, he was in marked contrast from the rebellious one mentioned in Matthew 21:30, "I go, sir, and went not." "The first act of saving faith consists in a discovery and sight of the infinite greatness, goodness, and other excellencies of the nature of God, so as to judge it our duty upon His call, His command, and promise, to deny ourselves, to relinquish all things, and to do so accordingly" (John Owen). Such ought our obedience to be unto God's call, and to every manifestation of His will. It must be a simple obedience in subjection to His authority, without inquiring after the reason thereof, and without objecting any scruples or difficulties against it.

"Observe that faith, wherever it is, bringeth forth obedience: by faith Abraham, being called, obeyed God. Faith and obedience can never be severed; as the sun and the light, fire and heat. Therefore we read of the 'obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5). Obedience is faith's daughter. Faith hath not only to do with the grace of God, but with the duty of the creature. By apprehending grace, it works upon duty: 'faith worketh by love' (Gal. 5:6); it fills the soul with the apprehensions of God's love, and then makes use of the sweetness of love to urge us to more work or obedience. All our obedience to God comes from love to God, and our love comes from the persuasion of God's love to us. The argument and discourse that is in a sanctified soul is set down thus: 'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me' (Gal. 2:20). Wilt thou not do this for God, that loved thee? for Jesus Christ, that gave Himself for thee? Faith works towards obedience by commanding the affections" (Thos. Manton, 1680).

"He went forth *not* knowing whither he went." How this demonstrates the reality and power of his faith-to leave a present possession for a future one. Abraham's obedience is the more conspicuous because at the time God called him, He did not specify which land he was to journey to, nor where it was located. Thus, it was by faith and not by sight, that he moved forward. Implicit confidence in the One who had called him was needed on the part of Abraham. Imagine a

total stranger coming and bidding you follow him, without telling you where! To undertake a journey of unknown length, one of difficulty and danger, towards a land of which he knew nothing, called for real faith in the living God. See here the power of faith to triumph over fleshly disinclinations, to surmount obstacles, to perform difficult duties. Reader, is *this* the nature of *your* faith? Is your faith producing works which are not only *above* the power of mere nature to perform, but also directly *contrary* thereto?

Abraham's faith is hard to find these days. There is much talk and boasting, but most of it is empty words-the *works* of Abraham are conspicuous by their absence, in the vast majority of those who claim to be his children. The Christian is required to set his affections on things above, and not on things below (Col. 3:1). He is required to walk by faith, and not by sight; to tread the path of obedience to God's commands, and not please himself; to go and do whatever the Lord bids him. Even if God's commands appear severe or unreasonable, we must obey them: "Let no man deceive himself: if any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18); "And He said to them all, if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

But such an obedience as God requires, can only proceed from a *supernatural* faith. An unshakable confidence in the living God, and unreserved surrender to His holy will, each step of our lives being ordered by His Word (Psa. 119:105), can only issue from a miraculous work of grace which He has Himself wrought in the heart. How many there are who profess to be God's people yet only obey Him so long as they consider that their *own* interests are being served! How many are unwilling to quit trading on the Sabbath because they fear a few dollars will be lost! Now just as a traveler on foot, who takes a long journey through an unknown country, seeks a reliable guide, commits himself to his leading, trusts to his knowledge, and follows him implicitly o'er hill and dale, so God requires us to commit ourselves fully unto Him, trusting His faithfulness, wisdom, and power, and yielding to every demand which He makes upon us.

"He went forth not knowing whither he went." Most probably many of his neighbours and acquaintances in Chaldea would inquire why he was leaving them and where he was bound for. Imagine their surprise when Abraham had to say, I know not. Could *they* appreciate the fact that he was walking by faith and not by sight? Would they commend him for following Divine orders? Would they not rather deem him crazy? And, dear reader, the godless will no more understand the motives which prompt the real children of God today, than could the Chaldeans understand Abraham; the unregenerate professing Christians all around us, will no more approve of our strict compliance with God's commands than did Abraham's heathen neighbours. The world is governed by the senses, not faith; lives to please self, not God. And if the world does not deem you and me crazy, then there is something radically wrong with our hearts and our lives.

One other point remains to be considered, and we must reluctantly conclude this chapter. The obedience of Abraham's faith was *unto* "a land which he should afterward receive for an inheritance" (v. 8). Literally, that "inheritance" was Canaan; spiritually, it foreshadowed Heaven. Now had Abraham refused to make the radical break which he did from his old life, crucify the affections of the flesh, and leave Chaldea, he had never reached the promised land. The Christian's "Inheritance" is purely of *grace* for what can any man do in time to earn something which is eternal? Utterly impossible is it for any finite creature to perform anything which deserves an infinite reward. Nevertheless, God has marked out a certain path which conducts to the promised Inheritance: the path of obedience, the "Narrow Way" which "leadeth *unto* Life" (Matt. 7:14), and only ever reach Heaven who tread *that* path to the end.

As the utmost confusion now reigns upon this subject, and as many are, through an unwarranted reserve, afraid to speak out plainly thereon, we feel obliged to add a little more. Unqualified obedience is required from us: *not* to furnish title to Heaven-that is found alone in the merits of Christ; not to fit us for Heaven-that is supplied alone by the supernatural work of the Spirit in the heart; but that God may be owned and honoured by us as we journey thither, that we may prove and manifest the sufficiency of His grace, that we may furnish evidence we *are* HIS children, that we may be preserved from those things which would otherwise destroy us-only in the path of obedience can we avoid those foes which are seeking to slay us.

O dear reader, as you value your soul, we entreat you not to spurn these words, and particularly the closing paragraphs, because their teaching differs radically from what you are accustomed to hear or read. The path of obedience *must* be trod if ever you are to reach Heaven. Many are acquainted with that path or "way," but they walk not therein: *see* 2 Peter 2:20. Many, like Lot's wife, make a start along it, and then turn from it: *see* Luke 9:62. Many follow it for quite a while, but fail to persevere; and, like Israel of old, perish in the wilderness. No rebel can enter Heaven; one who is wrapt up in self cannot; no disobedient soul will. Only those will partake of the heavenly "inheritance" who are "the children of Abraham," who have his faith, follow his examples, perform his works. May the Lord deign to add His blessings to the above, and to Him shall be all the praise.

CHAPTER 6

The Life of Abraham

(Heb. 11:9-10)

In the preceding Chapter we considered the appearing of the Lord unto idolatrous Abraham in Chaldea, the call which he then received to make a complete break from his old life, and to go forward in faith in complete subjection to the revealed will of God. This we contemplated as a figure and type, an illustration and example of one essential feature of regeneration, namely, God's effectually calling His elect from death unto life, out of darkness into His marvelous light, with the blessed fruits this produces. As we saw on the last occasion, a mighty change was wrought in Abraham, so that his manner of life was completely altered: "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."

Ere turning unto the verses which are to form our present portion, let us first ask and seek to answer the following question: Was Abraham's response to God's call a perfect one? Was his obedience flawless? Ah, dear reader, is it difficult to anticipate the answer? There has been only one perfect life lived on this earth. Moreover, had there been no failure in Abraham's walk, would not the type have been faulty? But God's types are accurate at every point, and in His Word the Spirit has portrayed the characters of His people in the colours of truth and reality. He has faithfully described them as they actually were. True, a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham, but the "flesh" had not been removed from him. True, a supernatural faith had been communicated to him, but the root of unbelief had not been taken out of him. Two contrary principles were at work within Abraham (as they are in us), and *both* of these were evidenced.

God's requirements from Abraham were clearly made known: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12:1). The first response which he made to this is recorded in Genesis 11:31, "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." He left Chaldea, but instead of separating from his "kindred," he suffered his nephew Lot to accompany him; instead of forsaking his father's house, Terah was permitted to take the lead; and instead of entering Canaan, Abraham stopped short and settled in Haran. Abraham temporized: his obedience was partial, faltering, tardy. He yielded to the affections of the flesh. Alas, cannot both writer and reader see here a plain reflection of himself, a portrayal of his own sad failures! Yes, "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19).

But let us earnestly seek grace at this point to be much upon our guard lest we "wrest" (2 Peter 3:16) to our own hurt what has just been before us. If the thought arises "O well, Abraham was not perfect, *he* did not always do as God commanded him, so it cannot be expected that *I* should do any better than he did," then recognize that this is a temptation from the Devil. Abraham's failures are not recorded for us to shelter behind, for us to make them so many palliations for our own sinful falls; no, rather are they to be regarded as so many warnings for us to take to heart and prayerfully heed. Such warnings only leave us the more without excuse. And when we discover that we have sadly repeated the backslidings of the Old Testament saints, that very discovery should but humble us the more before God, move to a deeper repentance, lead to increasing self-distrust, and issue in a more earnest and constant seeking of Divine Grace to uphold and maintain us in the paths of righteousness.

Though Abraham failed, there was no failure in God. Blessed indeed is it to behold His long-suffering, His super-abounding grace, His unchanging faithfulness, and the eventual fulfilling of His own purpose. This reveals to us, for the joy of our hearts and the worshipping praise of our souls, another reason why the Holy Spirit has so faithfully placed on record the shadows as well as the lights in the lives of the Old Testament saints: they are to serve not only as solemn warnings for us to heed, but also as so many examples of that marvelous patience of God that bears so long and so tenderly with the dullness and waywardness of His children; examples too of that infinite mercy which deals with His people not after their sins, nor rewards them according to their iniquities. O how the realization of this should melt our hearts, and evoke true worship and thanksgiving unto "the God of *all* grace" (1 Peter 5:10). It will be so, it must be so, in every truly regenerate soul: though the unregenerate will only turn the very grace of God "into lasciviousness" (Jude 4) unto their eternal undoing.

The sequel to Genesis 11:31 is found in 12:5, "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came." Though Abraham had settled down in Haran, God would not allow him

to continue there indefinitely. The Lord had purposed that he should enter Canaan, and no purpose of His can fail. God therefore tumbled him out of the nest which he had made for himself (Deut. 32:11), and very solemn is it to observe the means which he used: "And Terah died in Haran (Gen. 11:32 and cf. Acts 7:4)-death had to come in before Abraham left Halfway House! He never started across the wilderness until death severed that tie of the flesh which had held him back. But that with which we desire to be specially occupied at this point is the wondrous love of God toward His erring child.

"I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

Blessed, thrice blessed, is this. Though the dogs are likely to consume it unto their own ruin, yet that must not make us withhold this sweet portion of "the children's bread." The immutability of the Divine nature is the saints' indemnity; God's unchangeableness affords the fullest assurance of His faithfulness in the promises. No change in us can alter His mind, no unfaithfulness on our part will cause Him to revoke His word. Unstable though we be, sorely tempted as we often are, tripped up as may frequently be our case, yet God "*shall* also confirm us unto the end . . . God is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:8, 9). The powers of Satan and the world are against us, suffering and death before us, a treacherous and fearful heart within us; yet God *will* "confirm us to the end." He did Abraham; He will us. Hallelujah.

"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" (Heb. 11:9). This verse brings before us the second effect or proof of Abraham's faith. In the previous verse the Apostle had spoken of the place from whence Abraham was called, here of the place to which he was called. There he had shown the power of faith in self-denial in obedience to God's command, here we behold the patience and constancy of faith in waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. But the mere reading of this verse by itself is not likely to make much impression upon us: we need to diligently consult and carefully ponder other passages, in order to be in a position to appreciate its real force.

First of all we are told, "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land." Unless a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham's heart, subduing (though not eradicating) his natural desires and reasonings, he certainly would not have remained in Canaan. An idolatrous people were already occupying the land. Again, we are told that "He (God) gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5). Only the unclaimed tracts, which were commonly utilized by those having flocks and herds, were available for his use. Not an acre did he own, for he had to "purchase" a plot of ground as a buryingplace for his dead (Gen. 23). What a trial of faith was this, for Hebrews 11:8 expressly declares that he was afterward to "receive" that land "for an inheritance." Yet instead of this presenting a difficulty, it only enhances the beauty and accuracy of the type.

The Christian has also been begotten "to an inheritance" (1 Peter 1:4), but he does not fully enter into it the moment he is called from death unto life. No, instead, he is left here (very often) for many years to fight his way through an hostile world and against an opposing Devil. During that fight he meets with many discouragements and receives numerous wounds. Hard duties have to be performed, difficulties overcome, and trials endured, before the Christian enters fully into that inheritance unto which Divine Grace has appointed him. And nought but a Divinely bestowed and Divinely maintained faith is sufficient for these things: that alone will sustain the heart in the face of losses, reproaches, painful delays. It was thus with Abraham: it was "by faith" he left the land of his birth, started out on a journey he knew not whither, crossed a dreary wilderness, and then sojourned in tents for more than half a century in a strange land. Rightly did the Puritan Manton say:

"From God's training up Abraham in a course of difficulties, we see it is no easy matter to go to Heaven; there is a great deal of ado to unsettle a believer from the world, and there is a great deal of ado to fix the heart in the expectation of Heaven. First there must be self-denial in coming out of the world, and divorcing ourselves from our bosom sins and dearest interests; and then there must be patience shown in waiting for God's mercy to eternal life, waiting His leisure as well as performing His will. Here is the time of our exercise, and we must expect it, since the father of the faithful was thus trained up ere he could inherit the promises."

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country." The force of this will be more apparent if we link together two statements in Genesis: "And the Canaanite was then in the land" (12:6) "And the Lord said, unto Abram . . . all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it and to thy seed forever" (13:14, 15). Here was the ground which Abraham's faith rested upon, the plain word of Him that cannot lie. Upon that promise his heart reposed, and therefore he was occupied not with the Canaanites who were then in the land, but with the invisible Jehovah who had pledged it unto him. How different was the case of the spies, who, in a later day, went up into this very land, with the assurance of the Lord that it was a "good land." Their report was "the land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we *saw* in it are men of a great stature. And there we *saw* the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:32, 33).

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country.” As it was by faith that Abraham went out of Chaldea, so it was by faith he remained, out of the country of which he was originally a native. This illustrates the fact that not only do we become Christians by an act of faith (the yielding up of the whole man unto God), but that as Christians we are called upon to *live* by faith (Gal. 2:20), to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). The place where Abraham now abode is here styled “the land of promise,” rather than Canaan, to teach us that it is God’s promise which puts vigour into faith. Note how both Moses and Joshua, at a later day, sought to quicken the faith of the Israelites by this means: “Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do, that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers *hath promised thee*” (Deut. 6:3). “And the Lord your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the Lord your God *hath promised you*” (Josh. 23:5).

“As in a strange country.” This tells us how Abraham regarded that land which was then occupied by the Canaanites, and how he conducted himself in it. He purchased no farm, built no house, and entered into no alliance with its people. True, he entered into a league of peace and amity with Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre (Gen. 14:13), but it was as a stranger, and not as one who had anything of his own in the land. He reckoned that country no more his own than any other land in the world. He took no part in its politics, had nothing to do with its religion, had very little social intercourse with its people, but lived by faith and found his joy and satisfaction in communion with the Lord. This teaches us that though the Christian is still in the world, he is not of it, nor must he cultivate its friendship (James 4:4). He may use it as necessity requires, but he must ever be on his prayerful guard against abusing it (1 Cor. 7:31).

“Dwelling in tents.” These words inform us both of Abraham’s manner of life and disposition of heart during his sojourning in Canaan. Let us consider them from this twofold viewpoint. Abraham did not conduct himself as the possessor of Canaan, but as a foreigner and pilgrim in it. To the sons of Heth he confessed, “I am a stranger and sojourner with you” (Gen. 23:4). As the father of the faithful he set an example of self-denial and patience. It was not that he was unable to purchase an estate, build an elaborate mansion, and settle down in some attractive spot, for Genesis 13:2 tells us that “Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold”; but God had not called him unto this. Ah, my reader, a palace without the enjoyed presence of the Lord is but an empty bauble; whereas a prison-dungeon occupied by one in real communion with Him, may be the very vestibule of Heaven.

Living in a strange country, surrounded by wicked heathen, had it not been wiser for Abraham to erect a strongly fortified castle? A “tent” offers little or no defense against attack. Ah, but “the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.” And Abraham both feared and trusted God. “Where faith enables men to live unto God, as unto their eternal concerns, it will enable them to trust unto Him in all the difficulties, dangers, and hazards of this life. To pretend a trust in God as unto our souls and invisible things, and not resign our temporal concerns with patience and quietness unto His disposal, is a vain pretense. And we may take hence an eminent trial of our faith. Too many deceive themselves with a presumption of faith in the promises of God, as unto things future and eternal. They suppose that they do so believe, as that they shall be eternally saved, but if they are brought into any trial, as unto things temporal, wherein they are concerned, they know not what belongs unto the life of faith, nor how to trust God in a due manner. It was not so with Abraham: his faith acted itself uniformly with respect to the providences, as well as the promises of God” (John Owen).

Abram’s “dwelling in tents” also denoted the disposition of his heart. A life of faith is one which has respect unto things spiritual and eternal, and therefore one of its fruits is to be contented with a very small portion of earthly things. Faith not only begets a confidence and joy in the things promised, but it also works a composure of spirit and submission to the Lord’s will. A little would serve Abraham on earth because he expected so much in Heaven. Nothing is more calculated to deliver the heart from covetousness, from lusting after the perishing things of time and sense, from envying the poor rich, than to heed that exhortation, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). But it is one thing to quote that verse, and another to put it into practice. If we are the children of Abraham, we must emulate the example of Abraham. Are *our* carnal affections mortified? Can we submit to a pilgrim’s fare without murmuring? Are we enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3)?

The tent-life of the patriarchs demonstrated their pilgrim character: it made manifest their contentment to live upon the *surface* of the earth, for a tent has no foundation, and can be pitched or struck at short notice. They were sojourners here and just passing through this wilderness scene without striking their roots into it. Their tent life spoke of their separation from the world’s allurements, politics, friendships, religion. It is deeply significant to note that when reference is made to Abraham’s “tent,” there is mention also of his “altar”: “and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west and Hai on the east, and there he builded an altar unto the Lord” (Gen. 12:8); “and he went on his journeys . . . unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, unto the place of the altar” (Gen. 13:3, 4); “Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord” (13:18). Observe

carefully the *order* in each of these passages: there must be heart *separation* from the world before a thrice holy God can be *worshipped* in spirit and in truth.

“Dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.” The Greek here is more expressive than our translation: “in tents dwelling”: the Holy Spirit emphasized first not the act of dwelling, but the fact that this dwelling was in *tents*. The mention of Isaac and Jacob in this verse is for the purpose of calling our attention unto the further fact that Abraham continued thus for the space of almost a century, Jacob not being born until he had sojourned in Canaan for eighty-five years! Herein we are taught that “when we are once engaged and have given up ourselves to God in a way of believing, there must be no choice, no dividing or halting, no halving; but we must follow Him fully, wholly, living by faith in all things” (John Owen), and that unto the very end of our earthly course.

There does not seem to be anything requiring us to believe that Isaac and Jacob shared Abraham’s tent, rather is the thought that they also lived the same pilgrim’s life in Canaan: as Abraham was a sojourner in that land, without any possession there, so were they. The “with” may be extended to cover all that is said in the previous part of the verse, indicating it was “by faith” that both Abraham’s son and grandson followed the example set them. The words which follow confirm this: they were “the heirs with him of the same promise.” That is indeed a striking expression, for ordinarily sons are merely “heirs” and not joint-heirs with their parents. This is to show us that Isaac was not indebted to Abraham for the promise, nor Jacob to Isaac, each receiving the same promise direct from God. This is clear from a comparison of Genesis 13:15 and 17:8 with 26:3 and 28:13, 35:12. It also tells us that if we are to have an interest in the blessings of Abraham, we must walk in the steps of his faith.

Very blessed and yet very searching is the principle exemplified in the last clause of Hebrews 11:9. God’s saints are all of the same spiritual disposition. They are members of the same family, united to the same Christ, indwelt by the same Spirit. “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32). They are governed by the same laws: “I will put My laws into their mind and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). They all have one aim, to please God and glorify Him on earth. They are called to the same privileges: “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us” etc. (2 Peter 1:1).

“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and Maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). Ah, here is the explanation of what has been before us in the previous verse, as the opening “for” intimates; Abraham was walking by faith, and not by sight, and therefore his heart was set upon things above and not upon things below. It is the exercise of faith and hope unto heavenly objects which makes us carry ourselves with a loose heart toward worldly comforts. Abraham realized that his portion and possession was not on earth, but in Heaven. It was this which made him content to dwell in tents. He did not build a city, as Cain did (Gen. 4:17), but “looked for” one of which God Himself is the Maker. What an illustration and exemplification was this of the opening verse of our chapter: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

That for which Abraham looked was Heaven itself, here likened unto a city with foundations, in manifest antithesis from the “tents” which have no foundations. Various figures are used to express the saints’ everlasting portion. It is called an “inheritance” (1 Peter 1:4), to signify the freeness of its tenure. It is denominated “many mansions” in the Father’s House. It is styled an “heavenly country” (Heb. 11:16) to signify its spaciousness. There are various resemblances between Heaven and a “city.” A city is a civil society that is under government: so in Heaven there is a society of angels and saints ruled by God: Hebrews 12:22-24. In Bible days a city was a place of safety, being surrounded by strong and high walls: so in Heaven we shall be eternally secure from sin and Satan, death and every enemy. A city is well-stocked with provisions: so in Heaven nothing will be lacking which is good and blessed. The “foundations” of the Heavenly City are the eternal decree and love of God, the unalterable covenant of grace, Christ Jesus the Rock of Ages, on which it stands firm and immovable.

It is the power of a faith which is active and operative that will sustain the heart under hardships and sufferings as nothing else will. “For which cause we faint not: but though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed day by day. 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” (2 Cor. 4:16-18). As J. Owen well said, “This is a full description of Abraham’s faith, in the operation and effect here ascribed to it by the Apostle. And herein it is exemplary and encouraging to all believers under their present trials and sufferings.”

Ah, my brethren and sisters, do we not see from that which has been before us *why* the attractions of the world or the depressing effects of suffering, have such a power upon us? Is it not because we are negligent in the stirring up of our faith to “lay hold of the hope which is set before us”? If we meditated more frequently upon the glory and bliss of Heaven, and were favored with foretastes of it in our souls, would we not sigh after it more ardently and press forward unto it more earnestly? “Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day, and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56); and if we had

more serious and spiritual thoughts of the Day to come, we would not be so sad as we often are. "He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3), for it lifts the heart above this scene and carries us in spirit within the veil. The more our hearts are attracted to Heaven, the less will the poor things of this world appeal to us.

CHAPTER 7

The Faith of Sarah

(Heb. 11:11-12)

In the verses which are now to be before us the Apostle calls attention to the marvelous power of a God-given faith to exercise itself in the presence of most discouraging circumstances, persevere in the face of the most formidable obstacles, and trust God to do that which unto human reason seems utterly impossible. They show us that this faith was exercised by a frail and aged woman, who at first was hindered and opposed by the workings of unbelief, but who in the end relied upon the veracity of God and rested upon His promise. They show what an intensely practical thing faith is: that it not only lifts up the soul to Heaven, but is able to draw down strength for the body on earth. They demonstrate what great endings sometimes issue from small beginnings, and that like a stone thrown into a lake produces ever-enlarging circles on the rippling waters, so faith issues in fruit which increases from generation to generation.

The more the 11th verse of our present chapter be pondered, the more evident will it appear the faith there spoken of is of a radically different order from that mental and theoretical faith of cozy-chair dreamers. The "faith" of the vast majority of professing Christians is as different from that described in Hebrews 11 as darkness is from light. The one ends in talk, the other was expressed in deeds. The one breaks down when put to the test, the other survived every trial to which it was exposed. The one is inoperative and ineffectual, the other was active and powerful. The one is unproductive, the other issued into fruits to the glory of God. Ah, is it not evident that the great difference between them is that one is merely human, the other Divine; one merely natural, the other altogether supernatural? This it is which our hearts and consciences need to lay hold of and turn into earnest prayer.

That which has just been pointed out ought to deeply exercise both writer and reader. It ought to search us through and through, causing us to seriously and diligently weigh the character of our "faith." It is of little use to be entertained by interesting articles, unless they lead to careful self-examination. It is of little profit to be made to wonder at the achievements of the faith of those Old Testaments saints, unless we are shamed by them, and made to cry mightily unto God for Him to work in us a "like precious faith." Unless our faith issues in works which mere nature cannot produce, unless it is enabling us to "overcome the world" (1 John 5:4) and triumph over the lusts of the flesh, then we have grave cause to fear that our faith is not "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1). Cry with David, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Psa. 26:2).

It is not that any Christian lives a life of perfect faith-only the Lord Jesus ever did that. No, for in the first place, like all the other spiritual graces, it is subject to growth (2 Thess. 1:3), and full maturity is not reached in this life. In the second place, faith is not always in exercise, nor can we command its activities: He who bestowed it, must also renew it. In the third place, the faith of every saint falters at times: it did in Abraham, in Moses, in Elijah, in the Apostles. The flesh is still in us, and therefore the reasonings of unbelief are ever ready (unless Divine grace subdue them) to oppose the actings of faith. We are not then urging the reader to search in himself for a faith that is perfect, either in its growth, its constancy or its achievements. Rather are we to seek Divine aid and make sure whether we have *any* faith which is superior to what has been acquired through religious education; whether we have a faith which, despite the strugglings of unbelief, *does* trust the living God; whether we have a faith which produces any fruit which manifestly issues from a spiritual root.

Having spoken of Abraham's faith, the Apostle now makes mention of Sarah's. "Observe what a blessing it is when a husband and wife are both partners of faith, when both in the same yoke draw one way. Abraham is the father of the faithful, and Sarah is recommended among believers as having a fellowship in the same promises, and in the same troubles and trials. So it is said of Zachariah and Elizabeth, 'And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless' (Luke 1:6). It is a mighty encouragement when the constant companion of our lives is also a fellow in the same faith. This should direct us in the matter of choice: she cannot be a meet help that goeth a contrary way in religion. Religion decayeth in families by nothing so much as by want of care in matches" (T. Manton).

“Through faith also Sarah 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” (Heb. 11:11). There are five things upon which our attention needs to be focused. First, the impediments of her faith: these were, her barrenness, old age, and unbelief. Second, the effect of her faith: she “received strength to conceive.” Third, the constancy of her faith: she trusted God unto an actual deliverance or birth of the child. Fourth, the foundation of her faith: she rested upon the veracity of the Divine Promiser. Fifth, the fruit of her faith: the numerous posterity which issued from her son Isaac. Let us consider each of these separately.

“Through faith also Sarah herself.” The Greek is just the same here as in all the other verses, and should have been rendered uniformly “By faith” etc. The word “also” seems to be added for a double purpose. First to counteract and correct any error which might suppose that women were debarred the blessings and privileges of grace. It is true that in the official sphere God has prohibited them from occupying the place of rule or usurping authority over the men, so that they are commanded to be silent in the churches (1 Cor. 14:34), are not permitted to teach (1 Tim. 2:12), and are bidden to be in subjection to their husbands (Eph. 5:22). But in the spiritual sphere all inequalities disappear, for “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), and therefore the believing husband and the believing wife are “heirs together of the grace of life.”

In the second place, this added “also” informs us that, though a woman, Sarah exercised the same faith as had Abraham. She had left Chaldea when he did, accompanied him to Canaan, dwelt with him in tents. Not only so, but she personally acted faith upon the living God. Necessarily so, for she was equally concerned in the Divine revelation with Abraham, and was as much a party to the great difficulties of its accomplishment. The blessing of the promised seed was assigned to and appropriated by her, as much as to and by him; and therefore is she proposed unto the Church as an example (1 Peter 3:5, 6). “As Abraham was the father of the faithful, or of the Church, so she was the mother of it, so as that the distinct mention of her faith was necessary. She was the free woman from whence the Church sprang: Galatians 4:22, 23. And all believing women are her daughters: 1 Peter 3:6” (John Owen).

“By faith also Sarah herself received strength.” The word “herself” is emphatic: it was not her husband only, by whose faith she might receive the blessing, but by her own faith that she received strength, and this, notwithstanding the very real and formidable obstacles which stood in the way of her exercising it. These, as we have pointed out, were three in number. First, she had not borne any children during the customary years of pregnancy: as Genesis 11:30 informs us, “Sarai was barren”; “Sarai, Abram’s wife, bare him no children” (Gen. 16:1). Second, she was long past the age of childbearing, for she was now “ninety years old” (Gen. 17:17). Third, the workings of unbelief interposed, persuading her that it was altogether against nature and reason for a woman, under such circumstances, to give birth unto a child. This comes out in Genesis 18. There we read of three men appearing unto Abraham, one of whom was the Lord in theophanic manifestation. Unto him He said, “Sarah thy wife shall have a son.” Upon hearing this “Sarah laughed within herself.”

Sarah’s laughter was that of doubting and distrust, for she said “I am waxed old.” At once the Lord rebukes her unbelief, asking, “Is there anything too hard for the Lord! At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” Solemn indeed is the sequel. “Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And He said, Nay; but thou didst laugh” (Gen. 18:15). It is always a shame to do amiss, but a greater shame to deny it. It was a sin to give way to unbelief, but it was adding iniquity unto iniquity to cover it with a lie. But we deceive ourselves if we think to impose upon God, for nothing can be concealed from His all-seeing eye. By comparing Hebrews 11:11 with what is recorded in Genesis 18, we learn that after the Lord had reproved Sarah’s unbelief, and she began to realize that the promise came from God, her faith was called into exercise. Because her laughter came from weakness and not from scorn, God smote her not, as He did Zacharias for his unbelief” (Luke 1:20).

Varied are the lessons which may be learned from the above incident. Many times the Word does not take effect immediately. It did not in Sarah’s case: though afterward she believed, at first she laughed. It was only when the Divine promise was *repeated* that her faith began to act. Let preachers and Christian parents, who are discouraged by lack of success, lay this to heart. Again: see here that before faith is established often there is a conflict: “shall I have a child who am old?”—reason opposed the promise. Just as when a fire is kindled the smoke is seen before the flame, so ere the heart rests upon the Word there is generally doubting and fear. Once more; observe how graciously God hides the defects of His children: nothing is said of Rahab’s lie (Heb. 11:31), of Job’s impatience (James 5:11), nor here of Sarah’s laughing, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love” (Eph. 5:1, 2)!

Let us next consider what is here ascribed unto the faith of Sarah: “she received strength to conceive seed.” She obtained that which previously was not in her: there was now a restoration of her nature to perform its normal functions. Her dead womb was supernaturally vivified. In response to her faith, the Omnipotent One did for Sarah what He had done to Abraham in response to his trusting of Him: “I have made thee a father of many nations, before Him, whom he believed, even God, who *quickeneth* the dead” (Rom. 4:17). “All things are possible with God”; yes, and it is also true that “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23): how blessedly and strikingly does the incident now

before us illustrate this! O that it may speak unto each of our hearts and cause us to long after and pray for an increase of our faith. What is more glorifying to God than a confident looking unto Him to work in and through us that which mere nature cannot produce.

“By faith also Sarah herself received strength.” Christian reader, this is recorded both for thine instruction and encouragement. Faith worked a vigor in Sarah’s body where it was not before. Is it not written “But they that wait upon the Lord shall *renew their strength*” (Isa. 40:31)? Do we really believe this? Do we act as though we did? The writer can bear witness to the veracity of that promise. When he was in Australia, editing this Magazine, keeping up with a heavy correspondence, and preaching five and six times each week, when it was over one hundred in the shade, many a time has he dragged his weary body into the pulpit, and then looked unto the Lord for a definite reinvigoration of body. Never did He fail us. After speaking for two hours we generally felt fresher than we did when we arose at the beginning of the day. And why not? Has not God promised to “supply *all* our need”? Of how many is it true that “ye have not, because ye (in faith) ask not” (James 4:2).

Ah, dear reader, “Bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that *now* is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8): “profitable” for the body, as well as for the soul. While we strongly reprobate much that is now going on under the name of “Faith-Healing,” yet we have as little patience with the pretended hyper-sanctity which disdains any looking unto God for the supply of our bodily needs. In this same chapter which we are now commenting upon, we read of others who “out of weakness were made strong” (Heb. 11:34). Sad it is to see so many of God’s dear children living far beneath their privileges. True, many are under the chastening hand of God. But this should not be so: the cause should be sought, the wrong righted, the sin confessed, restoration both spiritual and temporal diligently sought.

We do not wish to convey the impression that the only application unto us of these words, “By faith also Sarah herself received strength,” has reference to the reviving of the physical body; not so, though that is, undoubtedly, the first lesson to be learned. But there is a higher signification too. Many a Christian feels his spiritual weakness: that is well, yet instead of this hindering, it should bestir to lay hold of the Lord’s strength (Isa. 27:5). In the final analysis, it is nothing but lack of faith which so often allows the “flesh” to hinder us from bringing forth the Gospel-fruits of holiness. Despair not of personal frailty, but go forward in the strength of God: “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10): turn this into believing prayer for Divine enablement. “Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase” (Job 8:7).

Does the reader still say, “Ah, but such an experience is not for me; alas, I am so unworthy, so helpless; I feel so lifeless and listless.” So was Sarah! Yet, “by faith” she “received strength.” And, dear friend, faith is not occupied with self, but with God. “Abraham considered not his own body” (Rom. 4:19), nor did Sarah. Each of them looked away from self, and counted upon God to work a miracle. And God did not fail them: He is pledged to honor those who honor Him, and nothing honors Him more than a trustful expectation. He always responds to faith. There is no reason why you should remain weak and listless. True, without Christ, you can do nothing; but there is an infinite fullness in Him (John 1:16) for you to draw from. Then from this day onwards, let your attitude be “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Apply to Him, count upon Him: “my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1).

“And was delivered of a child.” The “and” here connects what follows with each of the preceding verbs. It was “by faith” that Sarah “received strength,” and it was also “by faith” that she was now “delivered of a child.” It is the constancy and perseverance of her faith which is here intimated. There was no abortion, no miscarriage; she trusted God right through unto the end. This brings before us a subject upon which very little is written these days: the duty and privilege of Christian women counting upon God for a safe issue in the most trying and critical season in their lives. Faith is to be exercised not only in acts of worship, but in the ordinary offices of our daily affairs. We are to eat and drink in faith; work and sleep in faith; and the Christian wife should be delivered of her child by faith. The danger is great, and if in any extremity there is need of faith, much more so where life itself is involved. Let us seek to condense from the helpful comments of the Puritan Manton.

First, we must be sensible what *need* we have to exercise faith in this case, that we may not run upon danger blindfolded; and if we escape, then to think our deliverance a mere chance. Rachel died in this case; so also did the wife of Phinehas (1 Sam. 4:19, 20); a great hazard is run, and therefore you must be sensible of it. The more difficulty and danger be apprehended, the better the opportunity for the exercise of faith: 2 Chronicles 20:12, 2 Corinthians 1:9. Second, because the sorrows of travail are a monument of God’s displeasure against sin (Gen. 3:16), therefore this must put you the more earnestly to seek an interest in Christ, that you may have remedy against sin. Third, meditate upon the promise of 1 Timothy 2:15 which is made good eternally or temporally as God sees fit. Fourth, the faith you exercise must be the glorifying of His power and submitting to His will. This expresses the kind of faith which is proper to all temporal

mercies: Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst save me-it is sufficient to ease the heart of a great deal of trouble and perplexing fear.

“And was delivered of a child.” As we have pointed out in the last paragraph, this clause is added to show the continuance of Sarah’s faith and the blessing of God upon her. True faith not only appropriates His promise, but continues resting on the same till that which is believed be actually accomplished. The principle of this is enunciated in Hebrews 3:14 and 10:36. “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast *unto the end*”; “Cast not away therefore your confidence.” It is at this point so many fail. They endeavour to lay hold of a Divine promise, but in the interval of testing let go of it. This is why Christ said, “If ye have faith *and doubt not*, ye shall not only do this” etc., Matthew 21:21-“doubt not,” not only at the moment of pleading the promise, but during the time you are awaiting its fulfillment. Hence also, unto “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart” is added “and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).

“When she was past age.” This clause is added so as to heighten the miracle which God so graciously wrought in response to Sarah’s faith. It magnifies the glory of His power. It is recorded for our encouragement. It shows us that no difficulty or hindrance should cause a disbelief of the promise. God is not tied down to the order of nature, nor limited by any secondary causes. He will turn nature upside down rather than not be as good as His word. He has brought water out of a rock, made iron to float (2 Kings 6:6), sustained two million people in a howling wilderness. These things should arouse the Christian to wait upon God with full confidence in the face of the utmost emergency. Yea, the greater the impediments which confront us, faith should be increased. The trustful heart says, Here is a fit occasion for faith; now that all creature-streams have run dry is a grand opportunity for counting on God to show Himself strong on my behalf. What cannot He do! He made a woman of ninety to bear a child-a thing quite contrary to nature-so I may surely expect Him to work wonders for me too.

“Because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” Here is the secret of the whole thing. Here was the ground of Sarah’s confidence, the foundation on which faith rested. She did not look at God’s promises through the mist of interposing obstacles, but she viewed the difficulties and hindrances through the clear light of God’s promises. The act which is here ascribed unto Sarah is, that she “judged” or reckoned, reputed and esteemed, God to be faithful: she was assured that He would make good His word, on which He had caused her to hope. God had spoken: Sarah had heard; in spite of all that seemed to make it impossible that the promise should be fulfilled in her case, she steadfastly believed. Rightly did Luther say, “If you would trust God, you must learn to crucify the question *How*.” Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24): this is sufficient for the heart to rest upon; faith will cheerfully leave it with Omniscience as to *how* the promise will be made good to us.

“Because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” Let it be carefully noted that Sarah’s faith went beyond the promise. While her mind dwelt upon *the thing* promised, it seemed unto her altogether incredible, but when she took her thoughts off all secondary causes and fixed them on God Himself, then the difficulties no longer disturbed her: her heart was at rest in God. She knew that God could be depended upon: He is “faithful”-able, willing, sure to perform His word. Sarah looked beyond the promise to the Promiser, and as she did so all doubtings were stilled. She rested with full confidence on the immutability of Him that cannot lie, knowing that where Divine veracity is engaged, omnipotence will make it good. It is by believing meditations upon the character of God that faith is fed and strengthened to expect the blessing, despite all apparent difficulties and supposed impossibilities. It is the heart’s contemplation of the perfections of God which causes faith to prevail. As this is of such vital practical importance, let us devote another paragraph to enlarging thereon.

To fix our minds on the *things* promised, to have an assured expectation of the enjoyment of them, without the heart first resting upon the veracity, immutability, and omnipotency of God, is but a deceiving imagination. Rightly did J. Owen point out that, “The formal object of faith in the Divine promises, is not the things promised in the first place, *but God Himself* in His essential excellencies, of truth, or faithfulness and power.” Nevertheless, the Divine perfections do not, of themselves, work faith in us: it is only as the heart believingly ponders the Divine attributes that we shall “judge” or conclude Him faithful that has promised. It is the man whose mind is stayed upon God Himself, who is kept in “perfect peace” (Isa. 26:3): that is, he who joyfully contemplates who and what God is that will be preserved from doubting and wavering while waiting the fulfillment of the promise. As it was with Sarah, so it is with us: every promise of God has tacitly annexed to it this consideration, “Is anything too hard for the Lord!”

“Wherefore also from one was born, and that too of (one) having become dead, even as the stars of the Heaven in multitude, and as the sand which (is) by the shore of the sea the countless” (Heb. 11:12). We have quoted the rendering given in the Bagster Interlinear because it is more literal and accurate than our A.V. The “him” in the English translation is misleading, for in this verse there is no masculine pronoun: at the most the “one” must refer to one couple, but personally we believe it points to one woman, Sarah, as the “born” (rather than the “begotten”) intimates. We regard the 12th verse as setting forth the fruit of her faith, namely the numerous posterity which issued from her son, Isaac. The

double reference to the “sand” and the “stars” calls attention to the twofold seed: the earthly and the heavenly, the natural and the spiritual Israel.

Like the “great multitude which no man could number” of Revelation 7:9, so “as the stars of the sky for multitude and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable” of our present verse, is obviously an hyperbole: it is figurative language, and not to be understood literally. This may seem a bold and unwarrantable statement to some of our readers, yet if Scripture be compared with Scripture, no other conclusion is possible. The following passages make this clear: Deuteronomy 1:10, Joshua 11:4, Judges 7:12, 1 Samuel 13:5, 2 Samuel 17:11, 1 Kings 4:20. For other examples of this figure of speech see Deuteronomy 9:1, Psalm 78:27, Isaiah 60:22, John 21:25. Hyperboles are employed not to move us to believe untruths, but, by emphasis, arrest our attention and cause us to heed weighty matters. The following rules are to be observed in the employment of them. First, they are to be used only of such things as are indeed true in the substance of them. Second, only of things which are worthy of more than ordinary consideration. Third, set out, as nearly as possible, in proverbial language. Fourth, expressed in words of similarity and dissimilarity, rather than by words of equality and inequality (W. Gouge).

But let our final thought be upon the rich recompense whereby God rewarded the faith of Sarah. The opening “Therefore” of verse 12 points the blessed consequence of her relying upon the faithfulness of God in the face of the utmost natural discouragements. From her faith there issued Isaac, and from him, ultimately, Christ Himself. And this is recorded for our instruction. Who can estimate the fruits of faith? Who can tell how many lives may be affected for good, even in generations yet to come, through your faith and my faith today! Oh how the thought of this should stir us up to cry more earnestly “Lord, increase our faith” to the praise of the glory of Thy grace: Amen.

CHAPTER 8

The Perseverance of Faith

(Heb. 11:13-14)

Having described some of the eminent acts of faith put forth by the earliest members of God’s family, the Apostle now pauses to insert a general commendation of the faith of those he had already named, and (as is clear from vv. 39, 40) of others yet to follow. This commendation is set forth in verse 13 and is amplified in the next three verses. The evident design of the Holy Spirit in this was to press upon the Hebrews, and upon us, the imperative need of such a faith as would last, wear, overcome obstacles, and endure unto the end. Even the natural man is capable of “making good resolutions” and has flashes of endeavour to please God, but he is entirely lacking in that principle which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7).

The faith of God’s elect is like unto its Divine Author in these respects: it is living, incorruptible, and cannot be conquered by the Devil. Being implanted by God, the gift and grace of faith can never be lost. Strikingly was this illustrated in the history of the patriarchs. Called upon to leave the land of their birth, to sojourn in a country filled with idolaters, owning no portion of it, dwelling in tents, suffering many hardships and trials, and living without any such peculiar temporal advantages as might answer to the singular favor which the Lord declared He bore to them; nevertheless they all *died in faith*. The eye of their hearts saw clearly the blessings God had promised, and persuaded that they would be theirs in due season, they joyfully anticipated their future portion and gave up present advantages for the sake thereof.

In the verses which are to be before us the Apostle, then, stresses the great importance of seeking and possessing a persevering faith—therefore does he make mention of the fact that as long as they remained in this world, the Old Testament saints were believers in the promises of God. It is the durability and constancy of their faith which is commended. Despite all the workings of unbelief within (records of which are found in Genesis in the case of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and all the assaults of temptation from without, they persisted in clinging to God and His Word. They lived by faith, and they died in faith: therefore have they left us an example that we should follow their steps. Beautifully did John Calvin point out:

“There is expressed here a difference between us and the fathers: though God gave to the fathers only a taste of that grace which is largely poured on us, though He showed to them at a distance only an obscure representation of Christ, who is now set forth to us clearly before our eyes, yet they were satisfied and never fell away from their faith: how much greater reason then have we at this day to persevere! If we grow faint, we are doubly inexcusable. It is then an enhancing

circumstance, that the fathers had a distant view of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, while we at this day have so near a view of it, and that they all hailed the promises afar off, while we have them as it were quite near us, for if they nevertheless persevered even unto death, what sloth will it be to become wearied in faith, when the Lord sustains us by so many helps. Were anyone to object and say, that they could not have believed without receiving the promises on which faith is necessarily founded: to this the answer is, that the expression is to be understood comparatively; for they were far from that high position to which God has raised us. Hence it is that though they had the same salvation promised them, yet they had not the promises so clearly revealed to them as they are to us under the kingdom of Christ; but they were content to behold them afar off.”

“These all died in faith” (Heb. 11:13), or, more literally, “In (or “according to”) faith died these all.” Differing from most of the commentators, we believe those words take in the persons mentioned previously, from Abel onwards: “These all” grammatically include those who precede as well as those which follow—the relative pronoun embracing all those set forth in the catalog, namely, young and old, male and female, great and small. “The same Spirit works in all, and shows forth His power in all, 2 Corinthians 4:13” (W. Gouge). Against this it may be objected that Enoch died not. True, but the Apostle is referring only to those that died, just as Genesis 46:7 must be understood as excepting Joseph, who was already in Egypt. Moreover, though Enoch died not as the others, he was removed from earth to Heaven, and before his translation he continued living by faith unto the very end, which is the main thing here intended.

“In (or “according to”) faith died all these.” The faith in which they died is the same as that described in the first verse of our chapter, namely, a justifying and sanctifying faith. That they “died in faith” does not necessarily mean that their faith was actually in exercise during the hour of death, but more strictly, that they never apostatized from the faith: though they actually obtained or possessed not that which was the object of their faith, nevertheless, unto the end of their earthly pilgrimage they confidently looked forward unto the same. Five effects or workings of their faith are here mentioned, each of which we must carefully ponder. First, they “received not the promises.” Second, but they saw them “afar off.” Third, they were “persuaded of them.” Fourth, they “embraced” them. Fifth, in consequence thereof they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

As we shall see (D. V.) when taking up later verses, some of the Old Testament saints died in the actual exercise of faith. To die in faith is to have an assured confidence in an estate of glory and bliss. “And hereunto is required: 1. The firm belief of a substantial existence after this life; without this, all faith and hope must perish in death. 2. A resignation and trust of their departing souls into the care and power of God. 3. The belief in a future state of blessedness and rest, here called an heavenly country, a city prepared for them by God. 4. Faith of the resurrection of their bodies after death, that their entire persons, which had undergone the pilgrimage of this life, might be instated in eternal rest” (John Owen).

Thousands who are now in their graves were taught that it was wrong to expect death and make suitable preparation for it. They were told that the return of Christ was so near, He would certainly come during their lifetime. Alas, the writer has, in measure, been guilty of the same thing. True, it is both the Christian’s happy privilege and bounden duty to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13), for this is the grand prospect which God hath set before His people in all ages; but He has nowhere told us *when* His Son shall descend; He *may* do so today, He may not for hundreds of years. But to say that “looking for that blessed hope” makes it wrong to anticipate death is manifestly absurd: the Old Testament saints had just as definite promises for the first advent of Christ as the New Testament saints have for His second, and they thought frequently of death!

It is greatly to be feared that much of the popularity with which the “premillennial and imminent coming of Christ” has been received, may be attributable to a carnal dread of death: a strong appeal is made to the flesh when people can be persuaded that they are likely to escape the grave. That one generation of Christians will do so is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but how many generations have already supposed that *theirs* was the one which would be raptured to Heaven, and how many of them were quite unprepared when death overtook them, only that Day will show. We are well aware that these lines are not likely to meet with a favorable reception from some of our readers, but we are not seeking to please them, but God. Any man who is ready to die is prepared for the Lord’s return; as you may very likely die before the second advent, it is only the part of wisdom to make sure you are prepared for death.

And who are they whose souls are prepared for the dissolution of the body? Those who have disarmed death beforehand by plucking out its sting, and this by seeking reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. The hornet is harmless when its sting is extracted; a snake need not be dreaded if its fang and poison have been removed. So it is with death. “The sting of death is *sin*” (1 Cor. 15:56), and if we have repented of our sins, turned from them with full purpose of heart to serve God, and have sought and obtained forgiveness and healing in the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ, then death cannot harm us—it will but conduct us into the presence of God and everlasting felicity. Who are ready to die? Those who evidence and establish their title to Eternal Life by personal holiness, which is the “first fruits” of heavenly glory. It is by *walking in* the light of God’s Word that we make it manifest that we are meet for the Inheritance of the saints in Light.

“In (or “according to”) faith died all these.” To die in faith we must live by faith. And for this there must be, first, diligent labor to obtain a knowledge of Divine things. The understanding must be instructed before the path of duty can be known. “Teach me Thy way,” “Order my steps in Thy Word,” must be our daily prayer. Second, the hiding of God’s Word in our hearts. Its precepts must be meditated upon, memorized, and made conscience of: only then will our affections and lives be conformed to them. God’s Word is designed to be not only a light to our understanding, but also a lamp upon our path: our walk is to be guided by it. Third, the regular contemplation of Christ by the soul: a worshipful and adoring consideration of His fathomless love, His marvelous grace, His infinite compassion, His present intercession. This will deliver from a legal spirit, warm the heart, supply strength for duty, and make us *want* to please Him.

“In faith died all these, not having received the promises.” The word “promises” is a metonymy, for the things promised. Literally they *had* “received the promises,” for that which they had heard from God was the basis of their faith: this is clear from Hebrews 11:10, 14, 16. The things promised concerned the spiritual blessings of the Gospel dispensation and the future heavenly inheritance. The promises made to the fathers or “elders” had respect unto Christ the blessed “seed” and to Heaven of which Canaan was the type. Observe that this first clause of verse 13 plainly intimates that *the same* promises were given-though the outer shell of them varied-to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, as were afterwards repeated to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Each one died in the firm expectation of the promised Messiah, and in believing views of the heavenly glory. *So* to die, was comfortable to themselves, and confirming to others the reality of what they professed.

“Not having received the promises.” The Greek word for “received” signifies the actual participation in and possession of: faith, then, relies upon and rests in that which is not yet ours. A large part of the life of faith consists in laying hold of and enjoying the things promised, before the actual possession of them is obtained. It is by meditating upon and extracting their sweetness that the soul is fed and strengthened. The present spiritual happiness of the Christian consists more in promises and expectant anticipation than an actual possession, for “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It is this which enables us to say, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which *shall be* revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

“But having seen them afar off.” This, because the eyes of their understanding had been Divinely enlightened (Eph. 1:18), and thus they were able to perceive in the promises the wisdom, goodness, and love of God. True, the fulfillment of those promises would be in the remote future, but the eye of faith is strong and endowed with long-distance vision. Thus it was with Abraham: he “rejoiced to see My day,” said Christ, “and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). Thus it was with Moses who “had respect unto the recompense of the reward” and “endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:26, 27). Solemn indeed is the contrast presented in 2 Peter 1:9, where we read of those who failed to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, love, and in consequence of an undeveloped Christian character “cannot see afar off.”

“And were persuaded of them.” This announces the soul’s satisfactory acquiescence in the veracity of God as to the making good of His Word. It was the setting to of their seal that He is true (John 3:33), which is done when the heart truly receives His testimony. The word “persuaded” means an assured confidence, which is what faith works in the mind. A blessed example of this is seen in the case of Abraham, who, though about an hundred years old and his wife’s womb dead, yet when God declared they should have a son, he was “fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:21). Ah, my reader, is it not because we are so dilatory in meditating upon the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God, that our hearts are so little persuaded of the verity and value of them!

“And embraced them,” not with a cold and formal reception of them, but with a warm and hearty welcome: such is the nature of true faith when it lays hold of the promises of salvation. This is ever the effect of assurance: a thankful and joyful appropriation of the things of God. Faith not only discerns the value of spiritual things, is fully persuaded of their reality, but also loves them. Faith adheres as well as assents: in Scripture faith is expressed by taste as well as sight. Faith “sees” with the understanding, is “persuaded” in the heart, and “embraces” by the will. Thus the *order* of the verbs in this verse (Heb. 11:13) teaches us an important practical lesson. The promises of God are first viewed or contemplated, then rested upon as reliable, and then delighted in. If then we would have livelier affections we must meditate more upon the promises of God: it is the mind which effects the heart.

Ere passing on, let us inquire, Are God’s promises really precious unto us? Perhaps we are ready to answer at once, Yes; but let us test ourselves. Do our hearts cling to them with love and delight? Can we truly say, “I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches” (Psa. 119:14)? What influence do God’s promises have upon us in seasons of trial and grief? Do they supply us with more comfort than the dearest things of this world? In the midst of distress and sorrow, do we realize that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17)? What effect do God’s promises have upon our praying? Do we plead them before the Throne of Grace? Do we say with David “Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope” (Psa. 119:49)?

“And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” They who really embrace the promises of God are suitably affected and influenced by them: their delight in heavenly things is manifested by a weanedness from earthly things—as the woman at the well forgot her bucket when Christ was revealed to her soul (John 4:28). When a man truly becomes a Christian he at once begins to view time, and all the objects of time, in a very different light from what he did before. So it was with the patriarchs: their faith had a powerful and transforming effect upon their lives. They made profession of their faith and hope: they made it manifest that their chief interest was neither in nor of the world. They had such a satisfying portion in the promises of God that they publicly renounced such a concern in the world as other men take whose portion is only in this life.

The patriarchs made no secret of the fact that their citizenship and inheritance was elsewhere. Unto the sons of Heth, Abraham confessed “I am a stranger and a sojourner with you” (Gen. 23:4). Unto Pharaoh Jacob said, “The days of my *pilgrimage* are an hundred and thirty” (Gen. 47:9). Nor is this to be explained on the ground that other nations were then in occupation of Canaan: long after Israel entered into possession of that land David cried, “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not Thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were” (Psa. 39:12); and again, “I am a stranger in the earth: hide not Thy commandments from me” (Psa. 119:19). So too before all the congregation he owned unto God, “For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers (1 Chron. 29:15). Clear proof do these verses furnish that the Old Testament saints, equally with the New, apprehended their *heavenly* calling and glory.

“And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” The two terms, though very similar in thought, are not identical. The one refers more to the position, the place taken; the other to condition, how one conducts himself in that place. They were “strangers” because their home was in Heaven; “pilgrims,” because journeying thither. As another has said, “It is possible to be a ‘pilgrim’ without being a ‘stranger.’ But once we realize our true strangership we are perforce compelled to be ‘pilgrims.’ We may be ‘pilgrims,’ and yet, in our pilgrimage, may visit all the cities and churches in the world, and include them all in our embrace; but if we are true ‘sojourners’ we shall be ‘strangers’ to them all, and shall be compelled, as Abraham was, to erect our own solitary altar to Jehovah in the midst of them all. How could Abraham be a worshipper with the Canaanites? Impossible! This is why the ‘altar’ is so closely connected with the ‘tent’ in Genesis 12:8 and in Abraham’s sojourn” (E. W. B.)

That which was spiritually typified by the outward life of the patriarchs as “strangers and pilgrims” was the Christian’s renunciation of the world. As those whose citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20), we are bidden to be “not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). The patriarchs demonstrated that they were “strangers” by taking no part in the apostate religion, politics, or social life of the Canaanites; and evidenced that they were “pilgrims” by dwelling in tents, moving about from place to place. How far are *we* making manifest our crucifixion to the world (Gal. 6:14)? Does our daily walk show we are “partakers of the heavenly calling”? Have we ceased looking on this world as our home, and its people as our people? Are we seeking to lay up treasure in Heaven, or do we still hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt? When we pray “Lord, conform me to Thine image,” do we mean “strip me of all which hinders!”?

The figure of the “stranger” applied to the child of God here on earth, is very pertinent and full. The analogies between one who is in a foreign country and the Christian in this world, are marked and numerous. In a strange land one is not appreciated for his birth, but is avoided: John 15:19. The habits, ways, language are strange to him: 1 Peter 4:4. He has to be content with a stranger’s fare: 1 Timothy 6:7, 8. He needs to be careful not to give offense to the government: Colossians 4:6. He has to continually inquire his ways: Psalm 5:8. Unless he conforms to the ways of that foreign country, he is easily identified: Matthew 26:73. He is often assailed with homesickness, for his heart is not where his body is: Philippians 1:23.

The figure of the “pilgrim” as it applies to the Christian is equally suggestive. Moving on from place to place, he never feels at home. He finds himself very much alone, for he meets with few who are traveling his way. Those he does encounter afford him very little encouragement, for they think him peculiar. He is very grateful for any kindness shown him: sensible of his dependence on Providence, he is thankful whenever God grants him favor in the eyes of the wicked. He carries nothing with him but what he deems useful for his journey: all superfluities are regarded as encumbrances. He tarries not to gaze upon the various vanities around him. He never thinks of turning back because of the difficulties of the way: he has a definite goal in view, and toward it he steadily presses.

We ought to evidence that we are “strangers and pilgrims” by using the things of this world (when *necessity* requires), but not abusing them (1 Cor. 7:31). By being contented with that portion of this world’s goods which God has assigned us (Phil. 4:11). By conscientiously seeking to discharge our own responsibility, and not being a “busybody in other men’s matters” (1 Peter 4:15). By being moderate and temperate in all things, and thus “abstaining from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). By laying aside every hindering weight and mortifying our members which are upon the earth, so that we may run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1). By daily keeping in

mind the brevity and uncertainty of this life (Prov. 27:1). By constantly keeping before the heart our future inheritance, knowing that we shall only be satisfied when we awake in our Lord's likeness.

"If they in spirit amid dark clouds, took a flight into the celestial country, what ought we to do at this day? for Christ stretches forth His hand to us, as it were openly, from Heaven, to raise us up to Himself. If the land of Canaan did not engross their attention, how more weaned from things below ought we to be, who have no promised habitation in this world?" (John Calvin). When Basil (a devoted servant of Christ, at the beginning of the "Dark Ages") was threatened with exile by Modestus, he said, "I know no banishment, who have no abiding-place here in the world. I do not count this place mine, nor can I say the other is not mine; rather all is God's, whose stranger and pilgrim I am."

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Heb. 11:14). In these words a logical inference is drawn from the last clause of the preceding verse, which supplies a valuable hint on how the Scriptures are to be expounded. The Apostle here makes known unto us what was signified by the confession of the patriarchs. Just as the negative implies the positive—"thou shalt not covet" meaning also, "thou shalt be content with what God has given"—so for saints to conduct themselves as strangers and pilgrims, and that unto the end of their sojourning in this world, makes manifest the fact that they are journeying heavenwards. "This is the genuine and proper way of interpreting Scripture: when from the words themselves, considered with relation to the persons speaking them and to all their circumstances, we declare what was their determinate mind and sense" (John Owen).

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." Their confession of strangership implied more than that they had not yet entered their promised Inheritance: it likewise showed they were earnestly pressing toward it. They had every reason so to do: it was their own "Country," for it was there God had blest them with all spiritual blessings before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3, 4), it was from there they had been born again (John 3:3, margin), it was there that their Father, Saviour and fellow-saints dwell. To "seek" the promised Inheritance denotes that earnest quest of the believer after that which he supremely desires. It is this which distinguishes him from the empty professor: the latter desires that which is good for himself, as Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous" (Num. 23:10); but only the regenerate can truly say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I *seek after*; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (Psa. 27:4).

To "seek" after Heaven must be the chief aim and supreme task which the Christian sets before him: laying aside all that would hinder, and using every means which God has appointed. The world must be held loosely, the affections be set upon things above, and the heart constantly exercised about treading the Narrow Way, which alone leads thither. "Seek a Country": "Their designs are for it, their desires are after it, their discourses about it; they diligently endeavour to clear up their title to it, to have their temper suited to it, and have their conversation in it, and come to the enjoyment of it" (Matt. Henry). Heaven is here called a "Country" because of its largeness: it is a pleasant Country, the land of uprightness, rest and joy. May Divine grace conduct both writer and reader into it.

CHAPTER 9

The Reward of Faith

(Heb. 11:15-16)

Once more we would remind ourselves of the particular circumstances those saints were in to whom our Epistle was first addressed. Only as we do so are we in the best position to discern the meaning of its contents, and best fitted to make a right application of the same unto ourselves. It is not that the Hebrews were Jews according to the flesh and we Gentiles, for they, equally with us, were "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). No, it is the peculiar position which they occupied, with the pressing temptations that solicited them, which we need to carefully ponder. Divine grace had called them out of Judaism (John 10:3) but Divine judgment had not yet fallen upon Judaism. The temple was still intact, and its services continued, and as long as they did so, an appeal was made to the Hebrews to return thereunto.

Now that historical situation adumbrated a moral one. The Christian has been called out from the world to follow Christ, but the judgment of God has not yet fallen upon the world and burned it up. No, it still stands, and we are yet in it, and as long as this is the case, Satan seeks to get us to return thereunto. It is this which enables us to see the force of those verses which are now engaging our attention. Keeping in mind what has just been said, the reader should have no difficulty in discerning why the Apostle reminds us, first, that the patriarchs lived on earth as strangers and pilgrims; and

secondly, that they went not back again to the land of their birth. As we saw in Chapter 8, that which was typified by the patriarchs living in separation from the Canaanites and their “dwelling in tents,” was the Christian’s renunciation of this world; that which was foreshadowed by their refusal to return unto Chaldea was the Christian’s *continued* renunciation of the world, and his actual winning through to Heaven.

In the verses which are now to be before us clear light is thrown upon an essential element in the Christian life. They present to us an aspect of Truth which, in some circles, is largely ignored or denied today. There are those who have pressed the blessed truth of the eternal Security of the Saints with a zeal that was not always according to knowledge: they have presented it in a way that suggests God preserves His people altogether apart from their use of means. They have stated it in a manner as to virtually deny the Christian’s responsibility. They have implied that, having committed my soul unto the keeping of the Lord, I have no more to do with its safety, than I have with money which I have entrusted to the custody of a bank or the government. The result has been that many who have accepted this false presentation of the truth have felt quite at ease in a course of careless and reckless living.

So one-sided is the teaching we refer to, that its advocates will not allow for a moment that there is the slightest danger of a real Christian apostatizing. If a servant of God insists that there is, and yet he also affirms that no real saint of God has perished or ever will, they consider him inconsistent and illogical. They seem unable to recognize the fact that while it is perfectly true from the side of God’s eternal counsels, the value of Christ’s redemption, the efficacy of the Spirit’s work, that none of the elect can be finally lost; yet it is equally true from the side of the Christian’s frailty, the existence of the flesh still within, his being subject unto the assaults of Satan, and his living in a wicked world, that real (not theoretical or imaginary) danger menaces him from every side. No, they fondly imagine that there is only one side to the subject, the Divine side.

But the verses we are now to ponder show the fallacy of this. So far from affirming that there was no possibility of the patriarchs going back again to that country which they had left—which, in type, would mean returning to the world—the Apostle boldly affirms (caring not who might charge him with being inconsistent with himself) that if their hearts had been set upon Chaldea, they “might have had opportunity to have returned.” Had they grown weary of dwelling in tents and moving about from place to place in a strange land, and purposed to retrace their steps to Mesopotamia, what was there to hinder them so doing? True, *that* would have been an act of unbelief and disobedience, a despising and relinquishing of the promises; yet, from the human side, the way for them so to act was always open. Let us now weigh the details of our passage.

“And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned” (Heb. 11:15). There is a threefold connection between these words and that which immediately precedes. First, at the beginning of verse 13 the Apostle had affirmed that all those to whom he was referring (and to whom he was directing the special attention of the Hebrews) had “in faith died”; in all that follows to the end of verse 16 he furnishes proof of his assertion. Second, in verse 15 the Apostle continues the inference he had drawn in verse 14 from the last clause of verse 13: the confession made by the patriarchs manifested that their hearts were set upon Heaven, which was further evidenced by their refusal to return to Chaldea. Third, he anticipates and removes an objection: seeing that God had commanded them to take up their residence in another land (Canaan), they were “strangers” there by necessity. No, says the Apostle—they were “strangers and pilgrims” by their own consent too: their hearts as well as their bodies were separated from Chaldea.

The patriarchs’ remaining in a strange land was quite a voluntary thing on their part. And this brings us unto the very heart of what is a real difficulty for many: they do not see that when God “draws” a person (John 6:44), He does no violence to his will, that though exercising His sovereignty man also retains his freedom. Both are true, and hold good of the Christian life at every stage of it. Conversion itself is wholly brought about by the mighty operations of Divine grace, nevertheless it is also a free act on the part of the creature. Those who are effectually called by God out of darkness into His marvelous light, do, at conversion, surrender their whole being to Him, renouncing the flesh, the world, and the Devil, and vow to wage (by His grace) a ceaseless warfare against them. The Christian life is the habitual continuance of what took place at conversion, the carrying out of the vow then made, the putting of it into practice.

Immediately before conversion a fierce conflict takes place in the soul. On the one side is the Devil, seeking to retain his captive by presenting to it the pleasures of sin and the allurements of the world, telling the soul that there will be no more happiness if these be relinquished and the rigid requirements of Christ’s commandments be heeded. On the other side is the Holy Spirit, declaring that the wages of sin is death, that the world is doomed to destruction, and that unless we renounce sin and forsake the world, we must eternally perish. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit presses upon us that nothing short of a wholehearted surrender to the Lordship of Christ can bring us into “*the way of salvation.*” Torn between these conflicting impressions upon his mind, the soul is bidden to sit down and “count the cost” (Luke 14:28); to deliberately weigh the offers of Satan and the terms of Christian discipleship, and to definitely make his choice between them.

It is not that man has the power within himself to refuse the evil and choose the good; it is not that God has left it for the creature to determine his own destiny; it is not that the temptations of Satan are equally powerful with the convictions of the Holy spirit, and that *our* decision turns the scale between them. No indeed: not so do the Scriptures teach, and not so does this writer believe. Sin has robbed fallen man of all *power* to do good, yet not his *obligation* to perform it. The destiny of all creatures has been unalterably fixed by the eternal decrees of God, yet not in such a way as to reduce them to irresponsible automations. The operations of the Holy Spirit in God's elect are invincible, yet they do no violence to the human will. But while salvation, from beginning to end, is to be wholly ascribed to the free and sovereign grace of God, it nevertheless remains that conversion itself is the voluntary act of man, his own conscious and free surrendering of himself to God in Christ.

Now the same diverse factors enter into the Christian life itself. Necessarily so, for, as said above, the Christian life is but a progressive continuance of how we begin. Repentance is not once and for all, but as often as we are conscious of having displeased God. Believing in Christ is not a single act which needs no repeating, but a constant requirement, as the "believeth" of John 3:16, and the "coming" of 1 Peter 2:4 plainly show. So too our renunciation of the world is to be a daily process. The same objects which enthralled us before conversion are still on hand, and unless we are much upon our guard, unless our hearts are warmed and charmed by the loveliness of Christ, through maintaining a close fellowship with Him, they will soon gain power over us. Satan is ever ready to tempt, and unless we diligently seek grace to resist him, will trip us up.

"And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned," but as the next verse shows, they did not do so. In this they were in striking and blessed contrast from Esau, who sold his birthright, valuing temporal things more highly than spiritual. In contrast from the Children of Israel who said one to another, "Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt" (Num. 14:4). In contrast from the Gadarenes, who preferred their hogs to Christ and His salvation (Mark 5). In contrast from the stony-ground hearers who "have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13). In contrast from the apostates of 2 Peter 2:20-22, the latter end of whom is "worse with them than the beginning." Solemn warnings are these which each professing Christian needs to take to heart.

Note how positively the Apostle expressed it: "And truly" or "verily." "If they had been mindful," which means, had their minds frequently dwelt upon Chaldea, had their hearts desired it. How this shows the great importance of "girding up the loins of our minds" (1 Peter 1:13), of disciplining our thoughts, for as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). "It is in the nature of faith to mortify, not only corrupt and sinful lusts, but our natural affections, and their most vehement inclinations, though in themselves innocent, if they are any way incompilant with duties of obedience to the commands of God-yea herein lies the principal trial of the sincerity and power of faith. Our lives, parents, wives, children, houses, possessions, our country, are the principal, proper, lawful objects of our natural affections. But when they, or any of them, stand in the way of God's commands, if they are hindrances to the doing or suffering anything according to His will, faith doth not only mortify, weaken and take off that love, but gives us a comparative hatred of them" (John Owen).

"They might have had opportunity to have returned." They knew the way, were well furnished with funds, had plenty of time at their disposal, and health and strength for the journey. The Canaanites would not have grieved at their departure (Gen. 26:18-21), and undoubtedly their old friends would have heartily welcomed them back again. In like manner (as we have said before), the way back was wide open for the Hebrews to return unto Judaism: it was their special snare, and a constant and habitual renunciation of it was required of them. So too if *we* choose to return unto the world and engage again in all its vain pursuits, there are "opportunities" enough: enticements abound on every hand, and worldly friends would heartily welcome us to their society if we would but lower our colours, drop our godliness, and follow their course.

But the patriarchs did not go back again to that country from whence they came out: instead, they persevered in the path of duty, and despite all discouragements followed that course which the Divine commandments marked out for them. In this they have left us an example. They hankered not after the wealth, honours, pleasures, or society of Chaldea: their hearts were engaged with something vastly superior. They knew that in Heaven they had "a better and enduring substance," and therefore they disdained the baubles which once had satisfied them. Divine grace had taught them that those sources of joy which they had once so eagerly sought, were "cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13)-but that in Christ they had an ever-flowing well, that springeth up unto everlasting life. Grace had taught them that it is sinful to make material things the chief objects of this life: they sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

So little did Abraham esteem Chaldea that he would not go thither in person to obtain a wife for his son, nor suffer Isaac to go, but sent his servant and made him swear that he would not bring her thither, if she were unwilling to come-another illustration that nothing is more voluntary than godliness. So it is with the Christian when he is first converted: the world has lost all its attractions for him, nor can it regain its hold upon his heart so long as he walks with God. The

acutest test comes in seasons of prosperity. “David professeth himself to be a stranger and a pilgrim, not only when he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, but when he was in his palace, and in his best estate. We are not to renounce our comforts, and throw away God’s blessings; but we are to renounce our carnal affections. We cannot get out of the world when we please, but we must get the world out of us. It is a great trial of grace to refuse the opportunity; it is the most difficult lesson to learn how to abound, more difficult than to learn how to want, and to be abased; to have comforts, and yet to have the heart weaned from comforts; not to be necessarily mortified, but to be voluntarily mortified” (T. Manton).

It is not the absence of temptations, but the resisting of and prevailing over them which evidences the efficacy of indwelling grace. The power of voluntary godliness is manifested in the conflict, when we have the “opportunity” to go wrong, but decline it. Joseph had not only a temptation, but the “occasion” for yielding to it, yet grace forbade (Gen. 39:9). It was the command of God which held back the patriarchs from returning to Chaldea, and the same controls the hearts of all the regenerate. “It is easy to be good when we cannot be otherwise, or when all temptations to the contrary are out of the way. All the seeming goodness there is in so many, they owe it to the want of a temptation and to the want of an opportunity of doing otherwise” (T. Manton). Not so with the real Christian.

“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” (Heb. 11:16). The first half of this verse gives the positive side of what has been before us, and amplified what was said in verse 14. It is not enough to renounce the world, but we must also have our hearts carried forth unto better things: we must believe in and seek Heaven itself. There are some who disdain worldly profits, but instead of seeking the true riches, are immersed in worldly pleasures. Others while despising fleshly recreations and dissipations, devote themselves to more serious occupations, yet “labour for that which satisfieth not” (Isa. 55:2). But the Christian, while passing through it, makes a sanctified use of the world, and has his affections set upon things above.

“But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.” It helps us to link together the four statements made concerning this. First, “Abraham *looked for* a Country” (v. 10), which denotes faith’s expectations of blessedness to come: it was not a mere passing glance of the mind, but a serious and constant anticipation of Celestial Bliss. Second, “They *seek* a Country” (v. 14): they make it the great aim and business of their lives to avoid every hindrance, overcome every obstacle, and steadfastly press forward along the Narrow Way that leads thither: “Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:19). Third, “they *desire* a better Country” (v. 16): they long to be relieved from the body of this death, removed from this scene of sin, and be taken to be forever with the Lord: “We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23): he that has had a taste of Heaven in the joy of the Spirit, his heart cries “when shall I come to the full enjoyment of my Inheritance!” Fourth, “they *declare plainly* that they seek a country” (v. 14): their daily walk makes it manifest that they belong not to this world, but are citizens of Heaven.

One of the best evidences that we are truly seeking Heaven is the possession of hearts that are weaned from this world. None will ever enter the Father’s House on high in whose soul the first fruits of heavenly peace and joy does not grow now. He who finds his satisfaction in temporal things is woefully deceived if he imagines he can enjoy eternal things. He whose joy is all gone when earthly possessions are snatched from him, knows nothing of that peace which “passeth all understanding.” And yet, if the auto, radio, newspaper, money to go to the movies, were taken away from the average “church member,” what would he then have left to make life worth living? O how few can really say, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17, 18).

“Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.” “The word ‘therefore’ denotes not the procuring or meritorious cause of the thing itself, but the consequent or what ensued thereon” (John Owen). God will be no man’s Debtor: “them that honour Me, I will honour” (1 Sam. 2:30 and cf. 2 Tim. 2:21) is His sure promise. By confessing they were strangers and pilgrims, the patriarchs had avowed their supreme desire for and hope of a portion superior to any that could be found on earth. Hence, because they were willing to renounce all worldly prospects so as to follow God in an obedient faith, for the sake of an invisible but eternal inheritance, He did not disdain to be known as their Friend and Portion. “We are hence to conclude that there is no place for us among God’s children except we renounce the world, and that there will be for us no inheritance in Heaven except we become pilgrims on earth” (J. Calvin).

“God is not ashamed to be called their God.” Here was the grand reward of their faith. So well did God approve of their desire and design, He was pleased to give evidence of His special regard unto them. “Not ashamed” literally signifies that He had no cause to “blush” because He had been disgraced by them—it is God speaking after the manner of men; it is the negative way of saying that He made a joyous acknowledgment of them, as a father does of dutiful children. When we think not only of the personal unworthiness of the patriarchs (fallen, sinful creatures), but also of their contemptible situation—“dwelling in tents” in a strange land—we may well marvel at the infinite condescension of the

Maker of the universe identifying Himself with them. What incredible grace for the Divine Majesty to avow Himself the God of worms of the earth!

Ah, those who renounce the world for God's sake shall not be the losers. But observe it was not simply, "God is not ashamed *to be* their God," but "to be *called* their God." He took this very title in a peculiar manner: unto Moses He said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exo. 3:6). Thus, to be "called their God" means that He was their covenant God and Father. Not only is He the God of His children by creation and providence, but He is also unto them "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10), as He is the God of Christ and all the elect in Him. This He manifests by quickening, enlightening, guiding, protecting and making all things work together for their good. He continues to be such a God unto them through life and in death, so that they may depend upon His love, be assured of His faithfulness, count upon His power, and be safely carried through every trial, till they are landed on the shores of Eternal Bliss.

"God is not ashamed to be called their God." The wider reference is to all the elect, who have a special interest in Him. These are known, first, by the manner of their coming into this relation. God brings His people into this special relation by effectually calling them and then when He has taken possession of their hearts, they choose Him for their all-sufficient portion, and completely give up themselves to Him. Their language is, "whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Psa. 73:25). Their surrender to Him is evidenced by, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Second, by their manner of living in this relation. They glorify God by their subjection to Him, love for Him, trust in Him. Unto those who have renounced all idols, God is not ashamed to be known as their God.

Now if God be our "God" how *contented* we should be! "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psa. 16:5, 6): this should ever be our language. How *confident* we should be! "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want" (Psa. 23:1): this should ever be our boast. How *joyful* we should be! "Because Thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee" (Psa. 63:3): this should ever be our confession. "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." (Psa. 16:11): when brought Home to Glory we shall better understand what this connotes—"their God."

How may I know that God is *my* "God"? Did you ever enter into covenant with Him? "Was your spirit ever subdued to yield to Him? Do you remember when you were bond-slaves of Satan, that God broke in upon you with a mighty and powerful work of grace, subduing your heart, and causing you to yield, to give the hand to Him, to come and lie at His feet, and lay down the weapons of defiance? Didst thou ever come as a guilty creature, willing to take laws from God? Though it be God's condescension to capitulate with us, yet we do not capitulate with Him as equals, but as a subdued creature, who is taken captive and ready to be destroyed every moment, and is therefore willing to yield and cry quarter. How do you behave yourselves in the covenant? Do you love God as the chiefest good? Do you see His glory as the utmost end? Do you obey Him as the highest Lord? Do you depend on Him as your only Paymaster? This is to give God the glory of a God" (T. Manton).

"For He hath prepared for them a City." Here is the crowning evidence that He *is* their "God." The "City" is Heaven itself. It is spoken of as "prepared" because God did, in His eternal counsels, appoint it: see Matthew 20:23, 1 Corinthians 2:9. But sin entered? True, and Christ has put away the sins of His people, and has entered Heaven as their Representative and Forerunner: therefore has He gone there to "prepare" a place for us, having laid the foundation for this in His own merits; and hence we read of "the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:14). He is now in Heaven possessing it in our name. O what cause have we to bow in wonderment and worship.

CHAPTER 10

The Faith of Abraham—Part One

(Heb. 11:17-19)

Hebrews, chapter 11, is the chronology of faith, or a record of some of the outstanding acts which that grace has produced in all ages. The Apostle having mentioned the works wrought by the faith of those who lived before the Flood (vv. 4-7), and having spoken of the patriarchs in general (vv. 9-16), now mentions them in detail. He begins again with that of Abraham, who in this glorious constellation shines forth as a star of the first magnitude, and therefore is fittingly

styled the father of the faithful. Three principal products of his faith are here singled out: his leaving the land of his birth, upon the call of God (v. 8); the manner of his life in Canaan, sojourning in tents (v. 9); and his offering up of Isaac. The first pictures conversion, the second the Christian's life in this world, the third the triumphant consummation of faith.

Among all the actings of Abraham's faith nothing was more remarkable and noteworthy than the offering up of his son Isaac. Not only was it the most wonderful work of faith ever wrought, and therefore is the most illustrious of all examples for us to follow (the life and death of Christ alone excepted), but it also supplies the most blessed shadowing out of the love of God the Father in the gift of His dear Son. The resemblances pointed by the type are numerous and striking. Abraham offered up a son, his only begotten son. Abraham delivered up his son to a sacrificial death, and, in purpose, smote him. But observe too how the antitype excelled the type. Abraham's son was only a man. Abraham offered up Isaac under Divine command: God was under no constraint, but gave Christ freely. Abraham's son suffered not: Christ did.

Let it not be forgotten that the chief design before the Apostle throughout this chapter, was to demonstrate unto his tried brethren the great efficacy of faith: its power to sustain a very great trial, to perform a very difficult duty, and to obtain a very important blessing. Unmistakably were these three things illustrated in the case we are now to consider. As we have already seen, it was not without good reason that Abraham is designated the father of all who believe. But among all the actings of his faith none was more memorable than its exercise upon Mount Moriah. If we consider the object of it, the occasion of it, the hindrances which stood in his way, and his blessed victory, we cannot but admire and wonder at the power of Divine grace triumphing over the weakness of the flesh.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son" (v. 17). For a clearer understanding of this verse we need to consult Genesis 22: there we read, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (vv. 1, 2). The whole of what follows in Genesis 22, to the end of verse 19, should be carefully read. Before attempting to expound our present verse and make application to ourselves of its practical teachings, let us seek to remove one or two difficulties which may stand in the way of the thoughtful reader.

First, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." The word "offered up" is the same that is used for slaying and offering up sacrifices. Here then is the problem: how could Abraham "offer up" his son *by faith*, seeing that it was against both the law of nature and the law of God for a man to slay his own son? Genesis 22:2, however, shows that his faith had a sure foundation to rest upon, for the Lord Himself had commanded him so to do. But this only appears to remove the difficulty one stage farther back: God Himself had laid it down as a law that "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6). True, but though His creatures are bound by the laws He has prescribed them, God Himself is not.

God is under no law, but is absolute Sovereign. Moreover, He is the Lord of life, both Giver and Preserver of it, and therefore has He an indisputable right to dispose of it, to take it away when He pleases, by what means or instruments He sees fit. God possesses supreme authority, and when He pleases sets aside His own laws, or issues new ones contrary to those given previously. By His own imperial fiat, Jehovah now, by special and extraordinary command, constituted it a duty for Abraham to do what before had been a sin. In similar manner, He who gave commandment "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness" (Exo. 20:4), ordered Moses *to make* a brazen serpent (Num. 21:8)! Learn, then, that God is bound by no law, being above all law.

Second, but how could it be truly said that Abraham "offered up Isaac," seeing that he did not actually slay him? In regard to his willingness, in regard to his set purpose, and in regard to God's acceptance of the will for the deed, he *did* do so. There was no reserve in his heart, and there was no failure in his honest endeavours. He took the three days' journey to the appointed place of sacrifice; he bound Isaac unto the altar, and took the knife into his hand to slay him. And God accepted the will for the deed. This exemplifies a most important principle in connection with God's acceptance of the Christian's obedience. The terms of His law have not been lowered: God still requires of us personal, perpetual, and perfect obedience. But this we are unable to render to Him while in our present state. And so, for Christ's sake, where the heart (at which God ever looks) *truly desires* to fully please Him in all things, and makes an honest and *sincere effort* to do so, God graciously accepts the will for the deed. Carefully ponder 2 Corinthians 8:12 which illustrates the same blessed fact, and note the word "willing" in Hebrews 13:18!

Third, the statement made in Genesis 22:1, "God did tempt Abraham," or as our text says, "when he was tried," for that is exactly what both the original Hebrew and Greek word signifies: to make trial of. "It is an act of God whereby He proveth and makes experience of the loyalty and obedience of His servants" (W. Perkins). And this *not* for His own information (for He "knoweth our thoughts afar off"), but for their own knowledge and that of their fellows. Christ put

the rich young ruler to the proof when He said, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor” (Matt. 19:21). So too He made trial of the Canaanite woman when He said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs” (Matt. 15:26).

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.” In order to understand and appreciate the fact that it was “by *faith*” Abraham offered up Isaac, we must examine more closely the nature of that test to which the Lord submitted the one whom He condescended to call His “friend.” In bidding him to sacrifice his beloved son, that ordeal combined in it various and distinct features: it was a testing of his submission or loyalty to God; it was a testing of his affections, as to whom he really loved the more: God or Isaac; it was a testing of which was the stronger within him: grace or sin; but supremely, it was a testing of his *faith*.

Carnal writers see in this incident little more than a severe trial of Abraham’s natural affections. It cannot be otherwise, for water never rises above its own level; and carnal men are incapable of discerning spiritual things. But it is to be carefully noted that Hebrews 11:17 does not say, “In submission to God’s holy will, Abraham offered up Isaac,” though that was true; nor “out of supreme love for God he offered his son,” though that was also the case. Instead, the Holy Spirit declares that it was “by faith” that the patriarch acted declaring “he that had *received the promises* offered up his only begotten son.” Most of the modern commentators, filled with fleshly sentiment rather than with the Holy Spirit, completely miss this point, which is the central beauty of our verse. Let us seek then to attend unto it the more particularly.

In calling upon Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering, the Lord submitted his faith to a fiery ordeal. How so? Because God’s promises to Abraham concerning his “seed” centered in Isaac, and in bidding him slay his only son, He appeared to contradict Himself. Ishmael had been cast out, and Isaac’s posterity alone was to be reckoned to Abraham as the blessed seed among whom God would have His Church. Isaac had been given to Abraham after he had long gone childless and when Sarah’s womb was dead, therefore there was no likelihood of his having any more sons by her. At the time, Isaac himself was childless, and to kill him looked like cutting off all his hopes. How then could Abraham reconcile the Divine command with the Divine promise? To sacrifice his son and heir was not only contrary to his natural affections, but opposed to carnal reason as well.

In like manner God tests the faith of His people today. He calls upon them to perform acts of obedience which are contrary to their natural affections and which are opposed to carnal reason. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24). How many a Christian has had his or her affections drawn out toward a non-Christian, and then has come to them that piercing word, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14)! How many a child of God has had his membership in a “church” where he saw that Christ was dishonoured; to heed that Divine command, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17) entailed leaving behind those near and dear in the flesh; but the call of God could not be disregarded, no matter how painful obedience to it might be.

But when are we put to such a trial as to offer up our Isaac? To this question the Puritan Manton returned a threefold answer. First, in the case of *submission to* the strokes of providence, when near relations are taken away from us. God knows how to strike us in the right vein; there will be the greatest trial where our love is set. Second, in case of *self-denial*, forsaking our choicest interests for a good conscience. We must not only part with mean things, but such as we prize above anything in the world. When God requires it (as He did with the writer) that we should forsake father and mother, we must not demur; nay, our lives should not be dear unto us (Acts 20:24). Third, in *mortifying* our bosom lust: this is what is signified by cutting off a “right hand” or plucking out a “right eye” (Matt. 5:29, 30).

Let us notice the *time* when Abraham was thus tested. The Holy Spirit has emphasized this in Genesis 22:1 by saying, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham.” A double reference seems to be made in these words. First, a general one to all the preceding trials which Abraham had endured-his journey to Canaan, his sojourning there in tents, the long, long wait for the promised heir. Now that he had passed through a great fight of afflictions, he is called upon to suffer a yet severer test. Ah, God educates His children little by little: as they grow in grace harder tasks are assigned them, and deeper waters are called upon to be passed through, that enlarged opportunities may be afforded for manifesting their increased faith in God. It is not the raw recruit, but the scarred veteran, who is assigned a place in the front ranks in the battle. Think it not strange then fellow-Christian if thy God is now appointing thee severer tests than He did some years ago.

Second, a more specific reference is made in Genesis 22:1 to what is recorded in the previous chapter: the miraculous birth of Isaac, the great feast that Abraham made, when he was weaned (v. 8), and the casting out of Ishmael (v. 14). The cup of the patriarch’s joy was now full. His outlook seemed most promising: not a cloud appeared on the horizon. Yet it was then, like a heavy clap of thunder out of a clear sky, that the most trying test of all came upon him! Yes, and so it was just after God had pronounced Job “a perfect man and an upright” that He delivered all that he had into Satan’s hands

(Job 1:8, 12). So too it was when Paul had been rapt to the third Heaven, when he received such “abundance of revelations,” that there was given him “a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him” (2 Cor. 12:1-7).

How we need to seek grace that we may be enabled to hold everything down here with a light hand. Rightly did an old writer say, “Build not thy nest on any earthly tree, for the whole forest is doomed to be cut down.” It is not only for God’s glory, but for our own good, that we set our affections upon “things above.” And in view of what has just been before us, how necessary it is that we should *expect* and seek in advance to be prepared for severe trials. Are we not bidden to “hear for the time to come” (Isa. 42:23)? The more we calmly anticipate future trials, the less likely are we to be staggered and overcome by them when they arrive: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

Having observed the time when Abraham was tested, let us now consider the *severity* of his trial. And first *the act* itself. Abraham was ordered to slay, not all his bullocks and herds, but a human being; and that not one of his faithful servants, but his beloved son. Abraham was bidden not to banish him from home or send him out of Canaan, but to cut him off out of the land of the living. He was commanded to do a thing for which no reason could be assigned save the authority of Him who gave the command. He was bidden to do that which was most abhorrent to natural feeling. He must not only consent unto the death of his dear Isaac, but himself be his executioner. He was to slay one who was guilty of no crime, but who (according to the Divine record) was an unusually dutiful, loving, and obedient child. Was ever such a demand made upon a human creature before or since?!

Second, consider *the offerer*. In our text he is presented in a particular character: “he that had received the promises,” which is the key clause to the verse. God had declared unto Abraham that He would establish an everlasting covenant with Isaac and with his seed after him (Gen. 17:9). Isaac, and none other, was the “seed” by whose posterity Canaan should be possessed (Gen. 12:7). It was through him that all nations should be blessed (Gen. 17:7), and therefore it must be through him that Christ, according to the flesh, would proceed. These promises Abraham had “received”: he had given credit for them, firmly believed them, fully expected their performance. Now the accomplishment of those promises depended upon the preservation of Isaac’s life—at least until he had a son; and to sacrifice him now appeared to render them all null and void, making their fulfillment impossible.

“He that had received the promises”—“which noteth not only the revelation of the promises, concerning a numerous issue, and the Messiah to come of his loins, but the entertaining of them and cordial assent to them. He received them not only as a private believer, but as a free offer in trust for the use of the church. In the first ages of the world God had some eminent persons who received a revelation of His will in the name of the rest. This was Abraham’s case, and he is here viewed not only as a father, a loving father, but as one who had received the promises as a public person, and father of the faithful—the person whom God had chosen in whom to deposit the promises” (T. Manton). Herein lay the *spiritual* acuteness of the trial: would he not in slaying Isaac be faithless to his trust? would he not by his own act place the gravestone on all hope for the fulfillment of such promises?

Forcibly did Matthew Henry, when commenting upon the time at which Abraham received this trying command from God, say, “After he had received the promises that this Isaac should build up his family, and that ‘in him his seed should be called’ (Heb. 11:18), and that he should be one of the progenitors of the Messiah, and all nations blessed in Him; so that in being called to offer up his Isaac, he seemed to be called to destroy and cut off his own family, to cancel the promises of God, to prevent the coming of Christ, to destroy the whole truth, to sacrifice his own soul and his hope of salvation, to cut off the church of God at one blow; a most terrible trial!” If Isaac were slain, then *all* seemed to be lost.

It may be asked, But *why* should God thus try the faith of the patriarch? For Abraham’s own sake that he might the better know the efficacy of that grace which God had bestowed upon him. As the suspending of a heavy weight upon a chain reveals either its weakness or its strength, so God places His people in varied circumstances which manifest the state of their hearts—whether or no their trust be really in Him. The Lord tried Hezekiah to show unto him his frailty (2 Chron. 32:31); he tried Job to show that though He slew him yet would he trust in God. Second, for the sake of others, that Abraham might be an example to them. God had called him to be the father of the faithful, and therefore would He show unto all generations of his children what grace He had conferred upon him—what a worthy “father” or pattern he was (condensed from W. Gouge).

In like manner, God tries His people today and puts to the proof the grace which He has communicated to their hearts: this, both for His own glory, and for their own comfort. The Lord is determined to make it manifest that He has on earth a people who will forsake any comfort and endure any misery rather than forego their plain duty; who love Him better than their own lives, and who are prepared to trust Him in the dark. So too we are the gainers, for we never have clearer proof of the reality of grace than when we are under sore trials. “Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5:3, 4). As another has said, “By knocking upon the vessel we see whether it is full or empty, cracked or sound; so by these knocks of providence we are discovered.”

Rightly did John Owen point out, “Trials are the only touchstone of faith, without which men must want (lack) the best evidence of its sincerity and efficacy, and the best way of testifying it unto others. Wherefore we ought not to be afraid of trials, because of the admirable advantages of faith, in and by them.” Yea, the Word of God goes farther, and bids us, “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” or “trials,” declaring “that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4). So too, “Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: (or “trials”) 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 1:6, 7).

In conclusion, let us observe how Abraham conducted himself under this sore trial: “he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.” Many instructive details concerning this are recorded in Genesis 22. There it will be found that Abraham consulted not with Sarah—why should he, when he already *knew* God’s will on the matter! Nor was there any disputing with God, as to the apparently flagrant discrepancy between His present command and His previous promises. Nor was there any delay: “And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him” (Gen. 22:3). And how is his unparalleled action to be accounted for? From what super-fleshly principle did it spring? A single word gives the answer: FAITH. Not a theoretical faith, not a mere head-knowledge of God, but a real, living, spiritual, triumphant *faith*.

“*By faith* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.” By faith in the Divine justice and wisdom behind the command so to act. By faith in the veracity and faithfulness of God to make good His own promises. Fully assured that God was able to fulfill His word, Abraham closed his eyes to all difficulties, and steadfastly counted upon the power of Him that cannot lie. This is the very nature or character of a *spiritual* faith: it persuades the soul of God’s absolute supremacy, unerring wisdom, unchanging righteousness, infinite love, almighty power. In other words, it rests upon the *character* of the living God, and trusts Him in the face of every obstacle. Spiritual faith makes its favoured possessor judge that the greatest suffering is better than the least sin; yea, it unhesitatingly avows “Thy loving kindness is better than life” (Psa. 63:3).

We must leave for our next Chapter the consideration of the remainder of our passage. But in view of what has already been before us, is not both writer and reader constrained to cry unto God, “Lord, have mercy upon me! Pardon my vile unbelief, and graciously subdue its awful power. Be pleased, for Christ’s sake, to work in me that spiritual and supernatural faith which will honour Thee and bear fruits to Thy glory. And if Thou hast, in Thy discriminating grace, already communicated to me this precious, precious gift, then graciously deign to strengthen it by the power of Thy Holy Spirit; call it forth into more frequent exercise and action. Amen.”

CHAPTER 11

The Faith of Abraham—Part Two

(Heb. 11:17-19)

“Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom. 6:13). The Lord has an absolute claim upon us, upon all that we have. As our Maker and Sovereign He has the right to demand from us anything He pleases, and whatsoever He requires we must yield (1 Chron. 29:11). All that we have comes from Him, and must be held for Him, and at His disposal (1 Chron. 29:14). The Christian is under yet deeper obligations to part with anything God may ask from him: loving gratitude for Christ and His so great salvation, must loosen our hold on every cherished temporal thing. The bounty of God should encourage us to surrender freely whatever He calls for, for none ever lose by giving up anything to God. Yet powerful as are these considerations to any renewed mind, the fact remains that they move us not until *faith* is in exercise. Faith it is which causes us to yield to God, respond to His claims, and answer His calls.

“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” (Heb. 11:17-19). The Apostle’s purpose in citing this remarkable incident, was to show that it is the property of faith to carry its possessor through the greatest trials, with a cheerful submission and acceptable obedience to the will of God. In order to make this clearer unto the reader, let us

endeavour to exhibit the powerful influence which faith has to support the soul under and carry it through testings and trials.

First, faith judgeth of all things aright: it impresses us with a sense of the uncertainty and fleetingness of earthly things, and causes us to highly esteem invisible and heavenly things. Faith is a spiritual prudence opposed not only to ignorance, but also to folly: so much unbelief as we have, so much folly is ours—"O fools, and slow of heart to believe" (Luke 24:25). Faith is a spiritual wisdom, teaching us to value the favour of God, the smiles of His countenance, the comforts of Heaven; it shows us that all outward things are nothing in comparison with inward peace and joy. Carnal reason prizes the concernment of the present life and grasps at its riches and honours; sense is occupied with fleshly pleasures; but faith knows "Thy lovingkindness is better than life" (Psa. 63:3).

Second, faith solves all riddles and doubts when we are in a dilemma: what a problem confronted Abraham: what! shall I offer Isaac and bring to nought God's promises, or must I disobey Him on the other side? Faith removed the difficulty: "accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Faith believes the accomplishment of the promise, whatever reason and sense may say to the contrary; it cuts the knot by a resolute dependence upon the power and fidelity of God. Faith casts down carnal imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Third, faith is a grace which looks to future things, and in the light of their reality the hardest trials seem nothing. Sense is occupied only with things present, and thus to nature it appears troublesome and bitter to deny ourselves. But the language of faith is, "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" (2 Cor. 4:17, 18). Faith looks within the veil, and so has a mighty influence to support the soul in time of trial. He who walks in the light of Eternity goes calmly and happily along through the mists and fogs of time; neither the frowns of men nor the blandishments of the world affect him, for he has a ravishing and affecting sight of the glorious Inheritance to which he is journeying.

Fourth, "faith worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), and then nothing is too near and dear to us if the relinquishing of them will glorify God. Faith not only looks forward, but backward; it reminds the soul of what great things God has done for us in Christ. He has given us His beloved Son, and *He* is worth infinitely more than all we can give to Him. Yes, faith apprehends the wondrous love of God in Christ, and says, If He gave the Darling of His bosom to die for me, shall I stick at any little sacrifice? If God gave me Christ shall I deny Him my Isaac: I love him well, but I love God better. Thus faith works, urging the soul with the love of God, that we may out of thankfulness to Him part with those comforts which He requires of us.

"Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called" (Heb. 11:18). This was brought in by the Apostle to show wherein lay the greatest obstacle before Abraham's faith. First, he was called on to "offer up" his son and heir. Second, and this after he had "received the promises." Third, not Ishmael, but his "only begotten" or well-beloved Isaac—this is the force of the expression: it is a term of endearment as John 1:18 and 3:16 show. Fourth, he must slay the one from whom the Messiah Himself was to issue, for this is clearly the meaning of the Divine promise recorded in verse 18.

Long ago John Owen called attention to the fact that the Socinians (Unitarians) reduced God's promise to Abraham unto two heads: first that of a numerous posterity, and second that this posterity should inhabit and enjoy the land of Canaan as an inheritance. But this, as he pointed out, directly contradicts the Apostle, who in Hebrews 11:39 affirms that, when they had possessed the land of Canaan almost unto the utmost period of its grant unto them, had *not* received the accomplishment of the promises—we wish our modern "dispensationalists" would ponder that verse. While it is true that the numerous posterity of Abraham and their occupancy of Canaan were both means and pledges of the fulfillment of the promise, yet Acts 2:38, 39, and Galatians 3:16 make it unmistakably plain that the subject matter of the promise was Christ Himself, with the whole work of His mediation for the redemption and salvation of His Church.

"Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called." This Divine promise is first found in Genesis 21:12, and the occasion of God's giving it unto Abraham supplies us with another help towards determining its significance. In the context there, we find that the Lord had given orders for the casting out of Hagar and her son, and we read, "And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son" (Gen. 21:11). Then it was, to console his stricken heart, that Jehovah said unto His "friend": grieve not over Hagar's son, for I will give thee One who is better than a million Ishmaels; I will give thee a son from whom shall descend none other than the promised Saviour and Redeemer. And now Abraham was called upon to slay him who was the marked-out progenitor of the Messiah! No ordinary faith was called for here!

Who can doubt but that now Abraham was sorely pressed by Satan! Would he not point out how "inconsistent" God was?—as he frequently will to us, if we are foolish enough to listen to his vile accusations. Would he not appeal to his sentiments and say, How will Sarah regard you when she learns that you have killed and reduced to ashes the child of her

old age? Would he not seek to persuade Abraham that God was playing with him, that He did not really mean to be taken seriously, that He could not be so cruel as to require a righteous father to be the executioner of his own dutiful son? In the light of all that is revealed of our great Enemy in Holy Writ, and in view of our own experience of his fiendish assaults, who can doubt but what Abraham now became the immediate object of Satan's attack.

Ah, nothing but a mind that was stayed upon the Lord could have then resisted the Devil, and performed a task which was so difficult and painful. "Had he been weak in faith, he would have doubted whether two revelations, apparently inconsistent, could come from the same God, or, if they did, whether such a God ought to be trusted and obeyed. But being strong in faith, he reasoned in this way: This is plainly God's command, I have satisfactory evidence of that; and therefore it ought to be immediately and implicitly obeyed. I know Him to be perfectly wise and righteous, and what He commands must be right. Obedience to this command does indeed seem to throw obstacles in the way of the fulfillment of a number of promises which God has made to me. I am quite sure that God has made those promises; I am quite sure that He will perform them. How He is to perform them, I cannot tell. That is His province, not mine. It is His to promise, and mine to believe; His to command, and mine to obey" (John Brown).

The incident we are now considering shows us again that faith has to do not only with the promises of God, but with His precepts as well. Yea, this is the central thing which is here set before us. Abraham had been "strong in faith" when God had declared he should have a son by his aged wife (Rom. 4:20), not being staggered by the seemingly insurmountable difficulty that stood in the way; and now he was strong in faith when God bade him slay his son, refusing to be deterred by the apparently immovable obstacle which his act would interpose before his receiving the Seed through Isaac. Ah, dear reader, make no mistake upon this point: a faith which is not as much and as truly engaged with the precepts as it is with the promises of God, is not the faith of Abraham, and therefore is not the faith of God's elect. Spiritual faith does not pick and choose: it fears God as well as loves Him.

As the promises are not believed with a lively faith unless they draw off our hearts from the carnal vanities to seek that happiness which they offer us, so the commandments are not believed rightly unless we be fully resolved to acquiesce in them as the only rule to guide us in the obtaining that happiness, and to adhere to and obey them. The Psalmist declared, "I have *believed Thy commandments*" (119:66); he recognized God's authority behind them, there was a readiness of heart to hear His voice in them, there was a determination of will for his actions to be regulated by them. So it was with Abraham, and so it must be with us if we would furnish proof that *he* is *our* "father." "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39).

God's Word is not to be taken piecemeal by us, but received into our hearts as a whole: every part must affect us, and stir up dispositions in us which each several part is suited to produce. If the promises stir up comfort and joy, the commandments must stir up love, fear, and obedience. The precepts are a part of Divine revelation. The same Word which calls upon us to believe in Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, also bids us to believe the commandments of God, for the molding of our hearts and the guiding of our ways. There is a necessary connection between the precepts and the promises, for the latter cannot do us good until the former be heeded: our consent to the Law precedes our faith in the Gospel. God's commands "are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Christ must be accepted as Lawgiver before He becomes our Redeemer: Isaiah 33:22.

How the readiness of Abraham to sacrifice his son condemns those who oppose God's

commands, and will not sacrifice their wicked and filthy lusts! "Whosoever he be of you," says Christ, "that *forsaketh not* all that he hath, he *cannot* be My disciple" (Luke 14:33): by which He meant, until he does in heart sincerity and resolute endeavour turn away from all that stands in competition (for our affections) with the Lord Jesus, he cannot become a Christian: see Isaiah 55:7. In vain do we claim to be saved if the world still rules our hearts. Divine grace not only delivers from the wrath to come, but even now it effectually "teaches" its recipients to *deny* "all ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). Here we learn what was the immediate object of Abraham's faith on this occasion, namely, the mighty power of God. He was fully assured that the Lord would work a miracle rather than fail of His promise. Ah, my brethren, it is by meditating upon God's sufficiency that the heart is quieted and faith is established. In times of temptation when the soul is heavy with doubts and fears, great relief may be obtained by pondering the Divine attributes, particularly God's omnipotency. His almighty power is a special prop to faith. The faith of saints has in all ages been much strengthened hereby. Thus it was with the three Hebrews: "our God whom we serve *is able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:17)! "With God *all* things are possible" (Mark 10:27): He is able to make good His word, though all earth and Hell seem to make against it.

Here too we see exhibited another of faith's attributes, namely, the committal of events unto God. Carnal reason is unable to rest until a solution is in sight, until it can see a way out of its difficulties. But faith spreads the need before God, rolls the burden upon Him, and calmly leaves the solution to Him. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy

thoughts shall be established” (Prov. 16:3): when this is truly done by faith we are eased of many tossings of mind, and agitations of soul that would otherwise distress us. So here, Abraham committed the event unto God, reckoning on His power to raise Isaac again, though he should be killed. This is the very nature of spiritual faith: to refer our case unto Him, and wait calmly and expectantly for the promised deliverance, though we can neither perceive nor imagine the manner in which it shall be brought about. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He *shall* bring to pass” (Psa. 37:5).

O how little faith is in exercise among the professing people of God today. Occupied almost wholly with the rising tide of evil in the world, with the rapid spread of Romanism, with the apostasy of Protestantism, the vast majority of those now bearing the name of Christ conclude that we are facing a hopeless situation. Such people seem to be ignorant of the history of the past. Both in Old Testament times and at different periods of this dispensation, things have been far worse than they now are. Moreover, such trembling pessimists *leave out God*: is not HE “able” to cope with the present situation? A hesitating “Yes” may be given, at once nullified by the query, “But where is the promise that He *will* do so?” Where? Why in Isaiah 59:19, “When the enemy shall come in like a flood (has he not already done so!), the Spirit of the Lord *shall* lift up a standard against him”-but who *believes* it?!

Ah, my Christian reader, ponder thoughtfully that blessed affirmation of Him that cannot lie, and then bow the head in shame for thine *unbelief*. Every thing in the world may seem to lie dead against the fulfillment of many a Divine promise, yet no matter how dark and dreadful the outlook appears, the Church of God on earth today is not facing nearly so critical and desperate a situation as did the father of the faithful when he had his knife at the breast of him on whose one life the accomplishment of *all* the promises did depend. Yet he rested in the faithfulness and power of God to secure His own veracity; and so may we do also at this present juncture. He who responded to the faith of sorely tried Abraham, to the faith of Moses when Israel stood before the Red Sea, to the three Hebrews when cast in Babylon’s furnace, *will* to ours, if we *really* trust Him. Forsake then your newspapers, brethren, get ye to your knees, and pray expectantly for a fresh outpouring of the Holy spirit. Man’s extremity is always God’s opportunity.

“Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.” This supplies an interesting sidelight on the spiritual intelligence of the patriarchs. The Old Testament saints were very far from being as ignorant as some of our superficial moderns suppose. Erroneous conclusions have often been drawn from the silence of Genesis on various matters: the later books of Scripture frequently supplement the concise accounts supplied in the earlier ones. Rightly did J. Owen point out, “Abraham firmly believed, not only in the immortality of the souls of men, but also the resurrection from the dead. Had he not done so, he could not have betaken himself unto this relief in his distress. Other things he might have thought of, wherein God might have exercised His power; but he could not believe that He would do it, in that which itself was not believed by him.”

Some, perhaps, may think that Owen drew too much upon his imagination, that he read into Hebrews 11:19 what is not really there. If so, they are mistaken. There is one clear statement in Genesis 22, which, though not quoted by the eminent Puritan, fully establishes his assertion: there we are told that the patriarch said unto his young men, “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, *and come again to you*” (v. 5). This is exceedingly blessed. It shows us that Abraham was not occupied with his faith, his obedience, or with anything in himself, but solely with the living God: the “worship” of Him filled his heart and engaged all his thoughts. The added words “and come again to you” make it unmistakably plain that Abraham confidently expected Jehovah to raise again from the dead the one he was about to sacrifice unto Him as a burnt offering. A wonderful triumph of faith was this: recorded for the praise of the glory of God’s grace, and for our instruction.

O my dear brethren and sisters in Christ, we want you to do something more than read through this book: we long for you to *meditate* upon this blessed sequel to Abraham’s sore trial. He was tested as none other ever was, and grand was the outcome; but between that testing and its happy issue there was the exercise of faith, the counting upon God to interpose on his behalf, the trusting in His all-sufficient power. And God did not fail him: though He tried his faith to the limit, yet in the nick of time the Lord intervened. This is recorded for our encouragement, especially for those who are now passing through a fiery furnace. He who can *deliver from death*, what cannot He do! Say then with one of old, “Neither is there any Rock (to stay ourselves upon) like our God” (1 Sam. 2:2): Hannah had found a mighty support to her faith in the power of God.

“By faith Abraham . . . offered up Isaac . . . accounting that God was able to raise him up.” Faith, then, *expects* a recompense from God. Faith knows that it is a saving bargain to lose things for Christ’s sake. Faith looks for a restitution of comforts again, either in kind or in value: “There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, . . . for My sake and the Gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren . . . and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29, 30)-that is, either actually so, or an abundant equivalent. When one of the kings of Israel was bidden by the Lord to dismiss the army he had hired, he was troubled, and asked, “What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel” (2 Chron. 25:9); whereupon the prophet replied, “the Lord is able to give thee

much more than this"! When a man, through faithfulness to Christ, is exposed unto the frowns of the world, and his family faces starvation, let him know that God *will* undertake for him. The Lord will be no man's Debtor.

"From whence also he received him in a figure" (Heb. 11:19). Abraham had, as to his purpose, sacrificed Isaac, so that he considered him as dead; and he (thus) received him back from the dead-not really, but in a manner bearing likeness to such a miracle. This illustrates and demonstrates the truth of what has just been said above. God returns again to us what we offer to Him: "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). "That which he hath given will He pay him again" (Prov. 19:17), for He will not be beholden to any of His creatures. Hannah gave up Samuel to the Lord, and she had many more children in return (1 Sam. 2:20, 21). How great, then, is the folly of those who withhold from God anything which He asks of them: how they forsake their own mercies, stand in their own light, and hinder their own good.

"From whence also he received him in a figure." Here is the grand outcome of the patriarch's faith. First, the trial was withdrawn, Isaac was spared: the speediest way to end a trial is to be completely resigned to it; if we would save our life, we must lose it. Second, he had the expressed approval of the Lord, "now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen. 22:12): he whose conscience is clear before God enjoys great peace. Third, he had a clearer view of Christ than he had before: "Abraham saw My day" said the Saviour-the closer we keep to the path of obedience the more real and precious will Christ be unto us. Fourth, he obtained a fuller revelation of God's name: he called Him "Jehovah-Jireh" (Gen. 22:14): the more we stand the test of trial the better instructed shall we be in the things of God. Fifth, the covenant was confirmed to him (Gen. 22:16, 17): the quickest road to full assurance is full obedience.

CHAPTER 12

The Faith of Isaac

(Heb. 11:20)

Though Isaac lived the longest of the four great patriarchs, yet less is recorded about him than any of the others: some twelve chapters are devoted to the biography of Abraham, and a similar number each to Jacob and Joseph, but excepting for one or two brief mentionings before and after, the history of Isaac is condensed into two chapters, Genesis 26 and 27. Contrasting his character with those of his father and of his son, we may assume that there is noted less of Abraham's triumphs of faith, and less of Jacob's failures. Taking it on the whole, the life of Isaac is a disappointing one: it begins brightly, but ends amid the shadows-like that of so many, it failed to fulfill its early promise.

The one act in Isaac's life which the Holy Spirit selected for mention in the Scroll of Faith takes us back to Genesis 27, where, as the Puritan Owen well said, "There is none (other story) in the Scripture filled with more intricacies and difficulties as unto a right judgment of the things related, though the matter of fact be clearly and distinctly set down. The whole represents unto us Divine sovereignty, wisdom and faithfulness, working effectually through the frailties, infirmities and sins of all the persons concerned in the matter."

Genesis 27 opens by presenting unto us Isaac in his old age, and declares that "his eyes were dim, so that he could not see" (v. 1). It ought not to need saying that we have there something more than a mere reference to the state of his physical eyes, yet in these days when so many glory in their understanding the Word "literally," God's servants need to dwell upon the most elementary spiritual truths. Everything in Holy Writ has a deeper significance than the "literal," and we are greatly the losers when we limit ourselves to the "letter" of any verse. Let us contrast this statement concerning Isaac's defective vision with what is recorded of another servant of God at the same advanced age: "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: *his eye was not dim*" (Deut. 34:7).

Genesis 27 shows us the low state into which a child of God may get. Isaac presents unto us a solemn warning of the evil consequences which follow failure to judge and refuse our natural appetites. If we do not mortify our members which are upon the earth, if we do not abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, then the fine edge of our spiritual life will be blunted, and the fine gold will become dim. If we live to eat, instead of eating to live, our spiritual vision is bound to be defective. Discernment is a by-product, the fruit and result of the denying of self, and following of Christ (John 8:12). It was this self-abnegation which was so conspicuous in Moses: he learned to refuse that which appealed to the flesh-a position of honour as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; that is why *his* "eye was not dim." He saw that the brick-making Hebrews were the people of God, the objects of His sovereign favour, and following his spiritual promptings, threw in his lot with them.

How different was the case with poor Isaac! Instead of keeping his body in subjection, he indulged it. More than a hint of this is given in Genesis 25:28, "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison": this brought him under the influence of one who could be of no help to him spiritually, and he loved him because he ministered unto his fleshly appetites. And now in Genesis 27, when he thought that the end of his days was near, and he desired to bestow the patriarchal blessing upon his son, instead of giving himself to fasting and prayer, and then acting in accord with the revealed will of God, we are told that he called for Esau, and said, "Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die" (Gen. 27:3, 4). This is what furnishes the key to the immediate sequel.

"And the LORD said unto her (viz., Rebekah), 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" (Gen. 25:23). This is the Scripture which supplies the second key to the whole incident recorded in Genesis 27 and opens for us Hebrews 11:20. Here we find God making known the destiny of Jacob and Esau: observe that this revelation was made unto the mother (who had "inquired of the Lord": Gen. 25:22), and not to their father. That, later on, Isaac himself became acquainted with its terms, is clear, but as to how far he really apprehended their meaning, is not easy to say.

The word that the Lord had spoken unto her, Rebekah believed; yet she failed to exercise full confidence in Him. When she saw Isaac's marked partiality for Esau, and learned that her husband was about to perform the last religious act of a patriarchal priest and pronounce blessing on his sons, she became fearful. When she heard Isaac bid Esau make him some "savoury meat"-evidently desiring to enkindle or intensify his affections for Esau, so that he might bless him with all his heart-she imagined that the purpose of God was about to be thwarted, and resorted unto measures which ill become a daughter of Jehovah, and which can by no means be justified. We will not dwell upon the deception which she prompted Jacob to adopt, but would point out that it supplies a solemn example of real faith being resolutely fixed on the Divine promises, but employing irregular ways and wrong means for the obtaining of them.

In what follows we see how Isaac was deceived by Jacob posing as Esau. Though uneasy and suspicious at first, his fears were largely allayed by Jacob's lies: though perceiving the voice was that of the younger son, yet his hands appeared to be those of the elder. Pathetic indeed is it to see the aged patriarch reduced unto the sense of touch in his efforts to identify the one who had now brought him the longed-for venison. It is *this* which should speak loudly to our hearts: he who yields to the lusts of the flesh injures his spiritual instincts, and opens wide the door for the Devil to impose upon him and deceive him with his lies! He who allows natural sentiments and affections to override the requirements of God's revealed will is reduced to a humiliated state in the end. How often it proves that a man's spiritual foes are they of his own household! Isaac loved Esau unwisely.

But now we must face a difficult question: Did Isaac deliberately pit himself against the known counsel of God? Did he defiantly purpose to bestow upon Esau what he was assured the Lord had appointed for Jacob? "Whatever may be spoken in excuse of Isaac, it is certain he failed greatly in two things: First, in his inordinate love to Esau (whom he could not but know to be a profane person), and that on so slight an account as eating of his venison: Genesis 25:28. Second, in that he had not sufficiently enquired into the mind of God, in the oracle that his wife received concerning their sons. There is no question on the one hand, but that he knew of it; nor on the other, that he did not understand it. For if the holy man had known that it was the determinate will of God, he would not have contradicted it. But this arose from want of diligent enquiry by prayer into the mind of God" (John Owen).

We heartily agree with these remarks of the eminent Puritan. While the conduct of Isaac on this occasion was far from becoming a child of God who concluded his earthly pilgrimage was now nearly complete, yet charity forbids us to put the worst possible construction upon his action. While his affection for Esau was misplaced, yet, in the absence of any clear Scriptural proof, we are not warranted in thinking that he sinned presumptuously, by deliberately resisting the revealed will of God; rather must we conclude that he had no clear understanding of the Divine oracle given to Rebekah-his spiritual discernment was dim, as well as his physical vision! As to the unworthy part played by Rebekah and Jacob, their efforts are to be regarded not so much as the feverish energies of the flesh, seeking to force the fulfillment of God's promise, but as well-meant but misguided intentions to *prevent* the thwarting of God's purpose. Their fears remind us of Uzzah's in 2 Samuel 6:6.

The one bright spot in the somber picture which the Holy Spirit has so faithfully painted for us in Genesis 27 is found in verse 33. Right after Isaac had pronounced the major blessing on Jacob, Esau entered the tent, bringing with him the savoury meat which he had prepared for his father. Isaac now realized the deception which had been played upon him, and we are told that he "trembled very exceedingly." Was he shaking with rage at Jacob's treachery? No indeed. Was he, as one commentator has suggested, fearful that he might suffer injury at the hands of the hot-headed Esau? No, his next

words explode such a theory. Rather was it he now realized that he had been out of harmony with the Divine will, and that God had providentially intervened to effect His own counsels. He was awed to the very depths of his soul.

Blessed indeed is it to behold how the spirit triumphed over the flesh. Instead of bursting out with an angry curse upon the head of Jacob, Isaac said, "I have blessed him, yea, and he *shall be* blessed." That was the language of faith overcoming his natural partiality for Esau. It was the recognizing and acknowledging of the immutability and invincibility of the Divine decrees. He realized that God is in one mind, and none can turn Him: that though there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand (Prov. 19:21). Nor could the tears of Esau move the patriarch. Now that the entrance of God's words had given him light, now that the overruling hand of God had secured His own appointment, Isaac was firm as a rock. The righteous may fall, but they cannot be utterly cast down.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. 11:20). Jacob, the younger, had the precedence and principal blessing. Strikingly did this exemplify the high sovereignty of God. To take the younger, and leave the elder to perish in their ways, is a course the Lord has often followed, from the beginning of the world. Abel, the junior, was preferred before Cain. Shem was given the precedence over Japheth the elder (Gen. 10:21). Afterwards, Abraham, the younger, was taken to be God's favourite. Of Abraham's two sons, the older one, Ishmael, was passed by, and in Isaac was the Seed called. Later, David, who was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, was selected to be the man after God's own heart. And God still writes, as with a sunbeam in the course of His providence, that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

The "blessing" which Isaac pronounced upon Jacob was vastly superior to the portion allotted Esau, though if we look no deeper than the letter of the words which their father used, there appears to be very little difference between them. Unto Jacob Isaac said, "God give thee of the dew of Heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine" (Gen. 27:28); what follows in verse 29 chiefly concerned his posterity. Unto Esau Isaac said, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of Heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother" (Gen. 27:39, 40). Apart from the younger son having the pre-eminence over the elder, wherein lay the peculiar excellence of his portion? If there had been nothing *spiritual* in the promise, it would have been no comfort to Jacob at all, for the temporal things mentioned were not his portion: as he acknowledged to Pharaoh, "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been" (Gen. 47:9).

What has just been before us supplies a notable example of how the Old Testament promises and prophecies are to be interpreted; not carnally, but mystically. That Jacob's portion far excelled Esau's, is clear from Hebrews 12:17, where it is denominated, "*the* blessing." What that is was made clearer when Isaac *repeated* his benediction upon Jacob, saying, "And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed" (Gen. 28:4). Here is the key which we need to unlock its meaning; as Galatians 3:9, 14, 29 clearly enough show, the "blessing of Abraham" (into which elect Gentiles enter, through Christ) is purely a spiritual thing. Further proof that the same spiritual blessing which God promised to Abraham was also made over by Isaac to Jacob, is found in his words, "I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed" (Gen. 27:33), for Jehovah had employed the same language when blessing the father of all believers: "in blessing I will bless thee" (Gen. 22:17). To this may be added Isaac's "Cursed be everyone that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (Gen. 27:29), being part of the very words God used to Abraham, see Genesis 12:2, 3.

Now in seeking to rightly understand the language of Isaac's prophecy, it must be recognized that (oftentimes) in the Old Testament heavenly things were referred to in earthly terms, that spiritual blessings were set forth under the figure of material things. Due attention to this fact will render luminous many a passage. Such is the case here: under the emblems of the "dew of Heaven and the fatness of the earth," three great spiritual blessings were intended. First, that he was to have a real relation to Christ, that he should be one of the progenitors of the Messiah-this was the chief favour and dignity bestowed upon "Abraham." It is in the light of this that we are to understand Genesis 27:29 as ultimately referring: "let the people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee," that is, to the top branch which should proceed from him-unto Christ, unto whom all men are commanded to render allegiance (Psa. 2:10-12).

Second, the next great blessing of "Abraham" was that he should be the priest that should continue the worship of God and teach the laws of God (Gen. 26:5). The bowing down of his brethren to Jacob (Gen. 27:29), was the owning of his priestly dignity. Herein also lay Jacob's blessing: to be in the church, and to have the church continued in his line. This was symbolically pointed to in "that thou mayest inherit the land" (Gen. 28:4). "The church is the ark of Noah, which is only preserved in the midst of floods and deep waters. The church is the land of Goshen, which only enjoys the benefits of light, when there is nothing but darkness round about elsewhere. It is the fleece of Gideon, being wet with the dews of Heaven, moistened with the influences of grace, when all the ground round about is dry" (T. Manton). As to how high is the honour of having the church continued in our line, the Spirit intimates in Genesis 10:21-Eber being the father of the Hebrews, who worshipped God.

Third, another privilege of Jacob above Esau was this, that he was taken into covenant with God: “the blessing of Abraham shall come upon thee.” And what was that? This, “And I will be a God *unto thee*, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). This is the greatest happiness of any people, to have God for *their* God-to be in covenant with Him. Thus when Noah came to pronounce blessings and curses on his children, by the spirit of prophecy, he said, “Blessed be the LORD God of Shem” (Gen. 9:26). Afterward the same promise was made unto all Israel: “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exo. 20:2). So under the new covenant (the present administration of the Everlasting Covenant), he says, “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people” (Heb. 8:10). To be a “God” to any, is to supply them with all good things, necessary for temporal or spiritual life.

The fulfillment of Isaac’s prophetic blessing upon his sons was mainly in their descendants, rather than in their own persons: Jacob’s spiritual children, Esau’s natural. Concerning the latter, we would note two details. First, Isaac said to him, “thou shalt serve thy brother”; second, “and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck” (Gen. 27:40). For long centuries there seemed no likelihood of the first part of this prediction being fulfilled, but eight hundred years later, David said, “over Edom will I cast out my shoe” (Psa. 60:8), which meant he would bring the haughty descendants of Esau into a low and base state of subjection to him; which was duly accomplished-“all they of Edom became David’s *servants*” (2 Sam. 8:14)! Though their subjugation continued for a lengthy period of time, yet, in the days of Jehoshaphat, we read, “In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves” (2 Kings 8:20)!

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (Heb. 11:20). This “blessing” was more than a dying father expressing good-will unto his sons: it was extraordinary: Isaac spoke as a prophet of God, announcing the future of his posterity, and the varied portions each should receive. As the mouthpiece of Jehovah, he did, by the spirit of prophecy, announce beforehand what should be the particular estate of each of his two sons; and so his words have been fulfilled. Though parents today are not thus supernaturally endowed to foretell the future of their children, nevertheless, it is their duty and privilege to search the Scriptures and ascertain what promises God has left to the righteous *and to their seed*, and plead them before Him.

But seeing Isaac thus spake by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, how can it be said that “by faith” he blessed his sons? This brings in the human side, and shows how he discharged his responsibility. He gathered together and rested upon the promises which God had made to him, both directly, and through Abraham and Rebekah. The principle ones we have already considered. He had been present when the Lord said unto his father what is found in Genesis 22:16-18, and he had himself been made the recipient of the Divine promises recorded in Genesis 26:2-4. And now, many years later, we find his heart resting upon what he had heard from God, firmly embracing His promises, and with unshaken confidence announcing the future estates of his distant posterity.

That Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau “concerning things to come,” gives us a striking example of what is said in the opening verse of Hebrews 11. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” “Abraham was now dead, and Isaac was expecting soon to be buried in the grave he had purchased in the Land given to him and his seed. There was nothing to be seen for faith to rest on; nothing that gave the smallest ground for hope; nothing to make it even probable (apart from what he had heard and believed) that his descendants, either Jacob or Esau, would ever possess the land which had been promised to them” (E.W.B.). There was no human probability at the time Isaac spake which could have been the basis of his calculations: all that he said issued from implicit faith in the bare Word of God.

This is the great practical lesson for us to learn here: the strength of Isaac’s faith should stir us up to cry unto God for an increased measure thereof. With most precious confidence Isaac disposed of Canaan as if he already had the peaceable possession of it. Yet, in fact, he owned not an acre of that Land, and had no human right to anything there save a burying-place. Moreover, at the time he prophesied there was a famine in Canaan, and he was in exile in Gerah, “Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee” (Gen. 27:29), would, to one that viewed only the outward case of Isaac, seem like empty words. Ah, my brethren, we too ought to be as certain of the blessings to come, which God has promised, as if they were present, even though we see no apparent likelihood of them.

It may be objected against what has been said above, that, from the account which is supplied in Genesis 27, Isaac “blessed” Jacob in ignorance rather than “by faith.” To this it may be replied, first, the object of faith is always God Himself, and the ground on which it rests is His revealed will. So in Isaac’s case, his faith was fixed upon the covenant God and was exercised upon His sure Word, and this was by no means negated by his mistaking Jacob for Esau. Second, it illustrates the fact that the faith of God’s people is usually accompanied by some infirmity: in Isaac’s case, his partiality for Esau. Third, after he discovered the deception which had been played upon him, he made no effort to recall the blessing pronounced upon the disguised Jacob-sweetly acquiescing unto the Divine Sovereignty-but confirming it; and though with tears Esau sought to change his mind, he could not.

Here too we behold the strength of Isaac's faith: as soon as he perceived the providential hand of God crossing his natural affection, instead of murmuring and rebelling, he yielded and submitted to the Lord. This is ever the work of true faith: it makes the soul yield to God's will against our fleshly inclinations, as also against the bent of our own reason. Faith knows that God is so great, so powerful, so glorious, that His commands must be obeyed. As it was with Abraham, so in the case of Isaac: faith viewed the precepts as well as the promise; it moves us to tread the path of obedience. May our faith be more and more evidenced by walking in those good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

CHAPTER 13

The Faith of Jacob

(Heb. 11:21)

It has been well said that "Though the grace of faith is of universal use throughout our whole lives, yet it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its great work to do at the last, to help believers to finish well, to die to the Lord, so as to honour Him, by patience, hope and joy, so as to leave a witness behind them of the truth of God's Word and the excellency of His ways, for the conviction and establishment of all that attend them in their dying moments" (Matt. Henry). God is greatly glorified when His people leave this world with their flag flying at full mast: when the spirit triumphs over the flesh, when the world is consciously and gladly left behind for Heaven. For this *faith* must be in exercise.

It is not without good reason, we may be sure, that in the description which the Holy Spirit has given us of the life of faith in Hebrews 11, He has furnished us with no less than three examples-and these in successive verses-of the actings of faith in the final crisis and conflict. We believe that, among other reasons, God would hereby assure His trembling and doubting children, that He who has begun a good work in them, will most certainly sustain and complete the same; that He who has in His sovereignty committed this precious grace to their hearts, will not suffer it to languish when its support is most sorely needed; that He who has enabled His people to exercise faith during the vigor of life, will not withdraw His quickening power during the weakness of death.

As the writer grows older, he is saddened by discovering how very little is now being given out, either orally or in written ministry, for the instruction and comfort of God's people concerning the dying of Christians. The Devil is not inactive in seeking to strike terror into the hearts of God's people, and knowing this, it is the bounden duty of Christ's servants to expose the groundlessness and hollowness of Satan's lies. Not a few have been deterred from so doing by heeding the mistaken notion that, for a Christian to think of and prepare for death is dishonouring to Christ, and inconsistent with the "imminence" of His coming. But such a notion is refuted in our present passage. Let it be carefully considered that, when in Hebrews 12:1 the Holy Spirit bids *us* "run with patience the race that is set before us," He bases that exhortation on the fact that we are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," the reference being unto the men of God who are before in Hebrews 11, who all "*died in faith*" (v. 13).

A God-given and God-sustained faith is not only sufficient to enable the feeblest saint to overcome the solicitations of the flesh, the attractions of the world, and the temptations of Satan, but it is also able to give him a triumphant passage through death. This is one of the prominent things set forth in this wondrous and blessed chapter. In Hebrews 11 the Holy Spirit has set out at length the works, the achievements, the fruits, the glories of faith, and not the least of them is its power to support the soul, comfort the heart, illuminate the understanding, and direct the will, in the last earthly struggle. While Hebrews 11:20, 21 and 22 have this in common, yet each contributes its own distinctive feature. In the case of Isaac, we see a dying faith triumphing over the affections of the flesh; in the case of Jacob, dying faith overcoming the interference of man; and in Joseph, scorning the worthless pageantry of the world.

Of old Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. 23:10): well might he wish to do so. The writer has not a shadow of a doubt that every Christian who has, in the main current of his life, walked with God, his last hours on earth (normally speaking, for we consider not here the exceptional cases of those taken Home suddenly) are the brightest and most blissful of all. Proverbs 4:18, of itself, is fully sufficient to warrant this thought. The Christian is not always permitted to bear testimony of this so as to be intelligent unto those surrounding him, but even though his poor body be convulsed with pain, and physical unconsciousness set in, yet the soul cutting

adrift from its earthly moorings, is then blest with a sight and sense of his precious Redeemer such as he never had before (Acts 7:55).

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psa. 37:37). A peaceful death has concluded the troublous life of many a good man. As the late C. H. Spurgeon said on this verse, “With believers it may rain in the morning, thunder at midday, and pour torrents in the afternoon, but it must clear up ere the sun go down.” Most aptly do his words apply to the case of Jacob. A stormy passage indeed was his, but the waters were smooth as he entered the port. Cloudy and dark were many of the hours of his life, but the sunset bathed it with radiant splendor at its close.

“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying” (Heb. 11:21). Ah, but to “die” by faith, we must needs *live* by faith. And a life of faith is not like the shining of the sun on a calm and clear day, its rays meeting with no resistance from the atmosphere; rather is it more like the sun rising upon a foggy morning, its rays struggling to pierce through and dispel the opposing mists. Jacob walked by faith, but the exercise thereof encountered many a struggle, and had to fight hard for each victory. In spite of all his faults and failings (and each of us is just as full of the same), Jacob dearly prized his interest in the Everlasting Covenant, trusted in God, and highly esteemed His promises. It is a very faulty and one-sided estimate of his character which fails to take these things into account. The old nature was strong within him; yes, and so too was the new.

Though his infirmities led Jacob to employ unlawful means for the procuring of it, yet his heart *valued* the “birthright,” which profane Esau despised (Gen. 25). Though he yielded unto the foolish suggestions of his mother to deceive Isaac, yet his faith covetly eyed the promises of God. Though there may have been a measure of fleshly bargaining in his vow, yet Jacob was anxious for the Lord to be his God (Gen. 28:21). Though he stole away from Laban in fear, when his father-in-law overtook him, he glorified God in the tribute he paid Him (Gen. 31:54). Though he was terrified at Esau, nevertheless he sought unto the Lord, pleaded His promises (Gen. 32:12), and obtained an answer of peace. Though later he groveled at the feet of his brother, in the sequel we find him prevailing with God (Gen. 32:28). Equally with Abraham and Isaac, “by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents” (Heb. 11:9).

But it was during the closing days of his life that Jacob’s faith shone most brightly. When giving permission for Benjamin to accompany his other sons on their second trip to Egypt, he said, “God Almighty (or “God the Sufficient One”) give you mercy before the man” (Gen. 43:14). This was the title under which the Lord had blessed Abraham (Gen. 17:1), as it was also the one Isaac employed when he blessed Jacob (Gen. 28:3): thus in using it here, we see how Jacob rested on the covenant promise. Arriving in Egypt, the aged patriarch was presented unto its mighty monarch. Blessed is it to see how he conducted himself: instead of cringing before the ruler of the greatest empire of the old world, we are told that “Jacob blessed Pharaoh” (Gen. 47:7); with becoming dignity he conducted himself as a child of the King of kings (Heb. 7:7), and carried himself as became an ambassador of the Most High.

“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph.” This takes us back to what is recorded in Genesis 48. What is found there is quite distinct from what is said in the next chapter, where Jacob is seen as God’s prophet announcing the future of all his twelve sons. But here he is concerned only with Joseph and his two sons. Before considering the particular detail which our text treats of, let us note the sentence which immediately precedes it. “And he blessed Joseph” (48:15): in this we may admire the overruling hand of God, and also find here the key to what follows.

In Deuteronomy 21:17 we read, “But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength: the right of the firstborn is his.” It was the right of the firstborn to have a double portion, and this is exactly what we find Jacob bestowing upon Joseph, for both Ephraim and Manasseh were allotted a distinct tribal part and place in the promised inheritance. This, by right, belonged unto Joseph, though the Devil had tried to cheat him out of it, using Laban to deceive Jacob by substituting Leah in Rebekah’s place, and Joseph was *her* firstborn; and now by the providence of God the primogeniture is restored to him. So too God permitted Reuben to sin so that the way might be open for this: “Now the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph)” (1 Chron. 5:1).

Earlier in this interview, Jacob had said, “And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, *are mine*” (Gen. 48:5). Those two sons of Joseph had been borne to him by an Egyptian wife, and in a foreign land, but now they were to be adopted and incorporated into the body of the holy seed. For note, when Jacob blessed them he said, “The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac” (v. 16). By that blessing he sought to draw their hearts away from Egypt and their kinfolk there, that they might be annexed to the Church and share with the people of God.

“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph.” In this case the Revised Version is more accurate: “blessed *each* of the sons of Joseph,” for their blessing was not collective, but a distinctive and discriminating one. In fact the leading feature of the dying Jacob’s faith is most particularly to be seen at this very point. When Joseph brought his two sons before their grandfather to receive his patriarchal blessing, he placed Manasseh the elder, to his right hand, and Ephraim the younger to his left. His object in this was that Manasseh might receive the first and superior portion. Right there it was that the faith of Jacob was most tested. At this time Joseph was governor over all Egypt, and second only to Pharaoh himself in authority and power; moreover he was Jacob’s favorite son, yet the dying patriarch had now to withstand him.

“And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn” (Gen. 48:14). Herein we behold *the manner* in which the blessing was bestowed. Once more the younger, by the appointment of God, was preferred before the elder, for the Lord distributes His favors as He pleases, saying “Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?” (Matt. 20:15). Unto the high sovereignty of God Jacob here submissively bowed. It was not a thing of chance that he crossed his hands, for the Hebrew of “guiding his hands wittingly” is “made his hands to understand.” It was the understanding of faith, for his physical eyes were too dim to see what he was doing—true faith is ever opposed to sight!

“And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk” (Gen. 48:15). Very blessed is this. Despite his physical decay, there was no abatement of his spiritual strength: notwithstanding the weakness of old age, he abode firm in faith and in the vigorous exercise of it. Here in the verse before us, we behold Jacob recognizing and asserting the covenant which Jehovah had made with his fathers. This is the very life of faith: to lay hold of, draw strength from, and walk in the light of the Everlasting Covenant, for it is the foundation of all our blessings, the charter of our inheritance, the guaranty of our eternal Glory and bliss. He who keeps it in view will have a happy deathbed, a peaceful end, and a God-honouring exit from this world of sin and suffering.

“The God which fed me all my life long unto this day” (Gen. 48:15). As Jacob had made a solemn acknowledgment of the spiritual blessings which he had received by virtue of the Everlasting Covenant, so he also owned the temporal mercies of which he had been the favored recipient. “It was a work of faith to retain a precious thankful remembrance of Divine providence in a constant provision of all needful temporal supplies, from first to last, during the whole course of his life” (John Owen). As it is an act of faith to cordially consent unto the dealings of God with us in a providential way, so it is a fruit of faith to make a confession by the mouth concerning Him. Note: God is honoured before those attending him when a dying saint bears testimony unto His faithfulness in having supplied all his need.

“The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Gen. 48:16). “He reflects on all the hazards, trials and evils that befell him, and the exercise of his faith in them all. Now all his dangers were past, all his evils conquered, all his fears removed, he retains by faith a sense of the goodness and kindness of God in rescuing him out of them all” (John Owen). “Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee” (Deut. 8:2): as the children of Israel were called upon to do this at the close of their wilderness journey, so we cannot be more profitably employed in the closing hours of our earthly pilgrimage than by recalling and reviewing that grace which delivered us from so many dangers known and unknown.

“And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:16). Jacob was not ambitious for a continuance of their present greatness in Egypt, but desired for them the blessings of the covenant. Joseph could have left to his sons a rich patrimony in Egypt, but he brought them to Jacob to receive his benediction. Ah, the baubles of this world are nothing in comparison with the blessings of Zion: see Psalm 128:5; 134:3; 133:3. The spiritual blessings of the Redeemer far exceed in value the temporal mercies of the Creator: it was the former which Joseph coveted for his sons, and which Jacob now prophetically bestowed.

“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 (Gen. 48:17, 18). Here we see the will of man asserting itself, which, when left to itself, is ever opposed to God. Joseph had *his* wishes concerning the matter, and did not hesitate to express them; though, be it noted unto his credit, he meekly acquiesced at the finish.

“And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it” (Gen. 48:19). It was at *this* point that Jacob’s faith shone most brightly; the repeated “I *know* it” marks the great strength of his faith. He had “heard” from God (Rom. 10:17), he believed God, he submitted to God. Jacob was no more to be influenced by “the will of man” here, than in the preceding verse Joseph was by “the will of the flesh”: faith overcame both. Learn, my reader, that sometimes faith has to cross the wish and will of a loved one!

Plainly it was “by faith” that the dying Israel blessed each of the sons of Joseph. Certainly it was not by sight. “To ‘sight’ what could be more unlikely than that these two young Egyptian princes, for such they were, should ever forsake Egypt, the land of their birth, and migrate into Canaan? What more improbable than that they should ‘each’ become a separate tribe? What more unlooked for, than that, of these two, the younger should be exalted above the elder, both in importance and number?” (E.W.B.)

“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” (Gen. 48:19). Not only does God make a great difference between the elect and the reprobate, but He does not deal alike with His own children, neither in temporals nor spirituals. There are some of His favored people to whom God manifests Himself more familiarly, grants them more liberal supplies of His grace, and more plentiful comforts—there was a specially favored three among the twelve Apostles. Some Christians have more opportunities to glorify God than others, higher privileges of service, greater abilities and gifts—the “talents” were not distributed equally: one had five, another three, another one. But let us not murmur: all have more than they can improve.

“And worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff” (Heb. 11:21). There is some room for question as to what incident the Apostle is here referring to. Some think that (like Moses did “exceeding fear and quake”: Heb. 12:21) it is entirely a New Testament revelation; other (the writer included) regard it as alluding to what is recorded in Genesis 47:31. The only difficulty in connection with this view is, that here we read Jacob “worshipped upon the top of his staff,” there that “he bowed himself upon the bed’s head.” Concerning this variation we agree with Owen that “he did *both*, namely bow towards the head of the bed, and at the same time lean on his staff, as we are assured by comparing the Divine writers together.”

The occasion of Jacob’s “worship” was as follows: “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” (Gen. 47:29, 30). It was far more than a sentimental whim which moved the patriarch to desire that his body be interred in the holy land: it was the working of faith, a blessed exhibition of his confidence in God.

It was not the pomp and pageantry of his burial which concerned Jacob, but *the place* of it which he was so solicitous about. Not in Egypt among idolaters, must his bones be laid to rest, for with them he cared not to have any fellowship in life; and now he desired no proximity unto them in death—he would show that God’s people are a *separated* people. No, it was in the buryingplace of his fathers he wished to be laid. First, to show forth his union with Abraham and Isaac in the covenant. Second, to express his faith in the promises of God, which concerned Canaan, and not Egypt. Third, to draw off the minds of his descendants from a continuance in Egypt: setting before them an example that *they* should think of returning to the promised land at the proper time, and thereby confirming them in the belief of possessing it. Fourth, to signify he would go before them, and, as it were, take possession of the land on their behalf. Fifth, to intimate that Canaan was a type of Heaven, the “Better Country” (Heb. 11:16), the eternal Restingplace of all the people of God.

The asking of Joseph to place his hand under his thigh was a gesture in swearing (Gen. 24:2, 3), as the raising of the hand now is with us. It was not that Jacob doubted his son’s veracity, but it signified the eagerness of his entreaty, and the intensity of his mind about the matter: what an important thing it was to him. No doubt it was also designed to forestall any objection which Pharaoh might make after his death: see Genesis 50:5, 6. Jacob was in bed at the time, but gathering together his little remaining strength, he raised himself to sit upright, and then bowing his body, and so that it might be supported, he leaned upon his staff, worshipping God.

The Holy Spirit’s mention here of Jacob’s reverent gesture in worshipping God, intimates to us that it well becomes a worshipper of the Most High to manifest the inward devotion of the soul by a fitting posture of the body. God has redeemed both, and He is to be honoured by both: 1 Corinthians 6:20. Shall we serve God with that which costs us nothing? Sitting or lying at prayer savors more of sloth and carelessness, than of reverence and zeal. Carnal men, in pursuit of their fleshly lusts, can weary and waste the body; shall Christians shelter behind every inconvenience and excuse? Christ exposed His body to the utmost suffering, shall not His love constrain us to deny selfish ease and sloth!

Having secured the promise from Joseph that his will should be carried out, Jacob bowed before God in worship, for now he realized the Lord was making good the promise recorded in Genesis 46:4. In his great weakness he had bowed toward his bed’s head so as to adore God, completing now his representation of reverence and faith by leaning upon the top of his staff. In that emblematic action he signified his complete dependence upon God, testified to his condition as a pilgrim in the earth, and emphasized his weariness of the world and his readiness to part from it. He praised God for all He had done for him, and for the approaching prospect of everlasting bliss. Blessed is it to find that the Holy Spirit’s final word about Jacob in Scripture (Heb. 11:21) depicts him in the act of *worship*!

CHAPTER 14

The Faith of Joseph

(Heb. 11:22)

At the early age of seventeen Joseph was carried away into a foreign country, into a heathen land. There he remained for many years surrounded by idolaters, and during all that time he, probably, never came into contact with a single child of God. Moreover, in those days there was no Bible to read, for none of God's Word had then been committed to writing. Yet amid all sorts of temptations and trials, he remained true unto the Lord. Thirteen years in prison did not embitter him; being made lord over Egypt did not spoil him; evil examples all around did not corrupt him. O the mighty power of Divine grace to *preserve* its favoured objects. But let the reader carefully bear in mind that, in his earliest years, Joseph had received a godly training! O how this ought to encourage Christian parents: do your part in faithfully teaching the children, and with God's blessing, it will abide with them, even though they move into a foreign land.

It may strike some of our readers that the Apostle made a strange selection here from the remarkable history of Joseph. No reference is given unto his faithfulness to God in declaring what He had made known to him (Gen. 37:5), his chastity (Gen. 39:10), his patience under affliction (Psa. 105:18, 19), his wisdom and prudence (Gen. 39:22; 47:14), his fear of God (Gen. 42:18); his compassion (Gen. 42:24), his overcoming evil with good (Gen. 45:10), his reverence to his father, and that when he was advanced unto outward dignity above him (Gen. 48:12), his obedience to his father (Gen. 47:31); instead, the whole of his memorable life is passed over, and we are introduced to the final scene. But this seeming difficulty is at once removed if we bear in mind the Spirit's scope in this chapter, namely, to encourage the fearful and wavering Hebrews, by bringing before them striking examples of the efficacy and sufficiency of faith to carry its favoured possessor safely through every difficulty, and ultimately conduct him into the promised inheritance.

Not only was there a particular reason in the case of those who first received this Epistle, why the Holy Spirit should conduct them unto the expiring moments of Joseph, but there is also a wider purpose why (in this description of the whole Life of Faith) He should do so. Faith is a grace which honours God and stands its possessor in good stead, in death as well as in life. The worldling may appear to prosper, and his journey through life seem to be smooth and easy, but how does he fare in the supreme crisis? What support is there for his heart when God calls him to pass out of time into eternity? "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" (Job 27:8). Ignorance may exclude terror, and sottishness may still the conscience; but there can be no true peace, no firm confidence, no triumphant joy for those out of Christ. Only he can die worshipping and glorifying God for His promises who possesses genuine faith.

If the kind providence of God preserves his faculties unto the end, a Christian ought not to be passive in death, and die like a beast. No, this is the last time he can do anything for God on earth, and therefore he should take a fresh and firm hold of His Everlasting Covenant, "ordered in all things and sure," (2 Sam. 23:5) going over in his mind the amazing grace of the Triune God toward him; the Father, in having from the beginning, chosen him unto salvation; the Son for having obeyed, suffered and died in his room and stead; the Holy Spirit for having sought him out when dead in sins, quickened him into newness of life, shed abroad the love of God in his heart, and put a new song in his mouth. He should review the faithfulness and goodness of God toward him all through his pilgrimage. He should rest on the promises, and view the glorious future awaiting him. Thereby, praise and thanksgiving will fill his soul and mouth, and God will be greatly honoured before the onlookers.

When faith is active during the dying hours of a saint, not only is his own heart spiritually upheld and comforted, but God is honoured and others are confirmed. A carnal man cannot speak well of the world when he comes to pass through the dark valley; no, he dares not commend his worldly life to others. But a godly man can speak well of God, and commend His covenant to others. So it was with Jacob (Gen. 48:15, 16). So it was with Joshua: "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. 23:14).

So was it also with Joseph. He could have left to his sons nobility of blood, a rich patrimony in Egypt, but he brought them to his father to receive *his* blessing (Gen. 48:12). And what was that? To invest them with the right of entering into the visible privileges of the covenant. Ah, to Joseph, the riches of Egypt were nothing in comparison with the blessings of Zion. And so again now: when his hours on earth were numbered, Joseph thinks not of the temporal position of honour which he had occupied so long, but was engaged only with the things of God and the promised inheritance. See here the power of a godly example: Joseph had witnessed the last acts of his father, and now he follows in his steps. The good

examples of superiors and seniors are of great force unto those who look up to them-how careful they should be, then, of their conduct! Let us seek to emulate that which is praiseworthy in our betters: Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 13:7.

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (Heb. 11:22). First, let us observe *the time* when Joseph’s faith was here exercised. It was during his closing hours upon earth. Most of his long life had been spent in Egypt, and during its later stages, had been elevated unto a dizzy height; for as Acts 7:10 tells us, he was made “governor” or lord over Egypt, and over all Pharaoh’s house. But neither the honours nor the luxuries which Joseph received while in the land of exile, made that holy man forget the promises of God, nor bound his soul to the earth. His mind was engaged in higher things than the perishing baubles of this world. Learn then, my reader, it is only as our hearts ascend to Heaven that we are able to look down with contempt upon that which this world prizes so much.

From the case of Joseph we may see that earthly honour and wealth do not *in themselves* injure: where there is a gracious heart to manage them, they can be employed with advantage and used to God’s glory. Many examples may be cited in proof of this. God has ever had a few of His saints even in Caesar’s “household” (Phil. 4:22). Material things are God’s gifts, and so must be improved unto His praise. There is as much faith, yea more, in moderating the affections under a full estate, as there is in depending upon God for supplies when we have nothing. Nevertheless, to learn “*how to abound*” (Phil. 4:12) is a hard lesson. To keep the mind stayed upon God and the heart from settling down here, calls for much exercise of soul; therefore are we exhorted “if riches increase, set not your heart upon them” (Psa. 62:10)-but be thankful for them, and seek to use them unto God’s honour.

No, the poor do not have such temptations to overcome as do the rich. The poor are driven to depend upon God: they have no other alternative save abject despair. But there is more choice to those who have plenty: *their* great danger is to lose sight of the Giver and become immersed in His gifts. Not so with Joseph: to him Egypt was nothing in comparison with Canaan. Then let us seek grace to be of his spirit: true greatness of mind is to count the highest things of earth as nothing when weighed against the things of Heaven. It is a great mercy when the affluence of temporal things do not take the heart off the promises of God nor weaken faith in them, but for this there has to be a constant crying unto Him to quicken our spiritual sensibilities, keep us in close communion with Himself, wean us from things below.

But neither the riches nor the honours of Egypt could secure Joseph from death, nor did they make him unmindful or afraid of it. The time had arrived when he saw that his end was at hand, and he met it with a confident spirit. And thus it should be with us. But in order to do this we must be all our lifetime preparing for *that* hour. Reader, there can be no dissembling then. Allow me to ask: Is your soul truly yielded up to God? Do you hold this world with a light hand? Are God’s promises your daily food? Life is held by a very uncertain tenure. Unless the Lord returns first, death will be the last great enemy which you have to contend, and you will need to have on all your armour. If you have not on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation, what will you do in the swellings of the Jordan, when Satan is often permitted to make his fiercest attack?

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel.” Let us consider next *the strength* of his faith. It will be noted by the careful reader that the margin gives an alternative rendering, namely, “By faith Joseph, when he died, *remembered* the departing of the children of Israel”: the Greek will allow of either translation, and personally we believe that the *fullness* of the Spirit’s words requires that both meanings be kept before us. That which is in view here is very striking and blessed. The word “remembered” shows that Joseph’s mind was now engaged with the promise which the Lord had made to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15:14-16. The alternative translation he “*made mention of* the departing of the children of Israel,” signifies that Joseph testifies his own faith and hope in the sure words of the living God.

At the end of Joseph’s long and memorable career, his thoughts were occupied not so much with what God had wrought for him, but with what He had promised unto His people: in other words, he was dwelling not upon the past, but with that which was yet future. In his heart were the “things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1)! More than two hundred years had passed since Jehovah had spoken what is recorded in Genesis 15. Part of the prediction which He there made, had been fulfilled; but to carnal reason there seemed very little prospect that the remainder of it would come to pass. First, God had announced that the seed of Abraham should be “a stranger in a land that is not theirs” (Gen. 15:13), which had been confirmed when Jacob carried all his household down into Egypt. Second, God had declared the descendants of Abraham should “serve” the Egyptians and “they shall afflict them four hundred years” (15:13): but to outward sight, *that* now appeared most unlikely. The posterity of the patriarchs had been given favour in Pharaoh’s eyes (Gen. 45:16-18), the “best” of the land was set apart for their use (Gen. 47:6), there they multiplied exceedingly (Gen. 47:27), and so great was the respect of the Egyptians that they “mourned” for Jacob seventy days (Gen. 50:3). Joseph himself was their great benefactor and deliverer from the famine: why, then, should his descendants be hated and oppressed by them? Ah, faith does not reason, but *believes*.

Third, God had declared that He would judge the Egyptians for their afflicting of His people (Gen. 15:14), which was fulfilled in the awful plagues recorded in the early chapters of Exodus. Finally, God had promised “and afterward shall they come out with great substance . . . in the fourth generation they shall come (into Canaan) hither again” (15:14, 16). It was unto this that the heart of Joseph was now looking forward, and nothing but *real* spiritual faith could have counted upon the same. If, after his death, the Hebrews (without a leader) were to be sorely afflicted, and that for a *lengthy* season; if they were to be reduced unto helpless slaves, who could reasonably hope that all this should be followed by their leaving the land of Egypt with “great substance,” and returning to the land of Canaan? Ah, FAITH is fully assured that God’s promises *will be* fulfilled, no matter how long they may be delayed.

Faith is gifted with long-distant sight, and therefore is it able to look beyond all the hills and mountains of difficulty unto the shining horizon of the Divine promises. Consequently, faith is blessed with patience, and calmly awaits the destined hour for God to intervene and act: therefore does it heed that word, “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come,” (Hab. 2:3). Though the Hebrews were to lie under Egyptian bondage for a long season, Joseph had not a doubt but that the Lord would, in His appointed time, bring them forth with a high hand. God’s *delays*, dear reader, are not to deny our prayers and mock our hopes, but are for the disciplining of our hearts-to subdue our impatience, which wants things in our *own* way and time; to quicken us to call more earnestly upon Him, and to fit us for receiving His mercies when they are given.

God often defers His help until the very last moment. It was so with Abraham offering up Isaac; only when his son had been bound to the altar, and he had taken the knife into his hand to slay him, did God intervene. It was so with Israel at the Red Sea (Exo. 14:13). It was so with the disciples in the storm, “the ship was covered with the waves,” before Christ calmed the sea (Matt. 8:24-26). It was so with Peter in prison: only a very few hours before his execution did God free him (Acts 12:6-8). So, too, God works in mysterious ways *His* wonders to perform and often in a manner quite contrary to outward likelihood. The history of Joseph affords a striking example. He was first made a slave in Egypt, and this in order to his being made ruler over it—who would have thought that the prison was the way to the court! So it was with his descendants: when their tale of bricks was doubled and the straw withheld, who would have looked for deliverance! Yes, *God’s* ways are strange to flesh and blood: often He allows error to arise to clear the Truth: bondage often makes way for liberty; persecution and affliction have often proved blessings in disguise.

“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 swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Gen. 50:24). How plainly and how blessedly does this bring out the *strength* of Joseph’s faith! There was no hesitancy or doubt: he was fully assured that God cannot lie, and that He would, “*surely*” make good His word. Equally certain is it that God’s promises unto us will be fulfilled: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Therefore may the dying saint exclaim “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me” (Psa. 23:4). So too our faith may look beyond the grave unto the glorious resurrection, and say with David, “my flesh also shall rest *in hope*” (Psa. 16:9).

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel” (Heb. 11:22). Let us now take note of *the breadth* of his faith. A true Christian is known by his affection for Zion. The cause of Christ upon earth is *dearer* to him than the prosperity or disposition of his personal estate. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). Thus it was with Joseph; before he gave commandment concerning his bones, he was first concerned with the future exodus of Israel and their settlement in Canaan! How different with the empty professor, who is ruled by self-love, and has no heart for the people of God. He may be interested in the progress of *his own* denomination, but he has no concern for the Church at large. Far otherwise is it with the genuine saint: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Psa. 137:5, 6). So Joseph, at the very time of his death, was engaged with the future happiness of God’s people.

Beautiful indeed is it to see the dying Joseph unselfishly thinking about the welfare of others. O may God deliver the writer and reader from a narrow heart and a contracted spirit. True faith not only desires that it shall be well with our own soul, but with the Church at large. Behold another lovely example of this in the case of the dying daughter-in-law of Eli, the high priest: “And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken” (1 Sam. 4:22)—not my father-in-law is dead, not my husband has been slain, but “the glory is departed.” But most blessed of all is the case of Him of whom Joseph was here a type. As our precious Saviour drew near the Cross, yea, on the very night of His betrayal, it is recorded that “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). The interests of God’s people were ever upon His heart.

Let us note how another aspect of the *breadth* of true faith was illustrated by Joseph. Faith not only believes the promises which God has given to His saints individually, but also lays hold of those given to the Church collectively. There have been many seasons when the cause of Christ on earth has languished sorely; when it has been in a low state spiritually; when eminent leaders had been all called home, and when fierce persecution broke out against the little flock

which they had left behind. Even so, they still had that sure word, “Upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). In all ages the Enemy has sought to destroy the people of God, but the Lord has defeated his designs and rendered his opposition ineffectual. O for a faith to *now* lay hold of this promise, “When the Enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa. 59:19).

“And gave commandment concerning his bones.” The reference here is to what is recorded in Genesis 50:25, “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.” This brings out another characteristic of his faith: the *public avowal* of it. Joseph’s faith was no secret thing, hidden in his own heart, about which others knew nothing. No, though he had occupied for so long an eminent situation, he was not ashamed to now let others know that he found his support and confidence in the promises of God. He had been of great dignity and authority among the Egyptians, and his fame for wisdom and prudence was great among the nations. It was therefore the more necessary for him to *openly renounce* all alliance with them, lest posterity think he had become an Egyptian. Had he liked and loved the Egyptians, he had wanted his tomb among them; but his heart was elsewhere.

“And gave commandment concerning his bones.” This was not a superstitious request, as though it made any difference whether our bodies be deposited in “consecrated” ground or no. Rather it was, first, to exhibit his belief in the promises of Jehovah; though he could not go in person into the land of Canaan, yet he would have his bones carried thither, and thus symbolically (as it were) take possession of it. Second, to confirm the hope of his brethren, and thus draw their hearts from the goodly portion in Goshen. He would sharpen the desire of the Nation to earnestly aspire after the promised redemption when he was dead. Third, to establish a public memorial, by which, on all occasions, his posterity might call to mind the truth of the promise.

Proof that this dying request of Joseph’s was designed as a *public memorial* is found in noting a significant change between the wording of Genesis 50:24 and 50:25. In the former, Joseph “said unto his brethren”; in the latter, he “took an oath of the children of Israel” (cf. Exo. 13:19): by the heads of their tribes, he brought the whole people into this engagement-binding on after generations. Thus Joseph established this monument of his being of the favoured seed of Abraham. Joseph’s requesting his brethren to “take an oath” illustrates the power of example: cf. Genesis 47:31! He made reference to his “bones” rather than to his “body,” because he knew another two centuries must yet run their course. The whole transaction was an emblematic pledge of *the communion of saints*. Though the Christian at death be cut off from his loved ones on earth, he is introduced unto the spirits of the just in Heaven.

CHAPTER 15

The Faith of Moses’ Parents

(Heb. 11:23)

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents” (Heb. 11:23). A considerable length of time elapsed between what is recorded in the preceding verse and what is here before us. That interval is bridged by what is found in Exodus 1. There we see a marked revolution taking place in the lot of the Hebrews. In the days of Joseph, the Egyptians had been kind, giving them the land of Goshen to dwell in. Then followed another dynasty, and a king arose who “knew not Joseph”—probably a foreigner who had conquered Egypt. This new monarch was a tyrant of the worst kind, who sorely oppressed the descendants of Abraham. So subject to drastic changes are the fortunes both of individuals and nations: hence the force of those words, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him” (Eccl. 7:14).

The policy of the new ruler of Egypt quickly became apparent: “And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies” (Exo. 1:9, 10). Ah, but though “there are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD that shall stand” (Prov. 19:21). So it proved here, for “the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew” (Exo. 1:12). Yes, “the LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psa. 33:10, 11).

Next, the king of Egypt gave orders to the midwives that every male child of the Hebrews should be slain at birth (Exo. 1:15, 16). But all the laws which men may make against the promises that God has given to His Church are doomed

to certain failure. God had promised unto Abraham a numerous “seed” (Gen. 13:15), and had declared to Jacob, “fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation” (Gen. 46:3); as well, then, might Pharaoh attempt to stop the sun from shining as prevent the growth of the children of Israel. Therefore do we read, “But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive” (Exo. 1:17).

Refusing to accept defeat, “Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river” (Exo. 1:22). Now that the execution of this barbarous edict had been entrusted unto his own people, no doubt Pharaoh imagined that success was fully assured for his evil design: yet it was at this very season that God brought to the birth the one who was to emancipate his suffering nation. “How blind are poor sinful mortals, in all their contrivances against the Church of God. When they think all things secure, and that they shall not fail of their end, that their counsels are laid so deep as not to be blown upon, their power so uncontrollable and the way in which they are engaged so effectual, that God Himself can hardly deliver it out of their hands; He that sits on high laughs them to scorn, and with an Almighty facility lays provisions for the deliverance of His Church, and for *their* ultimate ruin” (John Owen).

“And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive. And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son” (Exo. 1:21 and 2:1, 2). Amram and Jochebed refused to be intimidated by the cruel commandment of the king, and acted as though no injunction had been issued by him. Were they reckless and foolish? No indeed, they took their orders from a far higher Authority than any earthly potentate. The fear of the Lord was upon them, and therefore they were delivered from that fear of man which bringeth a snare. In covenant relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this godly couple from the tribe of Levi allowed not the wrath of man to disrupt their domestic happiness.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents” (Heb. 11:23). It is the faith of Moses’ parents that is here celebrated. But because it is mentioned principally to introduce the discourse of himself and his faith, and also that which is spoken belongs unto *his honour*; it is thus peculiarly expressed. He saith not ‘By faith the parents of Moses when he was born, hid him,’ but ‘By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents’; that is, by the faith of the parents who hid him” (John Owen). Ah, here is the explanation of the conduct of Amram and Jochebed: it was “by faith” they acted: it was a living, supernatural, spiritual faith which sustained their hearts in this crisis, and kept them “in perfect peace” (Isa. 26:3). Nothing will so quieten the mind and still its fears as a real trusting in the Lord of Hosts.

The birth of Moses occurred during the very height and fury of the attack that was being made upon the infant males of the Hebrews. Herein we may discover a striking foreshadowment of the attempt which was made upon the life of the Christ-child, when, in his efforts to slay Him, Herod gave orders that all the children in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof from two years old and under, should be slain (Matt. 2:16). Many a typical representation of the principal events in the life of the Redeemer is to be found in the Old Testament, and at scores of points did Moses in particular prefigure the great Deliverer of His people. It is a deeply interesting line of study, which we commend to our readers, to go over the history of Moses and note down the many details in which he pictured the Lord Jesus.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment” (Heb. 11:23). It seems clear from the final clause that Pharaoh had either given orders that the Hebrews should notify his officers whenever a male child was born unto them, or that they themselves should throw him into the river. Instead of complying with this atrocious enactment, the parents of Moses concealed their infant for three months, which supplies us with a clear example of “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). It is true that the Lord requires His people to “be subject unto the higher powers” (Rom. 13:1), but this holds good *only so long as* the “higher powers” (human governors) require the Christian to do nothing which God has forbidden, or prohibit nothing which God has commanded. The inferior authority must always give place before the superior. As this is a principle of great importance practically, and one concerning which confusion exists in some quarters, let us amplify a little.

Holy Scripture must never be made to contradict itself: one of its precepts must never be pressed so far as to nullify another; each one is to be interpreted and applied in harmony with the general analogy of faith, and in the light of the modifications which the Spirit Himself has given. For example; children are required to honour their parents, yet Ephesians 6:1 shows that their obedience is to be “in the Lord”; if a parent required something directly opposed unto Holy Writ, then he is not to be obeyed. Christian wives are required by God to submit themselves unto their husbands, and that “in everything” (Eph. 5:24), obeying them (1 Peter 3:6); nevertheless, their subjection is to be of the same character as that of the Church unto Christ (Eph. 5:24); and inasmuch as He never demands anything from the Church which is evil, so He does not require the wife to obey injunctions which are positively harmful-if a thoughtless husband should insist on that which would be highly injurious to his wife’s health, she is to refuse him. Submission does not mean slavery!

Now the same modification we have pointed out above obtains in connection with the exhortations of Romans 13:1-7. In proof, let us cite a clear example to the point from either Testament. In Daniel 3 we find that the king of Babylon—the head of the “powers that be”—erected an image unto himself, and demanded that, on a given signal, all must “fall down and worship” the same (v. 5). But the three Hebrew captives declared, “Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (v. 18); and the Lord vindicated their non-compliance. In Acts 4 we see Peter and John arrested by the Jewish “powers,” who, “Commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (v. 18). Did the Apostles submit to this ordinance? No, instead they said, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (v. 19). As Romans 13:4 declares, the magistrate is “the minister of God to thee *for good*”: should he require that which the Word condemns as evil, he is not to be obeyed.

And what was it that enabled the parents of Moses to act so boldly and set at nought the royal edict? Our text furnishes clear answer: it was “by faith” they acted. Had they been destitute of faith, most probably the “king’s commandment” would have filled them with dismay, and in order that their own lives should be spared, would have promptly informed his officers of the birth of Moses. But instead of so notifying the Egyptians, they concealed the fact, and though by preserving the child they followed a course which was highly hazardous to sense, yet under God it became the path of security. Thus, the particular aspect of our theme which here receives illustration is *the courage and boldness of faith*: faith overcoming the fear of man. That brings before us another characteristic of this heavenly grace, one which evidences its excellency, and one which should move us to pray daily for an increase of the same.

Faith is a spiritual grace which enables its possessor to look away from human terrors, and to confide in an unseen God. It declares, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psa. 27:1). True it is that *this* faith is not always in exercise, yea, more often is its bright shining overcast by the clouds of unbelief, and eclipsed by the murky dust which Satan raises in the soul. We say, “this faith,” for there are thousands of professing Christians all around us who boast that *their* faith is constantly in exercise, and that they are rarely if ever tormented by doubts or filled with alarms. Ah, my reader, the “faith” of such people is not “the faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1), entirely dependent upon the renewing power of the Holy Spirit; no, it is but a natural faith in the bare letter of Scripture, which by an act of their own will they can call into exercise whenever they please. But unto such the many “Fear nots” of God’s Word have no application! But when the dew of Heaven falls upon the regenerated heart, its language is, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee” (Psa. 56:3).

Great indeed is the power of a God-given and God-sustained faith: not only to produce outward works, but to affect the workings of the soul within. This is something which is not sufficiently considered these days, when attention is confirmed almost exclusively to “visible results.” Faith regulates the affections: it curbs impetuosity and works patience, it chases away gloom and brings peace and joy, it subdues carnal fears and produces courage. Moreover, faith not only sustains the heart under severe trials, performs difficult duties, but (as the sequel shows) obtains important benefits. How pertinent, then, was this particular case unto those to whom this Epistle was first sent! How well was it calculated to encourage the sorely-tried and wavering Hebrews to remain faithful to Christ and to trust God with the issue and outcome!

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents.” Probably two things are included in these words: first, that they concealed all tidings of his birth; second, that they hid him in some part of the house. No doubt their diligence was accomplished by fervent cries to God, and the putting forth of a daily trust in Him. The fact that it was “by faith” that they “hid” him, shows that real spiritual faith is cautious and wary, and not reckless and presumptuous. Though faith overcomes carnal fear, yet it does not disdain the use of lawful means for overcoming danger. It is fanaticism, and not faith, which tempts God. To needlessly expose ourselves unto danger is sinful. Faith is no enemy unto lawful means as Acts 27:31 plainly enough shows.

It is to be observed that the words of our text go beyond Exodus 2:2, where the preserving of Moses is attributed unto his mother. As both the parents were engaged in the hazard, both had a hand in the work; no doubt Amram took the lead in advice and contriving, and Jochebed in the actual execution. As the parents have a joint interest in their children, both should share in the care and training of them, each seeking to help the other. Where there is an agreement between husband and wife in faith and in the fear of God, it makes way for a blessed success in their duties. When difficult tasks confront husbands and wives, it is their wisdom to apply themselves unto that part and phase of it which each is best suited for. “It is a happy thing when yoke-fellows draw together in the yoke of faith, as the heirs of the grace of God; and where they do this in a religious concern for the good of their children, to preserve them not only from those who would destroy their lives, but corrupt their minds” (Matt. Henry).

The “three months” teaches us that the parents of Moses *persevered* in that which they began well. They were prudent from the hour of his birth, and they maintained their vigilance. It is no use to shut the stable-door when the horse is gone. Care in preventing danger is to be continued as long as the danger is threatened. Some, perhaps, may ask, Would

it be right for the people of God today to give shelter to one of His saints or servants who was being unjustly hounded by “the powers that be”? Surely; it is always the duty of love to shield others from harm. But suppose the hidden ones are being inquired after by the authorities, may they still be concealed? Yes, if it is done without the impeachment of the truth, for it is never permissible to lie—to do so shows a distrust of the sufficiency of God. Should the officers ask whether you are sheltering one they seek, either remain silent, or so prudently word your answer as will neither betray the party nor be guilty of falsehood.

Others may ask, Since God purposed to make Moses the leader of His people and accomplish such a memorable work through him, why did He not by some wonderful and powerful miracle preserve him from the rage of Pharaoh? Answer: God was able to send a legion of angels for his protection, or to have visibly displayed His might by other means; but He did not. It is generally God’s pleasure to show His power through weak and despised means. Thus it was during the infancy of His own incarnate Son: God warned Joseph by a dream, and he took the young child and His mother into Egypt, remaining there till Herod was dead. Frequently it pleases the Most High to magnify His providence by things which men despise, by feeble instruments, and this, that it may the more plainly appear the excellency of the power is *of Him*.

In the preservation of the infant Moses, we may see a blessed illustration of how God preserves His elect through infancy and childhood, and from all that threatens their existence prior to the time when He regenerates them. This is expressed in Jude 1: “Preserved in Jesus Christ and called.” How blessed is it for the Christian to look back behind the time when God called him out of darkness into His marvelous light, and discern His guarding hand upon him when he was dead in trespasses and sins. There are few if any of the Lord’s people who cannot recall more than one incident in early life when there was “but a step” betwixt them and death; yet even then, as in the case of the infant Moses, a kind Providence was watching over them. Then let us return thanks for the same.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, *because they saw he was a proper child*: and they were not afraid of the king’s commandments.” It is really surprising how many of the commentators, led by sentiment, have quite missed the meaning of this verse. Exodus 2:2 states that his mother saw “that he was a goodly child”: the Hebrew word (“tob”) being the same term whereby God approved of His works of creation and declared them perfect (Gen. 1), from which the conclusion has been drawn that it was the exceeding fairness or beauty of the babe which so endeared him to his parents they were moved to disregard the king’s edict, and take special pains to preserve him. But this is only carnalizing Scripture, in fact, contradicting what the Holy Spirit has here said.

Hebrews 11:23 distinctly affirms that it was “by faith” the parents of Moses acted and *this* it is which explains their conduct. Now Romans 10:17 tells us, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”: thus Amram and Jochebed must have received a Divine revelation (not recorded in the Old Testament), and this word from God formed the foundation of their confidence, and supplied the motive-power of what they did. It is true they knew from the prophecy given to Abram (Gen. 15) that the time for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was drawing near, as they also knew from the prediction of Joseph (Gen. 50:24) that God was going to undertake for His people. Yet we are persuaded that Hebrews 11:23 refers to something more definite and specific. Most probably the Lord made known to these parents that *their* child was to be the promised deliverer, and furnished them beforehand with a description of him.

This revelation which Amram and Jochebed “heard” from God they *believed*, and that, before Moses was born. When, in due time, he was given to them, they “saw he was a proper child”—it was *the discernment of faith*, and not the mere admiration of nature. As Acts 7:20 declares “in which time was born Moses, and was beautiful to God” (Bagster International), which indicates an appearance of something Divine or supernatural. They recognized he was peculiarly grateful and acceptable to God: they perceived something remarkable in him, which was the Divine token to them that he would be the deliverer of Israel. “Probably there was some mark of future excellency impressed on the child, which gave promise of something extraordinary” (John Calvin). “The beauty of the Lord set upon him as a presage that he was born to great things, and that by conversing with God his face would shine (Exo. 34:29), and what bright and illustrious actions he should do for the deliverance of Israel, and how his name should shine in the sacred record” (Matt. Henry).

Resting with implicit confidence upon the revelation which they had received from Jehovah, their faith now confirmed by God’s mark of identification upon the babe, the parents of Moses preferred its safety before their own. It was not simply they trusted God for the outcome, but in their souls was that faith which is “the substance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1), and in consequence “they were *not afraid* of the king’s commandments.” Had it been only a natural or human admiration which they had for a signally beautiful child, then it had been “by affection” or “by infatuation” they hid the infant; and that would only have intensified their “fear,” for the more they admired the infant, the more afraid would they have been of harm befalling it.

Mere beauty is by no means a sure sign of excellency, as 1 Samuel 16:7, 2 Samuel 14:25, Proverbs 31:30 plainly enough show. No, the infant Moses was “beautiful *to God*” (Acts 7:20), and perceiving this, Amram and Jochebed acted

accordingly. First, they “hid” him for three months, “and when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes” etc. (Exo. 2:3): it may be that the Egyptians searched the houses of the Hebrews every three months. No doubt it was under the Divine direction that the parents of Moses now acted, for surely the placing of this precious child by the brink of the fatal “river” (Exo. 1:22) was the last thing that carnal reason had suggested! We do not at all agree with those who think the faith of Moses’ parents wavered when they placed him in the ark: when one lawful means of preservation from persecution will no longer secure, it is a duty to betake ourselves unto some other which is more likely to do so—Matthew 10:23.

In the kind providence of God, His interests and ours are often twined together, and then nature is allowed to work; though even then, grace must bear sway. So it was here: the parents of Moses had received a direct commandment from God how to act and what to do (as the “by faith” clearly denotes), and in their case, what He prescribed harmonized with their own feelings. But sometimes God’s requirements and our natural affections clash, as was the case when He required Abraham to offer up Isaac, and then the claims of the lower must yield to the Higher. When the current of human affection clashes not with God’s express precepts we may follow it, for He allows us to take in the help of nature: “a brother beloved . . . *both in the flesh*, and in the Lord” (Phile. 16).

CHAPTER 16

The Faith of Moses—Part One

(Heb. 11:24-27)

“The Apostle, as we showed before, takes his instances from the three states of the church under the Old Testament. The first was that which was constituted in the giving of the first promise, continuing to the call of Abraham. Herein his first instance is that of Abel, in whose sacrifice the faith of that state of the church was first publicly confessed, and by whose martyrdom it was confirmed. The next state had its beginning and confirmation in the call of Abraham, with the covenant made with him and the token thereof. He therefore is the second great instance on the roll of testimonies. The constitution and consecration of the third state of the church was in giving of the law; and herein an instance is given in the lawgiver himself. All to manifest, that whatever outward variations the church was liable to, and pass under, yet faith and the promises were the same, of the same efficacy and power under them all” (John Owen).

In approaching the careful study of our present verses it is of great importance to observe that they begin *a new section* of Hebrews 11: if this be not seen, they cannot be interpreted aright. The opening verse of each section of this chapter takes us back to *the beginning of* the Life of Faith, and each one presents a different aspect of the nature or character of saving faith. The first three verses of Hebrews 11 are introductory, the fourth beginning the first division. There, in the example of Abel, we see where the Life of Faith begins (at conversion), namely, with the conscience being awakened to a consciousness of our lost condition, with the soul making a complete surrender to God, and with the heart resting upon the perfect satisfaction made by Christ our Surety. That which is chiefly emphasized there is *faith in the blood*. But placing his faith in the blood of Christ *is not all* that is done by a sinner when he passes from death unto life.

The second section of Hebrews 11 commences at verse 8, where we have set before us another aspect of conversion, or the starting-point of the Life of Faith. Conversion is the reflex action or effect from a soul which has received an effectual call from God. This is illustrated by the case of Abraham, who was, originally, an idolater, as we all were in our unregenerate state. The Lord of Glory appeared unto him, quickened him into newness of life, delivered him from his former manner of existence, and gave him the promise of a future inheritance. The response of Abraham was radical and revolutionary: he set aside his natural inclinations, crucified his fleshly affections, and entered upon an entirely new path. That which is central in *his* case was *implicit obedience*, the setting aside of his own will, and the becoming completely subject to the will of God. But even that *is not all* that is done by the sinner when he passes from death unto life.

The case of Moses brings before us yet another side of conversion, or the beginning of the Life of Faith, a side which is sadly ignored in most of the “evangelism” of our day. It describes a leading characteristic of *saving* faith, which few professing Christians now hear (still less know) anything about. It shows us that saving faith does something more than “believe” or “accept Christ as a personal Saviour.” It exhibits faith as a definite decision of the mind, as an act of the will, as a personal and studied *choice*. It reveals the fundamental fact that saving faith includes, yea, begins with, a deliberate renunciation or turning away from all that is opposed to God, a determination to utterly *deny self* and an electing to

submit unto whatever trials may be incident to a life of piety. It shows us that a saving faith causes its possessor to turn away from godless companions, and henceforth to seek fellowship with the despised saints of God.

There is much more involved in the act of saving faith than is generally supposed. “We mistake it if we think it *only to be* a strong confidence. It is so indeed; but there are other things also. It is such an appreciative esteem of our Christ and His benefits, that all other things are lessened in our opinion, estimation, and affection. The nature of faith is set forth by the Apostle when he saith, ‘What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death’ (Phil. 3:7-10). And therefore true faith makes us dead to the world, and all the interests and honours thereof: and is to be known not so much by our confidence, as *by our mortification and weanedness*; when we carry all our comforts in our hands, as ready to part with them, if the Lord called us to leave them” (Thomas Manton, 1660).

“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” (Heb. 11:24, 25). Here we see the nature and influence of a saving faith. Two things are to be particularly noted: in it there is an act of relinquishment, and an act of embracing. In conversion, there is a turning from, and also a turning unto. Hence, before the sinner is invited to “return unto the Lord,” he is first bidden to “*forsake his way,*” yes, *his way*-having “*his own way.*” So too we are called on to “repent” first, and then “be converted,” that our sins may be “blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself” (Matt. 16:24). What is meant by the *denying* of “self”? This, the abridging ourselves of those things which are pleasing to the flesh. There are three things which are chiefly prized by the natural man—life, wealth, and honour; and so in the verses which immediately follow, Christ propounded three maxims to counter them. First, He says, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it” (Matt. 16:25): that is, he who thinks first and foremost of his own life, whose great aim is to minister unto “number one,” shall perish. Second, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (v. 26): showing us the comparative worthlessness of earthly riches. Third, “For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works” (v. 27): *that* is the honour we should seek.

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (Heb. 11:24). Here was a notable case of self-denial: Moses deliberately renounced the privileges and pleasures of a royal palace. It was not that he was now disowned and cast out by the woman who had adopted him; but that he voluntarily relinquished a position of affluence and ease, disdaining both its wealth and dignities. Nor was this the rash impulse of an inexperienced youth, but the studied decision of one who had now reached the age of forty (Acts 7:23). The disciples said, “We have forsaken all, and followed Thee” (Matt. 19:27): their “all” was a net and fishing-smack; but Moses abandoned a principality!

The denying of self is absolutely essential; and where it exists not, grace is absent. The first article in the covenant is, “thou shalt have no other gods before Me”: *He* must have the pre-eminence in our hearts and lives. God has not the glory of *God* unless we honour Him thus. Now God does not have the uppermost place in our hearts until *His* favour be esteemed above all things, and until we dread above everything the offending *of Him*. As long as we can break with God in order to preserve any worldly interest of ours, we prefer that interest above God. If we are content to offend God rather than displease our friends or relatives, then we are greatly deceived if we regard ourselves as genuine Christians. “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37).

“Faith is a grace that will teach a man to openly renounce all worldly honors, advantages, and preferments, with the advantage annexed thereto. When God calls us from them, we cannot enjoy them with a good conscience” (Thomas Manton). We are often put to the test of having to choose between God and things, duty and pleasure, heeding our conscience or gratifying the flesh. The presence and vigour of faith is to be proved by our *self-denial!* It is easy to speak contemptuously of the world and earthly things, but what is my *first care*? Is it to *seek* God or temporal prosperity? To *please* Him or self? If I am hankering after an increase in wages, or a better position, and am fretful because of disappointment, it is a sure proof that a worldly spirit governs me. What is my *chief delight*? earthly riches, honours, comforts, or communion with God? Can I truly say, “For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand” (Psa. 84:10)?

“All believers are not called to make the same sacrifices, or to endure the same trials for righteousness’ sake, nor have all the same measure of faith; yet, without some experience and consciousness of *this* kind, we are not warranted to conclude that we are of Moses’ religion; for a common walking stick more resembles Aaron’s fruitful rod, than the faith

of many modern professors of evangelical truth does the self-denying faith of Moses or Abraham” (Thomas Scott). The faith of God’s elect is a faith which “overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4), and not one which suffers its possessor to be overcome! “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24); not ought to, but *have* done so-in some real measure at least!

The great *refusal* of Moses consisted in a firm resolution of mind not to remain in that state wherein he had been brought up. This was not attained, we may be sure, without a hard fight, without the exercise of faith in prayer and trust in God. He knew full well all that his decision involved, yet, by grace, made it unhesitatingly. His resolution was made known not by a formal avowal, but by deeds, for actions ever speak louder than words. There is no hint in the sacred record that Moses verbally acquainted his foster-mother with his decision, but his converse with his brethren (Exo. 2:11, etc.) revealed where his heart was, and identified him with their religion and covenant. Ah, dear reader, it is one thing to *talk* well about the things of God, but it is quite another to *walk* accordingly; as it is one thing to pen articles and deliver sermons, and quite another to *practice* what we preach!

Not only was Moses’ renunciation of his favoured position a grand triumph over the lusts of the flesh, but it was also a notable victory over carnal reason. First of all, his action would seem to indicate the height of *ingratitude* against his foster-mother. Pharaoh’s daughter had spared his life as an infant, brought him into her own home, reared him as her son, and had him educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. For him to turn his back upon her now would appear as though he was devoid of appreciation-so little is the natural man able to understand the motives which regulate the workings of faith. The truth is that the commandments of the second table are binding upon us no further than our compliance with them is agreeable to our obedience unto the commandments of the first table. The saint is neither to accept favours from the world, nor to express gratitude for the same, if such be contrary to the fear of God, and the maintenance of a good conscience.

We are never to be dutiful to man at the expense of being undutiful to God. All relations must give way before preserving a clear conscience toward Him. His rights are paramount, and must be recognized and responded to, no matter how much the doing so may clash with our seeming obligations unto our fellows. A friend or kinsman may be entertaining me in his home, and show me much kindness through the week, but that will not justify or require me to join him on a picnic or frolic on the Sabbath day. “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he *cannot* be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). The language of the Christian ought ever to be, “wist ye not that I must be about *my Father’s* business?” (Luke 2:49).

To enjoy worldly honours is not evil in itself, for good men have lived in bad courts. Daniel is a clear case in point: most of his life was spent in high civic office. When Divine providence has given worldly riches or worldly prestige to us, they are to be entertained and enjoyed, yet with a holy jealousy and prayerful watchfulness that we be not puffed up by them, remembering that, “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Prov. 16:19). But such things are to be renounced when they are sinful in themselves, or when they cannot be retained with a clear conscience. Against his conscience, Pilate preferred to condemn Christ than lose Caesar’s friendship, and stands before us in Holy Writ as a lasting warning. “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41).

Again: not only did Moses’ great refusal seem like gross ingratitude unto her who had adopted him, but it also looked like flying in the face of Providence. It was God who had placed him where he was; why, then, should he forsake such an advantageous position? Had Moses leaned unto his own understanding and listened to the dictates of carnal reason, he had found many pretexts for remaining where he then was. Why not stay there and seek to reform Egypt? Why not use his great influence with the king on behalf of the oppressed Hebrews? Had he remained in the court of Pharaoh, he would escape much affliction; yes, and miss too the “recompense of the reward.” Ah, my reader, unbelief is very fertile, argues very plausibly, and can suggest many logical reasons why we *should not* practice self-denial!

What was it, then, which prompted Moses to make this noble sacrifice? A patriotic impulse? a fanatical love for his brethren? No, he was guided neither by reason nor sentiment: it was “*by faith*” that Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. It was the clinging of his heart to the Divine promise, the apprehension of things not seen by the outward eye, the confident expectation of future reward. Ah, it is faith which imparts to the heart a true estimate of things, which views objects in their real light, and which discerns the comparative worthlessness of what the poor worldling prizes so highly, and through his mad quest after which he loses his soul. Faith views the eternity to come, and when faith is in healthy exercise, its possessor finds it easy to relinquish the baubles of time and sense. Then it is the saint exclaims, “Surely every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who

shall gather them” (Psa. 39:6).

What a truly remarkable thing that one in Egypt's court *should have* such a "faith"! Moses had been brought up in a heathen palace, where there was no knowledge of the true God; yea, nothing but idolatry, wantonness, and profanity. Yes, some of Christ's sheep are situated in queer and unexpected places, nevertheless the Shepherd seeks them out, and either delivers them from or sustains them in it: the wife of "Herod's steward" (Luke 8:3), the saints in Nero's "household" (Phil. 4:22) are notable examples. What illustrations are these of "The LORD shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies" (Psa. 110:2)! However His enemies may rage, seek to blot out His name and root out His kingdom, Christ shall preserve a remnant according to the election of grace "even where Satan's seat is" (Rev. 2:13).

Some one may object, "But Joseph had faith as well as Moses, yet he did not leave the court, but continued there till his death." Circumstances alter cases! Their occasions and conditions were not alike. "God raised up Joseph to feed His people in Egypt, therefore his abode in the court was necessary under kings that favoured them; but Moses was called not to feed his people in Egypt, but to lead them out of Egypt; and the king of Egypt was now become their enemy, and kept them under bitter bondage. To remain in an idolatrous court of a pagan prince is one thing; but to remain in a persecuting court, where he must be accessory to their persecutions, is another thing" (T. Manton).

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25). This gives us the positive side of Moses' glorious decision. There is both a negative and a positive side to faith. First, a *refusing*, and then a *choosing*, and that order is unchanging. There must be a "ceasing to do evil" before there can be a "learning to do well" (Isa. 1:16, 17); there must be a "hating the evil" before there is a "loving the good" (Amos 5:15); there must be a "confessing *and forsaking*" of sin, before there is "mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The prodigal must *leave* the far country, before he can go to the Father (Luke 15). The sinner must abandon his idols, before he can take up the cross and follow Christ (Mark 10:21). There must be a turning to God, "*from idols*," before there can be a "serving the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). The heart must turn its back upon the world, before it can receive Christ as Lord and Saviour.

"Moses gave up the *world*; and ambition had the prospect of honour and greatness; the culture of the most civilized state was fascinating to the mind; treasure and wealth held out potent allurements. And all this—and does it not comprise 'all that is in the world,' and in its most attractive and elevated manner?—Moses gave up. And, on the other side what awaited him? To join a down-trodden nation of slaves, whose only riches were the promises of the invisible God," (A. Saphir). A man is known by his *choice*. Do you do evil for a little profit? Do you avoid duty because of some trifling inconvenience? Are you turned out of the way because of reproach?

Moses preferred to *suffer* affliction with the people of God than to *enjoy* the pleasures of sin for a brief season. Do you? He judged it the greatest misery of all to live in sin. Do you? Here is an important test: which gives you greater grief, sin or bodily affliction? Which troubles you the more: suffering loss in the world, or displeasing God? There are thousands of professing Christians who complain of their physical aches and pains, but how rarely do we hear any groaning over the body of sin and death! When you are afflicted in the body, which is your dominant desire: to be freed from the suffering, or for God to *sanctify* the suffering unto the good of your soul? Ah, my reader, what *real and supernatural* difference is there between you and the moral worldling? Is it only in your creed, what you believe with the intellect? "The demons believe."

Yes, it is our *refusal* and our *choice* which identifies us, which makes it manifest whether we are children of the devil or children of God. It is the property of a gracious heart to prefer the greatest suffering—physical, mental, or social—to the least sin; and when sin is committed, it is repudiated, sorrowed over, confessed, and forsaken. When "suffering" is inflicted upon saints by persecutors, the offense is done unto us; but "sin" is committed against God! "Sin" separates from God (Isa. 59:2), "suffering" drives the Christian nearer to God. "Affliction" only affects the body, "sin" injures the soul. "Affliction" is from God (Heb. 12:11), but "sin" is from the devil. But naught save a real, spiritual, supernatural faith will prefer suffering affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

"None of the exemplifications of the importance of believing, brought forth by the Apostle, is better fitted to serve his purpose than that which we have been considering. The Hebrew Christians were called on to part with an honour which they were accustomed to value above all other dignities. They were excommunicated by their unbelieving brethren, and denied the name of true children of Abraham. Their unbelieving countrymen were enjoying wealth and honour. The little flock they were called on to join was suffering affliction and reproach. Now, how is this to be done? Look at Moses. Believe as Moses believed, and you will find it easy to judge, choose, and act as Moses did. If you believe what Christ has plainly revealed, that 'it is His Father's good pleasure to give' His little flock, after passing through much tribulation, 'the kingdom': if you are persuaded that, according to His declaration, 'wrath is coming to the uttermost' on their oppressors, you will not hesitate to separate yourselves completely from your unbelieving country-men.

“The practical bearing of the passage is not confined to the Hebrew converts, or to the Christians of the primitive age. In every country, and in every age, Jesus proclaims, ‘If any man would be My disciple he must deny himself, he must take up the cross, and follow Me.’ The power of the present world can only be put down by ‘the power of the world to come’; and as it is through *sense* that the first power operates on our minds, it is through *faith* alone that the second power can operate on our minds. Some find it impossible to make the sacrifices Christianity requires, because they have no faith. They must be made; otherwise our Christianity is but a name, our faith is but a pretense, and our hope a delusion” (John Brown).

CHAPTER 17

The Faith of Moses—Part Two

(Heb. 11:25-26)

“The person here instanced as one that lived by faith, is Moses. And an eminent instance it is to his purpose, especially in his dealing with the Hebrews, and that on sundry accounts. 1. Of his person. None was ever in the old world more signalized by Providence in his birth, education, and actions, than he was. Hence his renown was both then, and in all ages after, very great in the world. The report and estimation of his acts and wisdom were famous among all the nations of the earth. Yet this person lived and acted, and did all his works *by faith*. 2. Of his great work, which was the typical redemption of the church. A work it was; great in itself; so God expresseth it to be, and such as was never wrought in the earth before (Deut. 4:32-34). Yet greater in the typical respect which it had to His eternal redemption of the Church by Jesus Christ. 3. On the account of his office. He was the lawgiver, whence it is manifest, that *the law is not opposite to faith*, seeing the lawgiver himself lived thereby” (John Owen).

Each example of faith supplied by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 11 presents a distinctive feature or fruit of that spiritual grace. The faith which is here described is *saving* faith, without which no man is accepted by God (see verse 6). It is true that all Christians are not given the same measure of faith, nor do all of them manifest it in the same manner. All flowers are not of the same hue, nor are they equally fragrant; yet every variety differs radically from weeds! Not every saint is called upon to build an ark, offer up his son in sacrifice, or forsake a palace; nevertheless, there is that in the heart and life of *every* regenerate soul, which plainly distinguishes him from those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and which clearly bears the mark of the *supernatural*-there is that in him which mere nature does not and cannot bring forth.

While it be true that very few Christians are called upon to leave a palace, yet everyone who would become a Christian *is required* to forsake the world: not physically, but morally. God does not bid us become hermits, or enter a convent or monastery-that is only the Devil’s perversion of the truth of separation; but He *does* insist that the sinner must cast away the idols of the world, turn from its vain pleasures, cease walking in its evil ways, and set his affections upon things above. Scripture is unmistakably plain upon this point, declaring, “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). That which was adumbrated by Moses in our present passage was the heart’s renunciation of a vain and perishing world, and giving God His true place in the affections.

In Chapter 16 we saw how Moses voluntarily relinquished his position of a nobleman in Pharaoh’s court, and preferred to have fellowship with the despised and suffering people of God. In this he was a blessed type of Him who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, who descended from the glory of Heaven, and was born in a manger; who laid aside His robes of majesty, and took upon Him the form of a servant. And, my reader, His people are predestinated “to be conformed to” *His* image (Rom. 8:29). He has left them an example, and there is no other route to Heaven, but by “following His steps”: see John 10:4! There is a real and practical oneness between the Head and the members of His mystical body, and that practical oneness consists in *self-sacrifice*. Unless the spirit of self-sacrifice rules my heart, I am no *Christian!*

The way to Heaven is a “narrow” one and the entrance to it is “strait,” and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13, 14). Because that way *is* “narrow,” opposed to all the inclinations of flesh and blood, Christ bids us to “sit down and count the cost” (Luke 14:31) before we start out. The “cost” is far too high for all who have never had a miracle of grace wrought within them, for it includes the cutting off of a right hand and the plucking out of a right eye (Matt. 5:29, 30)-*that* is why 1 Peter 4:18 asks, “If the righteous *scarcely* be saved (or “*with difficulty* be saved”), where shall the ungodly and the

sinner appear?" Few indeed are, like Moses, willing to pay the "cost." Alas, the vast majority, even in Christendom, are like Esau (Heb. 12:16) or the Gadarenes (Mark 5:14, 15)-they prefer to indulge the flesh rather than deny it.

The *difficulty* of salvation, or the "straitness" of the gate and the "narrowness" of the way which leadeth into Life, was strikingly prefigured by the alluring temptations and carnal obstacles which had to be overcome by Moses. As we pointed out in Chapter 16, his noble decision not only involved the leaving of Pharaoh's palace, the apparent ingratitude toward his foster-mother, the ignoring of the precedent set up by Joseph; but, it also meant the throwing in his lot with a despised people, enduring all the discomforts and hardships of their wilderness wanderings, and the bringing down upon his head not only the contempt of his former associates, but having to endure the murmurings and criticisms of the Hebrews themselves. Ah, my reader, *such a choice* as Moses made was altogether contrary to flesh and blood, and can be accounted for only on the ground that a miracle of Divine grace had been wrought within him. As our Lord declared, "With men *this is impossible*; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

From what has been said above, is it not unmistakably evident that as great a distance as that which separates Heaven from earth divides *Scriptural* "Conversion" from that which goes under the name of "conversion" in the vast majority of the so-called "churches" today?! A genuine and saving Conversion is a radical and revolutionary experience. It is vastly more than the taking up of a sound creed, believing what the Bible says about Christ, or joining some religious assembly. It is something which strikes down to the very roots of a man's being, causing him to make an unreserved surrender of himself to the claims of God, henceforth seeking to please and glorify Him. This issues, necessarily, in a complete break from the world, and the former manner of life; in other words, "if any man be in Christ, he is a *new* creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Heb. 11:24). It is the first two words of this verse which supply an adequate explanation of the noble conduct of Moses here. A God-given faith is occupied with something better than the things of sight and sense, and therefore does it discern clearly the utter vanity of worldly greatness and honour. Faith has to do *with God*, and when the mind be truly stayed upon Him, neither the riches nor the pleasures of earth can attract, still less enthrall. Faith relies upon and is obedient unto a personal revelation from on High, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Moses had "heard," Moses "believed," Moses *acted on* what he had heard from God.

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25). Yes, each of us *has to choose* between life and death (Deut. 30:15), between sin and holiness, between the world and Christ, between fellowship with the children of God and friendship with the children of the Devil. When Moses took the part of an Israelite against an Egyptian (Exodus 2), he declared plainly that he preferred the former to the latter, that the promises of God meant far more to him than the fame or luxury of an earthly court. Yet at that time the seed of Abraham were in an exceedingly low state, nevertheless Moses knew that the promises which God had made unto the patriarchs could not fail.

That was *faith* indeed: to willingly forego the attractive prospects which lay before him in the land of the Nile, and deliberately prefer a path of hardship. What he had "heard" from God was to him so grand, so great, so glorious, that, after thoughtfully balancing the one over against the other, Moses rejected material aggrandizement for spiritual riches: he considered it to be a far higher honour to be a child of Abraham than to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He might have *reasoned* that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and have "made the most of his (present) opportunity," rather than have set his heart on an unseen future; but the spirit triumphed over the flesh. O how we need to pray for grace to enable us to "approve things that are excellent," that we may be "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil 1:10).

It is to be duly noted that Moses elected to suffer affliction with the Hebrews not because they were his people, but because they were *God's* people. "The object of his choice was God; the One who chose his fathers, who revealed to them His truth and grace, and commanded them to walk before Him without fear; the God who was not ashamed to be called their God, and to whom he had been dedicated in his infancy" (A. Saphir). Observe that fellowship with "the people of God" necessarily involves, in some form or other, "affliction." Yes, God has ordained that "we must through much tribulation enter into His kingdom" (Acts 14:22), and declares, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). But *why* should this be so? Why has not God appointed a smoother path and a pleasanter lot for His high favourites while they pass through this world? We subjoin one or two of the many answers which may be returned to this question.

God has decreed that the general state of His people on earth shall be one of hardship, opposition, persecution. First, to arouse them to spiritual diligence. He has told them in His Word "this is not your rest" (Micah 2:10), nevertheless there is a tendency in us to settle down here. Again and again God bids us to watch and pray, to be sober and vigilant, alert and active; but only too often His exhortations fall on deaf ears. The "wise virgins" slumbered and slept as well as

the “foolish” ones, and need *awakening*; because they will not heed such calls as are found in Romans 13:11, Ephesians 5:14, etc. He uses the Enemy to arouse us. Second, to wean us from the world: because there is that in us which still loves the world, God, in His mercy, often stirs them up to hate us. Third, to conform us more fully unto the image of Christ: the Head endured the contradiction of sinners *against* Himself, and His body is called to have “fellowship in His sufferings.”

The “pleasures of sin” in verse 25 has immediate reference to the riches and dignities of Pharaoh’s court, which Moses could no longer enjoy without being unfaithful to God and His people. To have gone on living in the palace would be despising Jehovah and His covenant with Abraham’s seed. It would have been preferring his own advancement and ease rather than the deliverance of his people; he would have been conducting himself as a worldling, rather than as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene; and worse, he would have been conniving at Pharaoh’s cruel treatment of the Hebrews. Moreover, to have resisted the impulse of the Spirit on his heart would have been *sin*. This shows us that things which are not sinful in themselves, become so when used or enjoyed at the wrong time. Everything is beautiful in its season: “There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (Eccl. 3:4).

The principle we have just enunciated above is of great practical importance. Material things become snares if employed intemperately. God has granted us permission to “use” the things of this world, but has forbidden the “abuse” of them (1 Cor. 7:31). Temporal blessings become a curse if they are allowed to hinder us from the discharge of duty. All associations must be severed which deter us from having fellowship with the saints. Personal ease and comfort are to be set aside when our brethren are “suffering affliction” and need a helping hand. Alas, only God knows how many professing Christians have continued to enjoy the *luxuries* of life, while thousands were without some of the bare *necessities* of life.

Everything which is severed from true Godliness is included in this expression “the pleasures of sin.” Temporal mercies are to be enjoyed with thankfulness to God, but only so far and so long as they help to promote a true following of the example which Christ has left us. Alas, how many are seeking their happiness in the things of the flesh, rather than in the things of the Spirit. Scripture says, “Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith” (Prov. 15:16)-but how few believe it! Mark it well, dear reader, the “pleasures of sin” are only for “a season,” and a solemnly brief season at that: they must end either in speedy repentance or speedy ruin. How blessed is the contrast presented in Psalm 16:11, “At Thy right hand there are pleasures *forevermore*”! Is my heart set upon *them*? If so, I am making it my chief concern, every day, to walk along *the only path* which leads to them.

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:26). Here the Holy Spirit mentions a third instance of Moses’ contempt of the world: first, of its honours (v. 24), then of its pleasures (v. 25), now, of its wealth. Note the emphatic gradation in the decision of Moses as intimated in the three verbs: first, he “refused” to be any longer acknowledged as the adopted son of Egypt’s princess. Second, he “chose” or deliberately elected to become identified with and throw in his lot among the despised and suffering people of God. Third, he “esteemed” the reproach this involved, as high above that which he relinquished and renounced. The same Greek word is rendered “judged” in verse 11, showing that it was no rash conclusion which he jumped to hastily, but that it was the mature consideration of his mind and heart. Another has compared the three verbs here with Mark 4:28: “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear”

This 26th verse is an amplification of what is found in the 24th and 25th, and announces both the intelligence of Moses’ choice and the fervour of spiritual affection which prompted it. The decision that he made was not a reluctant and forced one, but ready and joyous. It was not merely he perceived that identifying himself with the Hebrews was a bounden duty, and therefore he must “make the best of a bad job” and put up with the hardships such a course entailed, but that he gladly preferred the same-*Christ* meaning infinitely more to him than everything which was to be found in Egypt. Reader, is the denying of self and taking up of the cross something which you grudgingly perform, or does the “love of Christ constrain” (2 Cor. 5:14) you thereto? Can you, in your measure, say with the Apostle, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake” (2 Cor. 12:10)?

What is meant here by “the reproach of Christ”? The Saviour was not born till many centuries later; true, but those whom the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world, were, from Abel onwards, well acquainted with Him: see John 8:56. Christ had a being before He was born of the virgin; we read of Israel “tempting Christ” in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:9). From the beginning, Christ was Head of the Church, and in His own Person led His own people, and was present in their midst, under the name of “the Angel of the Covenant.” Let the interested reader carefully ponder the terms of Exodus 23:20-22, and it should be plain that no *created* “angel” is there in view. Thus, whatever that people suffered, it was the reproach “of Christ,” who had taken them under His protection. There was a communion between Christ and His people, as real and as intimate as that union and communion which exists between Him and His people now: weigh well Isaiah 63:9, Zechariah 2:8, and compare with Acts 9:4 and Matthew 25:34 and clear proof of this will be obtained.

The “reproach of Christ,” then signifies first, Christ *personally* as identified with His people. Second, it has reference to Christ *mystically*, His redeemed as one with Him in humiliation and persecution. “Christ and the church were considered from the beginning, as one mystical body; so as that what the one underwent, the other is esteemed to undergo the same” (John Owen). In marriage the wife takes the name and status of her husband, because they have become “one flesh”: in like manner, the Church is called “Christ” in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Galatians 3:16 because of its union and communion with Him, because of the likeness and sympathy between them. Nor was this blessed mystery kept concealed—as modern “dispensationalists” wrongly declare—from the Old Testament saints, as a careful comparison of Jeremiah 23:6 with 33:16 makes very evident. Moses had “heard” from God that the Hebrews were His people and the remnant among them “according to the election of grace” were ordained to be “joint heirs with Christ,” and believing what he heard, he voluntarily and gladly decided to throw in his lot with them.

That the mystical body of Christ, the Church, is in view here in Hebrews 11:26—for the Head and His members can never be separated, though they may be viewed distinctly—is abundantly clear by a careful comparison of the preceding clauses. Verses 25 and 26 are obviously parallel, and explain one another. In the former, we are told that Moses “chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” Thus, there is a threefold parallelism: the “reproach” of verse 26 agrees with and is interpreted by the “suffering affliction” of verse 25, “the Christ” of verse 26 corresponds with and is defined by “the people of God” in verse 25; and the “treasures of Egypt” balances with and explains the “pleasures of sin for a season.”

“For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (v. 26). This was what strengthened and supported the faith of Moses. He had never forsaken the honours and comforts of the palace unless his heart had been fixed upon the eternal recompense. Faith realizes that peace of conscience is better than a big bank-balance, that communion with God is infinitely to be preferred above the favours of an earthly court. Moses knew that he would be no loser by such a choice: faith sees that nothing is lost which is quitted for Christ’s sake—though the name of Moses was removed from Egypt’s records, it has been accorded a prominent place upon the imperishable pages of Holy Writ. See here the vast difference between worldlings and saints; the former estimate things by sight, the latter by faith; the former through the coloured glass of corrupt reason and carnal sense, the latter by the light of God’s Word. Thus they wonder at each other: the worldling *thinks* the real Christian is crazy, the Christian *knows* the poor worldling is spiritually insane.

The heart of Moses was set upon something more blessed than the perishing things he was relinquishing. The “he had respect” is a compound in the Greek, and properly signifies to look from one thing to another: he looked from the things of time to those of eternity, for “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). This is one of the great properties of faith: to frequently and trustfully ponder the promise of Eternal Life, which we are to dwell in forever after this scene of sin is left behind. Faith perceives that the way to “save” is to “lose” (Matt. 16:25), that present self-denial will yet be honoured by enrichment, knowing that if now we suffer with Christ we shall be “also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17). How this condemns the practice of many who spend their lives in the greedy pursuit of the world, with no regard to God or their eternal interests, but think that if they call on Him for mercy with their last gasp, all will be well. Such people terribly deceive themselves by failing to see that Eternal Life is a “reward”—see Luke 1:74, 75: we must labour in the works of godliness in *this* life.

That which Moses had “respect unto” is here called “the recompense of the reward.” This is the all-sufficient presence of God with His people now (Gen. 15:1), and the great and final reward of Eternal Glory which is given by God, and received by His people as a compensation for all their sufferings. This is one of the New Testament passages which proves the Old Testament saints had a much clearer understanding of the future state of the redeemed than is now commonly supposed. For the reward of good works see Hebrews 6:10; of patience 6:12; of suffering 10:34. The calling of Heaven a “reward” in nowise imports any desert on man’s part, but abundant kindness in God, who will not suffer anything to be done or endured for Christ’s sake without recompense. It is called a “reward” to encourage obedience (Psa. 19:11) and allure our hearts (Matt. 5:12). That a *gift* may be a “reward” is clear from Colossians 3:24. It is also called a “reward” because it is God’s *owning* of the Spirit’s work in and through His people. Since Eternal Glory is a “reward” let us be patient under present suffering: Romans 8:18. It is legitimate to view the reward of Heaven while serving here—not that this is to be the chief or only motive (for that would be a religion of selfishness), but as faith’s anticipation: cf. Philippians 3:8-14. The reward is “gratuitous that God hath annexed to faith and obedience, not merited or deserved by them, *but infallibly annexed* unto them in a way of sovereign bounty” (John Owen).

CHAPTER 18

The Faith of Moses—Part Three

(Heb. 11:26-27)

In Chapters 16 and 17 (upon 11:24-26) we had before us the striking example of the power of faith to rise above the honours, riches, and pleasures of the world; now we are to behold it triumphing over *its terrors*. Faith not only elevates the heart above the delights of sense, but it also delivers it from the fear of man. Faith and fear are opposites, and yet, strange to say, they are often found dwelling within the same breast; but where one is dominant the other is dormant. The constant attitude of the Christian should be, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, *and not be afraid*” (Isa. 12:2). But alas, what ought to be, and what is, are two vastly different things. Nevertheless, when the grace of faith *is* in exercise, its language is, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee” (Psa. 56:3). So it was with Moses: he is here commended for his courage.

The leading feature of that particular working of Moses’ faith which we are now to consider, was its *durability*. That which engaged our attention on the last two occasions occurred when our hero had “come to years.” Forty years has elapsed since then, during which he passed through varied experiences and sore trials. But now that he is eighty years of age, faith is still active within him. That spiritual grace moved him to withstand the attractions of Egypt’s court, had led him to relinquish a position of high honour and wealth, had caused him to throw in his lot with the despised people of God—and now we behold faith enabling him to endure the wrath of the king. A God-given faith not only resists temptations, but it also endures trials, and refuses to be daunted by the gravest dangers. Faith not only flourishes under the dews of the Spirit, but it survives the fires of Satanic assault.

True faith neither courts the smiles of men nor shuns their frowns. Herein it differs radically from that natural faith, which is all that is possessed by thousands who think they are children of God. Recently we received a letter in which a friend wrote, “I know some professing Christians who boasted that the prospect of being out of work did not trouble them at all: for they knew every need would be supplied. Now that they have no work, they are not nearly as confident, but are wondering how in the world they are going to get along.” So too we read of the stony ground hearer. “The same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth It; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: *for when tribulation or persecution* ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended” (Matt. 13:20-21). Far otherwise was it with Moses.

“By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). Moses left Egypt on two different occasions, and there is some diversity of opinion among the commentators as to which of them is here in view. Personally, we think there is little or no room for doubt that the Holy Spirit *did not* have reference unto the first, for we are told, “And Moses *feared*, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian” (Exo. 2:14, 15). There he fled as the criminal, here he went forth as the commander of God’s people! Then he left Egypt in terror, but now “by faith.”

There are some, however, who find difficulty in the fact that Moses’ leaving of Egypt is here mentioned *before* his keeping of the Passover and sprinkling of the blood in verse 28. But this difficulty is self-created, by confining our present text unto a single event, instead of understanding it to refer to *the whole conduct* of Moses: his forsaking of Egypt is a general expression, which includes all his renouncing a continuance therein and his steady determination to depart therefrom. So too his “not fearing the wrath of the king” must not be restricted unto the state of his heart immediately following the Exodus, but also takes in his resolution and courage during the whole of his dealings with Pharaoh. And herein we may perceive again the *stability* of his faith, which withstood the most fiery ordeals, and which remained steadfast to the end. Thus did he supply a blessed illustration of “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).

The experiences through which Moses passed and the testings to which his faith was subjected, were no ordinary ones. First, he was bidden to enter the presence of Pharaoh and say, “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness” (Exo. 5:1). Let it be duly considered that for forty years Moses had lived the life of a shepherd in Midian, and now, with no army behind him, with none in Egypt’s court ready to second his request, he has to make this demand of the haughty monarch who reigned over the greatest empire then on earth. Such a task called for no ordinary faith. Nor did he meet with a favourable reception, instead, we are told, “And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” (Exo. 5:2).

Not only did the idolatrous king refuse point-blank to grant Moses' request, but he said, "Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. . . .Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves" (Exo. 5:4, 7). Well might the heart of the stoutest quake under such circumstances as these. To add to his troubles, the heads of the Israelites came unto Moses and said, "The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Exo. 5:21). Ah, faith must be tested; nor must it expect to receive any encouragement or assistance from men, no, not even from our own brethren-it must stand alone in the power of God.

Later, Moses was required to interview Pharaoh again, *after* Jehovah had informed them He had "hardened" his heart, and say, "The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink of the water of the river" (Exo. 7:16-18). It is easy for us now, knowing all about the happy sequel, to entirely *under-estimate* the severity of this trial. Seek to visualize the whole scene. Here was an insignificant Hebrew, belonging to a company of *slaves*, with no powerful "union" to press their claims. There was the powerful monarch of Egypt, who, humanly speaking, had only to give the word to his officers, and Moses had been seized, beaten, tortured, murdered. Yet, notwithstanding, he "feared not the wrath of the king."

We cannot now follow Moses through all the stages of his great contest with Pharaoh, but would pass on to the closing scene. After the tenth plague, Pharaoh called for Moses and proposed a compromise, which, upon Moses refusing, he said, "Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die" (Exo. 10:28). But Moses "feared not the wrath of the king," and boldly announced the final plague. Not only so, he declared that his servants should yet pay him homage (Exo. 11:4-8). "He had before him a bloody tyrant, armed with all the power of Egypt, threatening him with present death if he persisted in the work and duty which God had committed to him; but he was so far from being terrified, or declining his duty in the least, that he professeth his resolution to proceed, and denounceth destruction to the tyrant himself" (John Owen).

After the tenth plague had been executed, Moses led the children of Israel out of the land in which they had long groaned in bondage. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27). Even now he was not terrified by thoughts of what the enraged monarch might do, nor at the powerful forces which he most probably would send in pursuit; but staying his mind upon God, he was assured of the Divine protection. He allowed not gloomy forebodings to discourage him. Yet once more we would say, it is easy for us (in the light of our knowledge of the sequel) to under-estimate this marvel. Visualize the scene again. On the one hand was a powerful nation, who had long held the Hebrews in serfdom, and would therefore be extremely loath to let them altogether escape; on the other hand here was a vast concourse of people, including many thousands of women and children, unorganized, unarmed, unaccustomed to travel, with a howling wilderness before them.

Ah, my reader, does not such a situation as we have hastily sketched above, seem utterly hopeless? There did not seem one chance in a thousand of succeeding. Yet the spirit of Moses was undaunted, and he is here commended to us for his courage and resolution. But more-Pharaoh, accompanied by six hundred chariots and a great armed force, pursued them, and "when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?" (Exo. 14:10-11). Here was the crucial moment, the supreme test. Did Moses' heart fail him, was he now terrified by "the wrath of the king"? No indeed; so far from it, he calmly and confidently said unto the people, "*Fear ye not*, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exo. 14:13, 14).

O how the undaunted courage of Moses shames *our* petty fears! What cause have we to blush, and hang our heads in shame. Many are there who fear very much less than the wrath of a "king": such things as darkness and solitude, or even the rustling of a leaf, will frighten them. No doubt such fear is constitutional with some, but with the great majority it is a guilty conscience which makes them alarmed at a shadow. The best way for weak ones to overcome their timidity is to cultivate the sense of God's presence; and for the guilty, to confess and forsake their sins. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). Fear is the result of distrust, of taking the eye off God, of being unduly occupied with difficulties and troubles.

And what was it that enabled Moses to conduct himself with such firmness and boldness? What was it that delivered his heart from fearing the wrath of the king? FAITH, a spiritual, supernatural, God-given, God-energized faith. Reader,

do you know anything, experimentally, of *such* a faith? Again we would be reminded that “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Moses had heard, he had heard something from God, and his faith laid hold of and rested upon the same. What was it that he had heard? This, “Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye *shall* serve God upon this mountain” (Exo. 3:12). So too, if we are Christians, God has said to us, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Therefore “we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5, 6).

Perhaps someone may ask, But was there *no wavering* in Moses’ faith? Yes, dear reader, for he was a man of like passions with us. They who have a faith which never varies, which remains the same whether it be cloudy and stormy, or fair and sunny, have nothing but a natural and letter faith. A spiritual and supernatural faith is one which *we* did not originate and is one which we cannot call into exercise whenever we please: God imparted it, and He alone can renew and call it into action. When the leaders of Israel murmured against Moses, and charged him with endangering their lives (Exo. 5:21), we are told that “Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast Thou so *evil* entreated this people? why is it that Thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath done evil to this people; *neither hast thou delivered Thy people at all*” (Exo. 5:22, 23). Blessed is it to behold the patience of God with His failing servant, and to see how He comforted and strengthened him: Exodus 6:1-8.

“By faith he forsook Egypt.” Faith assures the heart of a *better portion* in return for anything God calls us to relinquish. No matter how attractive to the senses, no matter how popular with our fellows, no matter how necessary it may seem for the interests of our family, faith is convinced that God will not suffer us to be the losers: Genesis 12:1. So Abraham left Chaldea, so Ruth forsook Moab (Ruth 1:16). Here is one way in which a true faith may be discerned and known: if we were born and brought up in an idolatrous place, where honors, pleasures and treasures might be enjoyed, and we, for conscience sake, have forsaken that place, then surely we have a *spiritual* faith. Few are now required to do as Abraham did, but all *are* commanded to obey 2 Corinthians 6:14, 17.

Ah, there are many who forsake Egypt’s (the world’s) vices and pleasures, who do not separate from *its religion*, and *that* was the central thing in the final test which Moses’ faith had to overcome. Again and again Pharaoh sought a compromise, but with inflexible firmness Moses stood his ground. The demand of God was, “Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me *in the wilderness*” (Exo. 5:1): there must be a complete separation from the religion of the world. But that is something which the world cannot brook, for the withdrawal of God’s people condemns them; hence we find Pharaoh saying, “Go ye, sacrifice to your God *in the land*” (Exo. 8:25). But Moses was not to be moved, “We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, *as* He shall command us” (Exo. 8:27).

Next we are told Pharaoh said, “I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only *ye shall not go very far away*” (8:28): this was tantamount to saying, “If you are determined to adopt this holier than thou attitude, there is no reason why there should be a complete break between us.” After the Lord had further plagued Egypt, the king again sent for Moses and Aaron and asked, “*Who* are they that shall go?” Moses answered, “We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds” (Exo. 10:9). But that was too much for Pharaoh, who replied, “Not so: go now *ye that are men*, and serve the LORD” (10:11). See here in Pharaoh, my reader, our great Adversary, striving to get us to temporize: “If you are determined to forsake the church, at least leave your children in the Sunday School!” How subtle the devil is! What a *living* book is the Word! How thoroughly suited to our present lot and needs!

One more effort was made by Pharaoh to induce Moses to render only a partial obedience unto God’s demands: “Go ye, serve the LORD; *only let your flocks and your herds be stayed*” (10:24)-If you must be so unsociable, if you will be so mulish and not allow your children to remain in Sunday School, at least retain your *membership* with us and *pay* into the “church treasury” as hitherto! Ah, had Moses feared the wrath of the king, he had yielded this point. Instead, he remained firm, and said, “Thou must give us *also* sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. Our cattle also *shall* go with us; there shall *not an hoof* be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God” (10:25, 26). Well might the Apostle write, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: *for we are not ignorant of his devices*” (2 Cor. 2:11)-no, for they have been fully exposed to us in Holy Writ.

All of what has been before us above is included in these words “By faith he *forsook Egypt*,” and all of it is “written for *our* learning” (Rom. 15:4). The offers made by Pharaoh to Moses to prevent Israel from completely forsaking Egypt in their worship of the Lord, are, in essence, the very temptations which His people now have to overcome, if they are to fully heed and obey 2 Corinthians 6:14, 17, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, *and touch not the unclean thing.*” O my Christian reader, seek grace to obtain the uncompromising spirit of Moses. When urged to worship God in “Egypt” (i.e. the white-washed “churches” *of the world*), say it is impossible, for “what communion hath light with darkness!” When pressed to leave your children in a worldly Sunday School, to be instructed

by those who have not the fear of God upon them, refuse. When invited to at least retain your membership in the Holy Spirit-deserted “churches” and contribute of your means to their upkeep, decline to do so.

“Not fearing the wrath of the king.” The courage of Moses is here set forth in three degrees: he feared not *man*; he feared not the greatest of men, a *king*; he feared not that which most affrights people, the *wrath of a king*—“The king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion” (Prov. 19:12). It was his faith in God which expelled this fear. When faith is exercised, the greatest terrors cannot alarm saints. And, my reader, those who “forsake Egypt,” especially *religions* of Egypt, must expect to encounter the “wrath” of man: none hates so bitterly, none acts so cruelly, none come out more in their true colours, than the worldly religionist when the veneer of hypocritical piety has been seen through by a child of God. Yet *their* “wrath” is less to be feared than was Pharaoh’s: “If God be for us, who can be against us!” (Rom. 8:31).

“For he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). Ah, here is the key to all that has been before us. Moses “endured,” which tells us of the state of his heart. He “endured” the attractive honors and alluring pleasures of Egypt’s court; he “endured” the repeated compromises of Pharaoh; he “endured” the terrors which his conduct might inspire. His courage was no mere flash in the pan, or momentary bravado; but was steady and real. O how little of *this* faith and its blessed fruit of holy boldness is now to be seen in poor, degenerate Christendom. Yet how could it be otherwise, when worldliness has “quenched” the Spirit on every hand? May we who have, by sovereign grace, been drawn to Christ outside the camp, be very jealous and watchful against grieving the Spirit.

The precise word which is here rendered “endured” is not employed elsewhere in the New Testament. Scholars tell us that it is derived from a root meaning strength or fortitude, to bear evils, undergo dangers with resolution and courage, so as not to faint beneath them, but hold on our way to the end. It was a word most appropriate to express the firmness of Moses’ mind in this work of faith in “forsaking Egypt.” He met with a long course of difficulties, and was repeatedly threatened by the king; and, in addition, he had to endure a great conflict with his own unbelieving brethren. But he strengthened himself with spiritual courage and resolution to abide in his duty to the finish. *How?* Whereby was his strength renewed?

“For he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.” Ah, it was no mulish stupidity nor obstinate imprudence that wrought such a resolution in Moses, but the constant occupation of his heart with the Divine perfections. We say “the *constant* occupation,” for note carefully our text does not say “he endured because he *saw* Him who is invisible,” but “as *seeing* Him who is invisible”—it was a continuous act! O to be able to say in our measure, “I have *set the Lord always before me*” (Psa. 16:8). This is absolutely essential if faith and courage are to be kept healthy. Nothing else will enable us to “endure” the frictions and trials of life, the attractions and distractions of the world, the assaults of Satan.

“He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.” “God is said to be invisible (as He *is* absolutely) in respect of His essence, and is often so called in Scripture: Romans 1:20, Colossians 1:15, 1 Timothy 1:17. But there is a peculiar reason for this description of Him here. Moses was in that state and condition, and had those things to do, wherein he stood in need continually of Divine power and assistance. Whence this should proceed, he could not discern by his senses, his bodily eyes could behold no present assistant, for God is ‘invisible.’ And it requires an especial act of the mind in expecting help from Him who cannot be seen. Wherefore this is here ascribed to him. He saw Him who was in Himself invisible; that is, he saw Him by faith, whom he could not see with his eyes” (John Owen). This word “invisible” shows the uselessness (as well as sin) of making images to represent God, and warns against our forming any apprehensions in our mind patterned after the likeness of any visible object. Though God be invisible, yet He sees us!

“He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.” “A double act of the faith of Moses is intended herein. 1. A clear, distinct view and apprehension of God in His omnipresence, power and faithfulness. 2. A fixed trust in Him on their account, at all times and on all occasions. This he rested on, this he trusted to, that God was everywhere present with him, able to protect him, and faithful in the discharge of His promise” (John Owen). God is the proper object of faith: on which it rests, from which it expects every good, and to which it returns the glory for all.

O the surpassing excellency of faith. It takes in eternal, invisible, infinite objects. By His providences God often appears to be against His people, but faith knows He is for them. In this world we are subject to many trials and miseries, but faith knows that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). The bodies of God’s children die, are buried, and return to dust; but faith beholds a glorious resurrection for them. O the wondrous power of faith to rise above the things of sight and sense. It is true that neither the impartation of faith, nor its growth and exercise, lie within *our* power; nevertheless, we *are* responsible to avoid those things which becloud and weaken faith, and we are responsible to nourish faith. How very few make serious efforts *to see* “Him who is invisible!”

CHAPTER 19

The Faith of Moses—Part Four

(Heb. 11:28)

More is said about Moses than of any other individual in this 11th chapter of Hebrews. No less than five definite actings of his faith are there recorded. The reason for this is not far to seek. He was the lawgiver, and the boast of the Jews of Christ's day was, "We are Moses' disciples" (John 9:28). They were seeking acceptance with God on the ground of their own doings. They supposed that their outward conformity to the ordinances of Moses would secure the approbation of Heaven, and therefore, "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). It was under this influence that these converted Hebrews had been brought up, and therefore did the Holy Spirit press upon them the fact that it was *by faith*, and not by a legal spirit, their renowned ancestor had lived and acted.

The particular acting of Moses' faith which we are now to consider was one which would be singularly pertinent to the Spirit's design here: it manifested his trust in the Lamb and testified to the value which Moses placed upon the sprinkled blood. Instituting and observing the feast of the Passover, the leader of the Israelites set an example that could not be ignored without fatal consequences. It completely repudiated the awful error of thinking to escape from the wrath of God in consequence of any performances on the part of the creature. It effectively shuts up the sinner to Christ as his *only* hope. Let it be duly considered that the "Passover" was the *first* ordinance given to Israel.

How striking it is to see the lawgiver himself preaching by those actings of his recorded in our text, "*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). How great is the ignorance, then, which supposes that salvation by grace is peculiar to this Christian dispensation—as though God has had several ways of redeeming sinners. No, my reader, from the beginning to the end of human history every fallen descendant of Adam which enters Heaven will owe it to sovereign grace flowing to him through the appointed channel of faith, entirely irrespective of all his works, religious or irreligious, before he first trusts in Christ. Abel was saved thus: Hebrews 11:4. Noah "found grace in the eyes of the LORD": Genesis 6:8. Abraham "believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness": Romans 4:3. And the children of Israel were delivered from the Angel of Death because they sheltered beneath the blood of the lamb.

That which is now before our consideration formed an appropriate and blessed climax to the actings of Moses' faith recorded here in Hebrews 11: all the others led up to this one. His *refusing* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, his *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, his *esteeming* the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and his *forsaking* of Egypt would all have been in vain spiritually, that is, so far as his salvation was concerned, unless those had been followed by *faith in the lamb* and the efficacy of *its blood*. Turning away from the world is not sufficient: there must also be a turning unto God. The forsaking of sin is not enough: there must also be the laying hold of Christ. *This* is what is typically in view in our present text.

It is highly important that the closest attention be paid to *the order of truth* set forth in Hebrews 11:24-28. If this be done, the defectiveness of much modern "evangelism" will at once be apparent. The keeping of the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood *is not the first thing* recorded of Moses! No man can rightly value the blood of Christ while his heart is still wrapped up in the world, and to invite and exhort him to put his trust in the same, is being guilty of casting pearls before swine. No man can savingly believe in Christ while he is determined to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." *Repentance precedes faith* (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21): and repentance is a sorrowing over sin, a hatred of sin, and a turning from sin; and where there is no genuine repentance, there can be no "remission of sins": Mark 1:4. Let every preacher who reads this article carefully weigh *all* that is here recorded of Moses, and faithfully instruct his congregation that the different exercises of heart recorded in Hebrews 11:24-27 *must* precede that which is denoted in verse 28.

It is really deplorable that such elementary aspects of Truth as we have just pointed out above need to be stressed at this late date. Yet such is the tragic case. Laodicean Christendom is boasting of its riches, and knows not that it is poor and wretched and naked. Part of those "riches" which she boasts so loudly of today is the "great increase of light" which it is supposed that the study of "prophetic" and "dispensational" truth has brought to us. Yet not only is that a subtle device of Satan's coming as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), to *darken* men's understandings, and make them believe that his lies are "wonderful discoveries" and openings up of the Scriptures, but the present generation *has far less* real Light than Christendom enjoyed a century ago. By which we mean, there is far less faithful and fearless preaching of those things which make for practical godliness and holy living. But that is not the worst: Scriptural evangelism has well-nigh disappeared from the earth.

The “Gospel” which is being preached today is only calculated to deceive souls and bolster them up in a false hope. To make men believe that God loves them, while they are under His wrath (see John 3:36), is worse than a physician telling a diabetic subject that he may safely eat all he wishes. To withhold the preaching of *the Law*-its Divine authority, its inexorable demands, its spirituality (in requiring *inward* conformity to it: Matthew 5:22, 28), its awful curse-is to omit that which alone conveys a true knowledge of sin: see Romans 3:20, 7:7. To cry “Believe, believe,” and say nothing about *repentance*, is to falsify the terms of salvation: Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30. To invite sinners to receive Christ as their “Saviour” *before* they surrender to Him as their Lord, is to present a *false* “way of salvation.” To bid the lost “come to Christ” without telling them they must first “forsake the world,” is to fill the “churches” with unconverted souls. To tell sinners they may find rest unto their souls *without* taking Christ’s YOKE upon them, is to give the lie unto the Master’s own teaching: Matthew 11:29.

We offer no apology for this seeming digression from our present subject. Once again we would point out that it is our earnest desire in this book to write something more than a “commentary” on Hebrews 11, or give a bare “exposition” of its text: rather do we seek (as the Holy Spirit is pleased to enable) to address ourselves directly to the hearts of our readers, and press upon them *the personal and present* application of each verse to their own souls. In all probability a large proportion of the readers of this book are *deceived* souls, and we do not want to have to answer for their blood in the Day to come. Many of them have been lulled to sleep by the chloroforming “evangelism” of the day. Therefore we earnestly beg each one who scans these paragraphs to seriously and solemnly ask, Is there anything in my own heart’s history which answers to that which is said of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-27? If there is not, if you are not “*crucified to the world*” (Gal. 6:14), then Satan is fatally deluding you if you imagine that you are under the blood of Christ.

Suffer us then, dear reader, to continue addressing you directly, for a moment longer. We do not ask, first, Are you “resting on the finished work of Christ?” There are thousands who imagine they are so doing, who have never been converted. No, rather would we inquire, *Have you made your peace with God?* We are well aware *that* expression is ridiculed and denounced by a certain class who pose as being ultra-spiritual and exceptionally well-taught in the Scriptures, but they only betray their ignorance of the Word: see Isaiah 27:5, Luke 14:32. By asking whether you have “made your peace with God,” we mean, *Have you ceased fighting against Him, and have you yielded to His demands? Have you thrown down the weapons of your rebellion, and expressed an honest desire and determination to be in subjection to Him? Have you realized that living to please yourself and have your own way is a species of defiance, and have you truly surrendered yourself unto His claims?*

“Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest He that destroyed the firstborn should touch them” (Heb. 11:28). Let it be pointed out again that *this* was the point unto which all the previous actings of Moses’ faith led. While it is true that no sinner can “keep the Passover” or find protection under “the sprinkling of blood,” while his heart still loves the world, and is filled with its idols, nevertheless, his separation from and relinquishing of all which is opposed to God obtains not salvation for him. The blotting out of sins does not become ours until the atonement of Christ is received into our hearts by faith. Thus, by taking Hebrews 11:24-28 *as a whole*, we see how both the righteousness and the grace of God were honoured and magnified.

Our present verse (28) looks back to and gives an abridgment of that which is recorded in Exodus 12. It tells us of a further fruit of a supernatural faith. At first sight it may appear unto many that *this* particular work of faith is far less remarkable than some of those which have engaged our attention in previous articles. Yet when it be duly considered, when all the attendant circumstances are properly weighed, it will be seen that the conduct of Moses on this occasion was as much opposed to human reason and carnal wisdom, and issued from a Divine work of grace in his heart, as did Abraham’s leaving of Chaldea for an unknown country, his offering up of Isaac, or Joseph’s “making mention of the departing of the children of Israel.” We quote now from another who has brought out this point most forcibly and helpfully.

“The institution of the Passover was an act of faith, similar to that of Noah’s preparation of the ark (Heb. 11:7). To realize what this faith must have been, we have to go back to ‘that night,’ and note the special circumstances, which can alone explain the meaning of the words ‘by faith.’ God’s judgments had been poured out on Egypt and its king, and its people. A crisis had arrived, for, after nine plagues had been sent, Pharaoh and the Egyptians still remained obdurate. Indeed, Moses had been threatened with death if he ever came into Pharaoh’s presence again (Exo. 10:28, 29). On the other hand, the Hebrews were in more evil case than ever; and Moses, who was to have delivered them, had not made good his promises.

“It was at such a moment that Moses *heard* from God what he was to do. To sight and to sense it must have seemed most inadequate, and quite unlikely to accomplish the desired result. Why should this last plague be expected to accomplish what the nine had failed to do, with all their cumulative terrors? Why should the mere sprinkling of the blood have such a remarkable effect? And if they were indeed to leave Egypt, ‘that same night’ why should the people be

burdened with all those minute ceremonial observances at the very moment when they ought to be making preparation for their departure!?

“Nothing but *faith* could be of any avail here. Everything was opposed to human understanding and human reasoning. With all the consciousness of ill-success upon him, nothing but unfeigned faith in the living God, and what he had heard from Him, could have enabled Moses to go to the people and rehearse all the intricacies of the Paschal observances, and tell them to exercise the greatest care in the selection of a lamb on the tenth day of the month, to be slain on the fourteenth day, and eaten with (to them) an unmeaning ceremonial.

“It called for no ordinary confidence in what Moses had *heard* from God to enable him to go to his brethren who, in their deep distress, must have been ill-disposed to listen; for, hitherto, his efforts had only increased the hatred of their oppressors and their own miseries as bondmen. It would, to human sight, be a difficult if not impossible task to persuade the people, and convince them of the absolute necessity of complying with all the minute details of the observance of the Paschal ordinance. But this is just where *faith* came in. This was just the field on which it could obtain its greatest victory. Hence we read that ‘by faith’ every difficulty was overcome; the Feast was observed, and the Exodus accomplished. ‘All was based on the hearing of faith.’ The words of Jehovah produced the faith, and were at once the cause and effect of all the blessings” (E.W.B.).

It should be evident, then, from what has been pointed out above that the actions of Moses recorded in Exodus 11 and 12 proceeded from no mere natural faith, but were the supernatural fruit issuing from a supernatural root. His conduct must have exposed him unto the ridicule of the Egyptians, but with implicit confidence in the wisdom, distinguishing mercy, and faithfulness of Jehovah, he acted. See here, again, how inseparable are faith and obedience: the very “faith” of Moses which is mentioned in our present text, *consisted in* an implicit compliance with all the regulations specified by the Lord. He observed the Passover in his own person, and he ordered the people to do likewise, though it involved their procuring many thousands of lambs. He observed the Passover in fullest assurance that thereby all the firstborn of the Hebrews would be delivered. Though all Israel kept the Passover, it was by Moses that God delivered the institution of it.

The Passover was one of the most solemn institutions of the Old Testament, and one of the most eminent types of Christ. “1. It was a lamb that was the matter of this ordinance (Exo. 12:3). And in allusion hereunto, as also to other sacrifices that were instituted afterwards, Christ is called ‘The Lamb of God’ (John 1:29). 2. This lamb was to be taken out from the flock of the sheep (Exo. 12:5). So was the Lord Christ to be taken out of the flock of the church of mankind, in His participation of our nature, that He might be a meet sacrifice for us (Heb. 2:14-17). 3. This lamb being taken from the flock was to be shut up separate from it (Exo. 12:6). So although the Lord Christ was taken from amongst men, yet He was separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26), that is, absolutely free from all that contagion of sin which others are infected withal. 4. This lamb was to be without blemish (Exo. 12:5), which is applied unto the Lord Christ: ‘a Lamb without blemish and without spot’ (1 Peter 1:19). 5. This lamb was to be slain, and was slain accordingly (Exo. 12:6). So was Christ slain for us—a Lamb, in the efficacy of His death, slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). 6. This lamb was so slain, as that it was a sacrifice (Exo. 12:27); it was the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover. And Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7). 7. The lamb being slain, was to be roasted (Exo. 12:8-9), which signified the fiery wrath that Christ was to undergo for our deliverance. 8. That ‘neither shall ye break a bone thereof’ (v. 46), was expressly to declare the manner of the death of Christ (John 19:33-36). 9. The eating of him, which was also enjoined, and that wholly and entirely (Exo. 12:8, 9), was to instruct the church in the spiritual food of the flesh and blood of Christ, in the communication of the fruits of His mediation unto us by faith” (John Owen).

“Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest He that destroyed the firstborn should touch them” (Heb. 11:28). Two things are here noted separately, the lamb and its blood. In type they spoke, distinctively, of the Person and work of Christ, for it was *the Person* of Christ which gave value to His work—His Divine Person being the “altar” which “sanctified” the offering of His humanity (Matt. 23:19). This is ever the *order* of Scripture: “Behold (1) the Lamb of God, which (2) taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); “I determined not to know anything among you, save (1) Jesus Christ, and (2) Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2); “in the midst of the elders, stood (1) a Lamb (2) as it had been slain” (Rev. 5:6). Here is the Analogy of Faith for the preacher to follow today: it is not the blood which is first to be proclaimed to the sinner, but the wondrous and glorious God-man Mediator who shed His blood for His people.

The Hebrews, equally with the Egyptians, were exposed unto the Divine vengeance, when the Angel of Death went forth on His dread work that memorable night, for “*all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). And naught but their placing the substitutionary death of an innocent victim between their guilty selves and an holy God could protect from the judgment announced against them. Trusting in their descent from Abraham would avail them not. Appeal to their good works and religious performances would have sufficed not. They might have spent the entire night in fasting and prayer, in penitently confessing their sins and crying unto God for mercy, but none of those exercises would have stood them in any good stead. “When I *see the blood*, I will pass over you” (Exo. 12:13) made known the all-

essential requirement. So it is now-nothing but *the blood of Christ* can cleanse from sin and deliver from the death penalty of God's broken law.

"Through faith" or better "By faith," for the Greek here is the same as in the previous verses. "He kept the Passover," that is, both instituted and observed it, as the Redeemer did His own "supper." "And the sprinkling of blood": this emphasizes an important distinction. "Without *shedding* of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22), and without *sprinkling* of blood (cf. 1 Peter 1:2) the virtues of Christ's atonement are not brought into the soul. The "sprinkling" of the blood has reference to *the application* to one's own self. The shedding of Christ's blood is the *ground* on which atonement was made for the sins of His people; the sprinkling of it is the *means* of reaping benefit thereby. The sprinkling of the blood on the door of the house in Exodus 12:13 was both a sign to the Destroyer that He should not enter, and an assurance to the household that they were safe.

It is by the spiritual "sprinkling" or applying of Christ's blood that all the benefit thereof redounds to us. It corresponds to the laying of a plaster on a sore, to the drinking of a wholesome potion, to the eating of food, to the putting on of a garment: the *benefit* of all these ariseth from a *fit application* of them. The blood of Christ is "sprinkled" on the soul in two ways. First, by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:11), who inwardly persuades the soul of a *right* that *it* has to Christ and to all that He did and suffered for our redemption. Second, by faith (Acts 15:9), for faith is the hand of the soul which *receives* all spiritual benefits. Faith moves the regenerated soul to rest upon Christ for a personal benefit of His obedience unto death. On this ground the Apostle exhorts, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts *sprinkled from an evil* (guilty) conscience" (Heb. 10:22).

"Lest He that destroyed the firstborn should touch them" (Heb. 11:28). Primarily, the Destroyer was the Lord Himself (Exo. 12:12, 23); secondarily, and instrumentally, the reference is to an angel: compare 2 Samuel 24:16, 2 Kings 19:35. Whoever is not "sprinkled" with the blood of Christ is exposed to the anger of God. But so secure are those who are under the same, that the Destroyer shall not so much as "touch" them-He shall do them *no harm*: cf. 1 John 5:18. God proportioned His judgment upon Egypt according to their sin: Pharaoh had ordered his people to cast every son born unto the Hebrews into the river (Exo. 1:22), and now *their* firstborn were to be slain. Thus God manifested the equity of His proceedings against them. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Our verse as a whole teaches Christians that there must be *the exercise of faith* in order to a right use of the means and institutions which God has appointed: whether in reading the Word, in prayer, in baptism, or the Lord's supper: "*without* faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6). It also shows us that real faith will not use that for which it has no Divine warrant. An active obedience unto the authority of Christ in His commands is exactly required in all that we do in Divine worship. Well suited to the case of the Hebrews was this example of Moses: to exercise faith in the Lamb and persevere in the duties which God has appointed. No matter how unreasonable it might seem to carnal wisdom, no matter what inconvenience and persecution it might entail, trust in and obedience to the Lord was their duty and blessedness.

CHAPTER 20

The Faith of Israel—Part One

(Heb. 11:29)

The Apostle's object in this 11th chapter of Hebrews is to show the power of real faith in God to produce supernatural acts, to overcome difficulties which are insuperable to mere nature, and to endure trials which are too much for flesh and blood to bear up under. Various examples have been adduced in illustration. A further notable one is now before us. In it we see how faith enabled Israel to fearlessly venture themselves to enter a strangely formed valley between two mountainous ridges of water, and to reach in safety the opposite shore. In like manner, a real faith in God will enable the Christian to pass through trials and troubles which destroy multitudes of his fellow-creatures, and which will in due time conduct him into the enjoyment of perfect bliss.

The force of the above example is greatly heightened by a striking and most solemn contrast. The power of faith in enabling Israel to safely cross the Red Sea is demonstrated by the helpless and hopeless destruction of the Egyptians, who sought to follow them. "The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen" (Exo. 14:23). But they had no faith. They were moved by passion, by hatred of the Hebrews. It was night when the army of God undertook their strange journey, yet though dark, the hosts of Pharaoh

presumptuously and blindly followed. But now had arrived the hour when the long-insulted Divine forbearance was to be avenged.

“And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians” (Exo. 14:24, 25). But it was too late. The haughty monarch of Egypt and his powerful retinue now discovered how vain it was to fling themselves against the bosses of Jehovah’s buckler: that which had been a channel of deliverance to the believing Israelites, became the grave of their enemies. Thereby are we shown that all attempts of unbelievers to obtain what faith secures is utterly futile, and doomed to certain disappointment.

But here a difficulty presents itself, and a formidable one it has proved unto most of those who sought to grapple with it. In our text we are told that, “By faith they passed through the Red Sea,” whereas in Hebrews 3:18, 19 it is said, “To whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” Was, then, their faith only a temporary one, like that of the stony-ground hearers? No, for the “faith” mentioned in every other verse in Hebrews 11 was a *saving* one, and we dare not arbitrarily assume this in verse 29 was an altogether different one.

The solution of our present difficulty lies in attentively noting the pronoun which the Holy Spirit has here employed: “By faith *they* passed through the Red Sea.” It is not there said that “By faith the children of Israel” did so, for it is very evident from their later history that the vast majority of them were “a very forward generation, children in whom is *no* faith” (Deut. 32:29). The reference, then, in our text is unto Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, and the believing remnant among the Hebrews. But, it may be asked, Did not the unbelieving portion of the Nation also pass safely through the Red Sea? Truly, and therein we have an illustration of the fact that unbelievers are frequently made partakers of temporal blessings as the result of their association with the people of God. Another example of this principle is found in Acts 27:24, where we see that an entire ship’s company were spared for Paul’s sake.

“By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned” (11:29). In seeking to expound this verse we cannot do better than adopt the division of the Puritan Manton thereon, considering it three ways: historically, sacramentally, and applicatively. First, then, historically.

Our text takes us back to what is recorded in Exodus 14. There we learn that when at last Pharaoh consented to let the Hebrews go, he soon repented of his grant, and being informed by his spies that the Israelites were entangled in the straits of Pihahiroth, he determined to pursue, and either recover or destroy them. At the head of a great military force he swiftly went after them. The consequence was that “When Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness” (Exo. 14:10-12).

A truly desperate situation now faced Moses and the company he was leading. “Shut in, between the great fortress ‘Migdol,’ which was on the ‘Shur’ or wall (built to protect Egypt from Asia), and the sea, with Pharaoh’s host behind them, and shut in on the other side by the wilderness: Exodus 14:2, 3. It was indeed a crisis” (E.W.B.). What could the poor Israelites do? Fight they dare not, being a multitude of undisciplined people, of all sexes and ages, and pursued by a regular and powerful army of enemies. Flee they could not, for they were completely hemmed in on every side. To all outward appearances their case seemed hopeless; and to human reason, nothing but sore destruction might be expected.

The situation which confronted Israel *was* a hopeless one so far as *they* were concerned, and had not the Lord shown Himself strong on their behalf, they had undoubtedly perished. But, “if God be *for* us, who can be against us?” Ah, my reader, that is the great thing for each of us to make sure of, and when we have done so, to seek grace to rest with unshaken confidence upon it. Has not God promised, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee” (Isa. 43:2)! What better assurance than that can the believing heart ask for? No matter how deep and wide-stretching, no matter how dark and foreboding the “waters” of adverse circumstances may be unto sight and sense, has not He who cannot lie declared, “They *shall not* overflow thee”?!

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever” (Exo. 14:13). Undeterred by the chiding of the people, and wisely making no reply thereto, Moses turned their minds away from the outward danger and directed their thoughts unto Jehovah. They had “lifted up their eyes” and beheld the Egyptians (v. 10), and in consequence they were sore afraid; but there was something else for *faith* to “see,” namely, “the salvation (or

deliverance) of the LORD,” which was not yet visible to natural sight. If they were steadfastly occupied with *that* their trembling hearts would be stilled.

Admire, dear reader, the confident assurance which Divine grace wrought in the heart of Moses, for by nature he was a frail man of like passions and infirmities as we. But there was no wavering or doubting on his part: “see the salvation of the LORD, which He *will* show to you today”: that was the language of faith-of a supernatural, God-given faith. Moses was not engaged with the difficulties and dangers of the trying situation which confronted them; instead, he was occupied with One before whom all difficulties disappear like mists before the rising sun. “The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (v. 14). Once the soul is able to rest on that fact, doubtings end and alarms are silenced.

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Faith must have a foundation to stand upon, and the only firm and sure one is the promise of the living God. “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will show to you today . . . The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” afforded the necessary ground for the faith of each believing Hebrew to rest upon. The eye of faith must see that Divine “salvation” or deliverance, before the eye of sense beholds it: only the sure word of God could give strength to their hearts to advance into the ocean before them. When the promise had been “heard,” and not before, then came the order “Go forward.”

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: but lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea” (Exo. 14:15, 16). Thus we learn that the heart of Moses was engaged in silent supplication at this time. The Lord’s statement here is not to be understood as a rebuke. No, Moses was waiting the word of command, and until it was given, he stayed himself from the Lord. “And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left” (v. 22).

“When Moses gave the signal by his rod, the sea miraculously retreated, standing up like heaps of congealed ice on either side while they passed through. This is done, and they go on safely; the sea flanked them on both sides; the rear was secured by the cloudy and fiery pillar interposing between them and Pharaoh’s army, till such a time as all were out of danger, and safely arrived at the further shore; and so neither man nor child was hurt. The Egyptians followed the chase, as malice is perverse and blind, and those whom God designeth to destruction take the ready course to bring it upon their own heads; for at the signal again of Moses stretching forth his rod, the returning waters swallowed them all up in a moment” (T. Manton).

“A greater instance, with respect unto the work of Divine providence, of the power of faith on the one hand, and of unbelief with obdurate presumption on the other, there is not on record in the whole book of God. Here we have the end and issue of the long controversy that was between these two people, the Egyptians and the Israelites; a certain type and evidence of what will be the last end of the contest between the world and the Church. Their long conflict shall end in the complete salvation of the one, and the utter destruction of the other” (John Owen).

Though it was night, the Divine pillar of cloud “gave light” unto Israel (Exo. 14:20). Dreadful indeed must have appeared those walls of water, for the sea would be raised unto a very great height on either side of them. It called for no ordinary faith to put themselves between such walls, as were ready in their own nature to fall on them unto their destruction any moment, abiding upright only under an invisible restraint. But they had the command of God for their warrant and the promise of God for their security, and these, when laid hold of, are sufficient to overcome all fears and dangers. That Moses himself, to guide and encourage them (and as the type of Christ) took the lead, is clear from Isaiah 63:11-12, God “led them by the right hand of Moses” through the sea.

Let us now briefly consider the remarkable incident related in our text from a *sacramental* viewpoint. In 1 Corinthians 10:1, 2 we are told, “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” From this Scripture we learn that Israel’s passage through the Red Sea had the same signification that Christian baptism now has. The points of resemblance are many, and were developed at length by Manton, and more so by Gouge, from whom we here give a digest.

1. The ministry of Moses was confirmed by this miracle, so that the Israelites were obliged to take him for their leader and lawgiver: so the miracles wrought by Christ assure us that He was sent by God as our lawgiver, which we must hear and obey. 2. Israel’s experience is (figuratively) denominated a “baptism” because it signified the difference which God puts between His people and His enemies: the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians was sealed by their passage through the Red Sea. Similarly baptism is said to be an answering figure to the ark of Noah (1 Peter 3:20, 21): as those in the ark were exempted from the deluge, so those in Christ are exempted from the deluge of wrath which will yet overwhelm the world.

3. They were baptised “in the cloud and in the sea,” because by submitting to God’s command they gave up themselves to His direction: so in baptism we dedicate ourselves unto Christ, avowing Him to be our Lord and Master. 4. The passing through the Red Sea and baptism had both the same outward sign, which is water (Matt. 3:6). 5. They had like rites, which were entering into the water and coming out of it (Acts 8:38, 39). 6. They had both the same ground, which was God’s command and promise (Exo. 14:13, 16 and Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16). 7. They were both for the same people, namely, the children of God (Matt. 28:19). 8. They were but once administered (Eph. 4:5).

Let us now consider some of the *practical* lessons which this marvelous incident is designed to teach us. 1. The children of God are sometimes called on *to face great trials*: a Red Sea of difficulty and trouble confronts them. Let it be duly observed that it was not an enemy who put the sea there, but God Himself! This tells us that the Red Sea represents some great and trying providence which the Lord places in the path of each new-born Christian: it is in order to try his faith and test the sincerity of his trust in God. Often this trial is encountered soon after conversion. Sometimes it arises from opposition of ungodly members of our own family. Or, you are engaged in some business-perhaps requiring you to work on the Sabbath day-in which you cannot now conscientiously continue. It means renouncing your means of livelihood, and you cannot see how it can be done and provide things honest in the sight of all men. As you emerged from the bondage of Egypt you thought it would be easy to surrender everything to God, but now a Red Sea of testing is before you, and it appears unfordable.

2. The children of God are sometimes *terrified by powerful enemies*. The Egyptians who pursued Israel up to the Red Sea may be spiritualized to represent those sins of the Christians from which he expected to be completely delivered. For a little while after conversion sin does not much trouble the newly-regenerated saint: he is filled with joy and praise at the great things which the Lord has done for him. But it is not long before he discovers with the Apostle “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:23). Satan now pursues the young saint, and often it seems as though all the powers of Hell were let loose against him. At such a time our sins appear more formidable to us than before they were forgiven: in Egypt our taskmasters only appeared with their whips, but now they are mounted and in chariots! Ah, after conversion sin looks far more frightful to the saint than ever it did before, and we feel the plague of our heart much more acutely.

3. The people of God are often *troubled with faint hearts*. When the children of Israel saw the Egyptians they were sore afraid, and when they beheld the Red Sea they murmured against their deliverer. A faint heart is the worst foe a Christian has here; when the anchor of faith is fixed deep in the Rock, he need never fear the storm; but when the hand of faith is palsied, or the eye of faith be dim, it will go hard with us. When faith is dormant the most insignificant stream will make us quiver and cry, I shall be drowned in the flood!-But when faith is dominant we fear not an ocean of difficulty or danger. The babe in Christ has but little faith, for he has but little experience: he has not yet proved God’s promises and knows not His faithfulness. But as he grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, and becomes established in the faith, he will not despair before Red Seas and Egyptians; but meanwhile, he often trembles and asks, “How shall I ever find deliverance?”

4. The people of God are here instructed *how to act under great trials*. The first word which the Israelites received in the hour of their great emergency was, “Fear ye not, stand still”; the second was “And see the salvation (deliverance) of the LORD, which He will show to you today”; the third was, “Go forward” (Exo. 14:13, 15). It is of first importance that we should diligently attend to the Divine order of those three things: we are not equipped and ready to “Go forward” until we have “seen” (by faith) the “salvation of the LORD,” and that cannot be properly seen until our fears are calmed and we stand still; or, in other words, till we turn from all self-help and cease from all the feverish activities of the flesh.

The continuous call of God to the Christian is “Go forward”: persevering steadfastly along the path of duty, walking in that narrow way which the Divine commands and precepts have laid down for us. No matter what obstacles may confront you, no matter what your circumstances may be, no matter what Red Sea of difficulty or danger be before you, “Go forward” is God’s authoritative word to you. “Ah, but often that is far from being an easy thing to do!” Quite true, dear friend; yea, we will state it still more strongly: it is often *impossible* to mere nature. What, then, is to be done when the heart faints, when the soul is well-nigh overwhelmed by the greatness of the difficulty or danger, standing right in your path? Two things; first “Stand still.” Your own efforts to better matters have brought no relief, your own wisdom can devise no solutions; very well, then “stand still”: cease from all attempts at self-help.

“But,” you answer, “I have my responsibilities to discharge, my duties to perform.” Quite true: but admittedly you have now reached the place where a Red Sea is before you; you are dismayed and know not which way to turn. Here, then, is God’s word to you in this dire emergency: “Stand still.” This means, Get down on your knees, and cry unto the Lord: tell Him all about your trouble, unburden yourself freely and fully unto Him; spread your urgent need before Him. Probably, you answer, “I have done so, and thus far no way through my Red Sea has appeared before me.” Then you are now ready for His next word.

“And see the salvation (deliverance) of the LORD, which He *will* show you.” And what does that mean? This, *the exercise of faith* in the living God, the trusting in Him *to undertake* for you, the confident expectation He *will do so*. Cry unto the Holy Spirit to work this faith in you: remain on your knees until He has given you real assurance that your Father *will* show Himself strong on your behalf; wait before Him till one of His promises is applied to your heart in power. *Then* you are ready to “Go forward,” to resume your duties and discharge your responsibilities: to look for work, to go on with renewed strength. That Christian is only ready to “Go forward” when faith has *seen* that which is invisible to sight and sense, namely, the “salvation (deliverance) of the LORD” *before* it is actually wrought for us!

The way in which the Christian is required to walk as he journeys through this world on his way to Heaven is *the path of obedience* to God’s commands. Naught but a spiritual faith inclines the heart to comply with God’s demands, and upon compliance to expect the mercy promised: “LORD, I have hoped for Thy salvation, and done Thy commandments” (Psa. 119:166). This is the great business of faith: as the Israelites were to obey God, and to wait for His deliverance out of their imminent danger. Naught but a God-given faith imparts courage to obey God in the most difficult crisis. If we be bidden to go into the Red Sea we must not forbear, for none of God’s commands are to be disputed, however contrary they be to flesh and blood. Faith teaches us to depend upon God in the greatest extremities. Faith receives the promise of God upon the condition or terms which He has specified. If Israel were to receive the “salvation of the LORD,” they *must* do what He bade. Faith and obedience can no more be separated than can light and heat in the sun.

As Abraham, at the call of God, went out of Chaldea, “not knowing whither he went,” so Israel was required to “Go forward” through the Red Sea stretched before them. Probably it was not until their feet touched the brink that the waters divided. Nature might have gone over it, but *faith* passed safely “through” it! They feared they would be destroyed by Pharaoh’s hosts. The very last thing that they would have looked to as a means of escape would be the sea! Yet, in obedience to the Divine command, “The children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left” (Exo. 14:22). Learn, then, dear reader, we never lose by obeying God.

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea” (Heb. 11:29). True faith lifts a man above himself, puts into him a spirit which is more than human, and enables him to rise above the obstacles of reason and sense. Faith emboldened the hitherto trembling Israelites to venture through that strange chasm between the watery walls. “As by dry land” is added to magnify the Divine providence in making a path in the ocean’s bottom fit for women and children to tread upon-like a plain and beaten highway. By faith they “passed through”: they took not only a few steps, but continued to perseveringly march mile after mile and hour after hour. Hesitate not, my brethren, to venture upon anything which God calleth you unto; be assured that He will safely carry you through all difficulties and dangers. “Which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned”: the very means of Israel’s deliverance was their destruction: *see* 2 Corinthians 2:16! It was a just retribution for the slaying of the male Hebrew children in the waters (Exo. 1:22).

5. The people of God may *be assured of the Divine Providence*. When Israel “by faith,” obeyed the Divine command to “Go forward,” God wrought a miracle and delivered them from their dire situation. This is recorded for the encouragement of *our* hearts. It was God who had placed the Red Sea where it was, and it was God who opened the way for Israel through it. So, Christian reader, it is God (and *not* the Devil) who has brought about the problem, the emergency, the danger which now confronts you; for “*of Him . . . are all things*” (Rom. 11:36). As He has made your Red Sea, only He can cleave a way through it for you. Trust, then, in His unerring wisdom. Count upon His mighty power working on your behalf. “Stand still” and rest yourself upon God. View “by faith” anticipatively, expectantly, His “salvation” or deliverance. “Go forward” in obedience to His commands, and He will show Himself strong on your behalf. *He* never fails those who fully trust and unreservedly obey Him.

CHAPTER 21

The Faith of Israel—Part Two

(Heb. 11:30)

In the preceding verse we had the faith of the believing remnant of Israel under the command and example of Moses; in our present text we have an exhibition and triumph of their faith under the leadership of Joshua. There we beheld what faith accomplished under their exodus from Egypt, here we see what it achieved upon their entering the promised land. As the yoke of bondage was by faith broken asunder, so by the same faith the people of God were to obtain possession of

Canaan. Thereby we are taught that the true life of the saint is, from the beginning to end, one of faith. Without faith no progress can be made, no victories be obtained, no fruit be brought forth unto God's glory. It is solemn to note that an interval of forty years' duration comes in between Hebrews 11:29 and 30. Those years were occupied in the wilderness. They were a judgment from God because of unbelief (Heb. 3). Reader, how many years of your life record no actings of faith to the praise of Divine grace?

The remarkable incident referred to in our text is related at length in the 6th chapter of Joshua, which opens by telling us, "Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in" (v. 1). Israel had reached the borders of Canaan. They had safely crossed the Jordan, but could not enter the land because of Jericho, which was a powerful fortress barring their ingress. This was one of the cities which had affrighted the spies, causing them to say, "The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to Heaven" (Deut. 1:28): to their eyes the cities appeared impregnable, and far too secure for them to take.

Jericho was a frontier town. It was the key-city at the entrance to Canaan. Its capture was absolutely necessary before any progress could be made by Israel in their conquering and occupying of their promised inheritance. Failure to capture it would not only discourage the children of Israel, but would greatly strengthen the morale of the Canaanites. It was the enemy's leading stronghold, which doubtless, they considered to be quite invulnerable. Yet it fell to a people who possessed no artillery, and without them fighting any battle. All they did, in response to Jehovah's orders, was to march by faith around the city once each day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day, when they gave a great shout, and the walls fell down flat before them. Many important lessons are taught us therein, a few of which we will briefly mention, before dwelling at greater length upon the outstanding one.

First, God's ways are often entirely different from ours. Who ever heard of a powerful fortress being completely demolished in response to a company of people walking around it? Ah, God delights in staining the pride of man. The leader and lawgiver of Israel was preserved in an ark of bulrushes. The mighty giant of the Philistines was overcome by a sling and a stone. The prophet Elijah was sustained by a widow's handful of meal. The forerunner of Christ dwelt in a wilderness and fed upon locusts and wild honey. The Saviour Himself was born in a stable and laid in a manger. His selected ambassadors were, for the most part, unlettered fishermen. Striking illustrations are these of the sentence beginning this paragraph. The things which are highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God. It is well for us to remember this.

Second, God is independent of all natural means and superior to all the "laws of nature." It is true that, as a general rule, God is pleased to bless the use of natural means, and that He frequently accomplishes His ends by the operations of those laws of nature which He has set in motion; but it is a great mistake to imagine that He is tied down either by the one or the other. What natural "means" were employed in Israel's crossing of the Jordan or their capturing of Jericho? What natural "means" were used in the preserving of Daniel in the lion's den or Jonah in the whale's belly? And what "laws of nature" were observed in connection with the birth of Isaac, the feeding of Elijah by the ravens, or the preserving whole the three Hebrews in Babylon's fiery furnace? Yes, God *is* superior to all means and laws. It is well for us to remember this too.

Third, formidable difficulties and powerful oppositions are encountered in the Warfare of Faith. One will not follow the path of faith very far before he comes face to face with that which challenges all his courage and defies all his natural resources and powers. Jordan rivers and Jericho fortresses still exist. But though the one may be unfordable and the other appear impregnable, yet they are the veriest trifles to the Almighty. The dimensions which they assume unto our vision is largely determined by the measure in which our hearts are engaged with the Omnipotent One. Those formidable difficulties and powerful obstacles are placed in our path *by God*, for the purpose of testing us, for the training of faith, as opportunities to trust in and glorify the Lord.

Fourth, Satan's strongholds cannot stand before a people who are obedient to and who rely fully upon the living God. This fact is surely written in large letters across Joshua 6. The Canaanites were completely under the dominion of the Evil One, yet here we see one of their principal fortresses tumbling down like a frail booth when a powerful wind strikes it. To unbelief these cities might appear "walled up to Heaven" and seem impregnable, but faith laughs at such things, knowing that God has only to breathe upon them and they will collapse at once. Thus it was in the early days of Christianity, when the imposing citadels of Paganism crumbled away before the faithful ministry of the Apostles. Thus it was at the time of the great Reformation in the sixteenth century, when the kingdom of the Papacy was shaken to its very foundations by the courageous preaching of Luther and his contemporaries. Thus it was, in many parts, some fifty years ago, when the high places of heathendom fell down before the onslaughts of the missionaries.

And why is it we are not witnessing the same Gospel triumphs in our generation? Why is it that Romanism has now regained so much of its lost ground, and is forging ahead in so many directions? Why is it that on the "foreign field" the forces of Satan are advancing instead of retreating? And why is it that in the so-called Christian lands a growing number

of Jerichos defy the prayers and efforts of the saints? Is it because God's arm is now waxed short? Perish the thought. Is it because the Scriptures are obsolete and unfitted to the needs of this twentieth century? Far, far from it. What, then, is the matter? This: *there is a grieved Spirit in our midst*, and in consequence *His power is withheld*. The Holy Spirit of God has been "quenched" (1 Thess. 5:19), and therefore the feverish and frenzied efforts of present-day Christendom avail not.

And *why* is the Spirit of God "grieved"? *What is it* that has "quenched" His power in our midst? This, we have departed from *God's way*, we have ignored His orders, we have substituted human devices, we have put our confidence in carnal weapons. Instead of encompassing the walls of Jericho after the Divine order, we have resorted to worldly allurements, seeking to win over the Canaanites by fleshly attractions. My brethren, we cannot hope to have Israel's victories until we emulate Israel's example. We will never again witness a return to apostolic progress until we get back to apostolic methods. There can be no improvement until we truly recognize that it is "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). And the power of the Spirit will not be manifested in our midst until we once more enter the path of obedience, *doing God's work in God's prescribed way*, and confidently counting upon Him to honour and bless such efforts.

Fifth, but the outstanding lesson to be learned from this incident is that which is stated in our text, where the fall of Jericho is attributed to *the faith* of the believing Israelites. "Do we think enough of faith, chosen by Divine omnipotent love, to be its channel? God alone doeth great marvels, but it is through the faith of His saints. All the victories of Israel were wrought by faith. Divine power and grace redeemed them on that memorable night; but it was the faith of Moses which kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood. It was God who divided the Red Sea, but in answer to the silent prayer of faith which ascended from the heart of His servant. All miracles of healing recorded in the Gospels were wrought by faith. Jesus prayed to the Father, and then fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes. Jesus lifted up His eyes to Heaven, and then said 'Ephphatha, Be thou loosed.' Jesus by faith thanked God that He heard Him always, and then uttered His mighty 'Lazarus, come forth.'

"And faith was wrought also in the recipient of Divine favour: 'Thy faith hath healed thee'; 'Be it unto thee as thou hast believed.' Such were frequently Christ's words. The people who perished in the wilderness entered not into God's rest because of unbelief; and because of their unbelief, Jesus could not show many miracles in some places: 'Believe only, and thou shalt see the glory of God.'

"Israel's history is the history of God's omnipotent saving grace and of man's faith. From Heaven descends miracle; from earth ascends faith. From the election of Abraham to the birth of Moses, from the Passover and the Red Sea to the dividing of the river Jordan, all is miracle, and all has to go through the faith of some chosen saint. Israel is before Jericho, a walled and fenced city; it is not by power and might, but by faith, that they are to take it" (A. Saphir).

Let us consider the *various aspects of faith* which were manifested by the believing Israelites on this memorable occasion. 1. The *daring* of their faith. When Israel crossed the Jordan, they, as it were, burned all their bridges and boats behind them. They were cut off from flight; they had no houses to which they could retire, and no fortress to which they could retreat. They were now in the enemy's territory, and victory or death were the only alternatives. To march peacefully and quietly around those walls of Jericho seemed a perilous undertaking: what was to hinder the Canaanites from shooting at or casting down rocks upon them? It was truly an adventure of faith, and it is venturesome faith which God delights to honour. Unbelief is hesitant and timorous, but bold faith is confident and courageous. O to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

There are three degrees of faith. There is a faith which *receives*, when as empty-handed beggars we come to Christ and accept Him as our Lord and Saviour: John 1:12. There is also a faith which *reckons*, which counts upon God to fulfill His promises and undertake for us: 2 Timothy 1:12. There is also a faith which *risks*, which dares something for the Lord. This aspect of faith was exemplified by Moses when he ventured to confront the king of Egypt and make known Jehovah's demands. This daring of faith was manifested by David when he went forth to engage the mighty Goliath. We see it again in Elijah, when, single-handed, he encountered the host of Jezebel's false prophets on Carmel. We see it again when Daniel dared to be cast into the lion's den rather than comply with the idolatrous edict of Babylon's king. We see it again and again in the journeys and ministry of the Apostle Paul, who flinched not before dangers of every imaginable order, that he might make known the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And in each of the instances mentioned above we behold in the sequel how God honoured those trusting and daring hearts. It is venturesome faith which He ever delights to reward. He Himself bids us come to the Throne of Grace with holy "boldness," that we may find grace to help in time of need. O how this rebukes *our* timidity and reserve. How few today are prepared to *risk anything* in the service of our Lord. How little of the courage and daring of our fathers is now in evidence. What a lot of trembling and fearful soldiers are found today in the army of Christ. O how urgent is the need for some Spirit-filled man of faith to go forth and cry in the language of Carey, "Ask great things of God; expect great

things from God; *undertake great things for God.*” It is well to look before we leap, but many look so long that they never leap at all!

2. The *obedience* of their faith. This appears from a reading of Joshua 6:3, 4 and 6-8: all concerned carried out the Lord’s instructions to the letter. To do nothing more than walk and walk and walk around the walls of Jericho must have appeared a childish and ridiculous thing-yet the believing remnant complied with the Lord’s command. God promised to deliver Jericho into their hands: Joshua and his believing fellows rested on His word and carried out His orders. The Lord requires us to use whatever means He prescribes, no matter how unlikely and inadequate they may seem to us. It is true that Divine power overthrew Jericho’s walls, yet it was also by faith’s obedience they fell. God had made it known that the manifestation of His power should be via a particular way; it was inseparably connected with certain actions which were to be performed by His people.

How was Israel to capture that mighty fortress of the Canaanites? Consider their condition! For centuries they had been a nation of slaves. For the last forty years they had been weary wanderers in the wilderness. And now their great leader, Moses, was dead! They were without any military experience, devoid of artillery, and had no trained army. All true; but they were not left to themselves: the living God was for them; and so long as they responded to His revealed will, all went well with them. In like manner God has not left us to our own devisings, but has given us plain and full directions, and He requires us to do the work which He has appointed *us* in the way He has commanded. Implicit obedience to His orders is absolutely essential if we are to have *His* blessing.

Implicit obedience unto the known will of God marked all Israel’s arrangements for the siege of Jericho. Minute instructions were given them for their strange campaign. They were to march in a certain order, each being required to take the place assigned him. They were to march at a specified hour, and encompass the city a given number of times. At the command of the Lord they were to be silent, and at the command of the Lord they were to shout. There was no room for human scheming, no place for carnal planning, no need for human reasoning as to what should be done. Everything was prescribed for them, and faith’s obedience was all that was required from them. The orders which God gave to Joshua might have seemed unreasonable and absurd to his men, yet they *must* be faithfully executed if victory was to be theirs. And as it was then, so it is still. But O how slow we are to learn this lesson.

Reader, the commands and precepts of God *often* appear strange unto carnal wisdom. How absurd did God’s orders appear to the great Naman, when he was bidden to bathe his leprous body in the Jordan. How contrary to all human ideas was it for God to send the prophet Elijah to be fed for many months by a widow who had naught but a handful of meal and a little oil. How unreasonable it must have seemed to the twelve Apostles when Christ bade them tell the great multitude to sit down, and only five small loaves and two little fishes were in sight. And how unreasonable does it appear unto multitudes of professing Christians today when they are told to cast away all the worldly devices which have been brought into the “churches” and substitute fasting and prayer. How slow we are to recognize that it is the *obedience of faith* which God requires.

3. The *discipline* of their faith. “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” (Josh. 6:10). Their silence at the beginning was as necessary as their shouting at the finish. Why? These men were the immediate descendants of the greatest grumblers who ever lived. Their fathers complained and murmured until God swore in His wrath they should not enter into His rest.

How much mischief had been caused if every man had been left free to express *his* “opinion”! How many would have been ready to advise Joshua what method of strategy to employ. One would have reasoned that the only way to capture Jericho was by starving out its inhabitants through a protracted siege. Another would have suggested the use of ladders to scale its walls. Another would have advocated heavy battering-rams to force a way in. Another would have suggested tunneling under the walls. One and all would have ridiculed the plan which Joshua adopted. Ah, my readers, if the Jerichos which now confront the people of God are to be captured, then not only must the mouths of murmurers be stopped, but all leaning unto our own understanding must be abandoned.

O how often are the sinews of faith cut by the injudicious and unfriendly criticisms of those who pose as our Christian friends. How often is the man of God hindered by the Christ-dishonouring doubts and carnal suggestions of his fellows. A brother in the Lord, who had been without employment, recently wrote us that he had been rebuked for not making known his needs to his friends. Ah, let us not forget that the very first line which the Holy Spirit gives us in His picture of the “blessed” man is, that he “walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly” (Psa. 1:1). How much mischief is wrought by people perpetually talking of the *difficulties* in the task confronting us. All real Christian work is beset with difficulties-Satan sees to that!

The soldiers of Christ must be trained: faith must be disciplined: each one in the ranks of the Lord’s hosts must learn there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7). The children of Israel were not ordered to go forth in

battle array and make any sally upon this garrison of the Canaanites. Instead, in solemn silence, in sacred procession, they were to encompass the city. This was a great trial of faith for such a procedure seemed very unlikely to accomplish the desired end. Not only so, but it would expose them to the contempt of their enemies, who must have sneered at their harmless procession. Yet this was the way which *God* had ordered: He loves to do great things by contemptible means, that the glory may be His.

4. The *patience* of their faith: “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, *after they were*

compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30). They did not fall the first day that Israel marched around them, nor the second, nor the third. No, it was not until they had journeyed about them thirteen times, that the power of God was displayed. And why? To test their patience, as well as their faith and obedience; to prove whether they really believed the Lord’s promise or no, when He enjoined the use of such weak and unlikely means; and to give them a more distinct apprehension that the conquest of Canaan was the Lord’s, and not theirs. When nothing happened the first twelve times Israel encompassed Jericho, it became the more evident that their enemies would not be overcome by the power of man, but by God.

Not only the mercy, but the *timing* of it, is in the hands of God, and therefore are we bidden, “Rest in the LORD, and *wait patiently for Him*” (Psa. 37:7). Alas, how sadly do we fail at this point. How easily we become discouraged if our Jericho does not fall the first or second time we encompass it: “the vision is yet for an appointed time . . . though it tarry, *wait for it*; because it will surely come” (Hab. 2:3). But O how impatient is the flesh. It was at this point that Abraham failed: when Sarah bare not the promised son, he determined to have one by Hagar. It was at this point Moses first failed-taking things into his own hands (Exo. 2:11, 12), instead of waiting God’s time. “*Tarry ye at Jerusalem*” was the last word which the Redeemer gave unto the Apostles before He ascended.

“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). How much we need to take this word to heart: how often we have “fainted” when victory was almost in sight! Ah, we thought that the walls of our Jericho would never fall; but they *did*, at the appointed time. God is in no hurry, and it is required of us that “he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa. 28:16). But we find it much harder to *wait* than we do to believe: that is, probably, the weakest spot in our armour, and the point at which we fail most frequently. Then let us be more definite and earnest in begging the Holy Spirit to work in us the spiritual grace of patience. Let us seek grace to lay hold of that word, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

5. The *anticipation* of their faith: “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” (Josh. 6:20). What we would now particularly observe is that the people shouted *before* the walls fell down-it was faith *expecting* the victory. “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, *believe that ye receive* them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24). It reminds us of the missionary Moffatt, who laboured for years among the Bechuanas and saw not a single seal to his ministry. Some of his far-distant friends in England wrote him saying they wished to make a present, and asked him to specify what it should be. He answered “a communion set.” Months after, when it arrived, more than a dozen converted natives sat down with him to remember the Lord’s death!

Now the whole of Joshua 6 has been recorded for our learning. “The walls of unbelief, superstition, and ungodliness, yield to no earthly armour and power. It is not by compulsion, nor by reasoning; it is not by weapons which this world supplies, that these walls can be destroyed. It is by the Word of God, and by the Word declared in faith. Ministers and people, they who blow the trumpet, and also the people who are with them, are to be united together in the power of God” (A. Saphir). Each of us is confronted with a Jericho: whether it be the preacher in the field of service where God calls him to labour, the Sunday-school teacher in the class before her, or the individual Christian who is seeking to overcome some habit or disposition. Remember Joshua and take courage! If there be the daring, the discipline, the obedience, the patience, and the expectation of faith, the victory is sure in God’s appointed time.

Once more we have been shown the wondrous power of real faith to bring to pass that which is beyond mere nature: compare Matthew 17:20, 1 John 5:4; persevering trust and obedience enabled Israel to accomplish what had otherwise been impossible. Again, we have seen that faith in God’s promise of protection and the use of His appointed means, far surpasses all worldly methods of defense: compare 2 Chronicles 20:20. Contrariwise, we behold what a worthless thing it is to trust in outward and material things: the walls of Jericho were both strong and high, yet they afforded no security against God’s power- “vain is the help of man.” Though God required Israel to use the utmost of their courage, submission, and patience, yet He took it upon Himself to bless their efforts and effect the work of power. Barriers more difficult than the walls of Jericho stand between the Christian and holiness: how are they to be removed? By faith’s obedience; *compare 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5.*

CHAPTER 22

The Faith of Rahab (Heb. 11:31)

The inestimable value of spiritual faith is strikingly demonstrated in the case we are about to consider. The Apostle had cited the faith of such illustrious characters as Enoch and Noah, Abraham and Moses; he had mentioned that of a believing company as they had passed through the Red Sea and had marched around Jericho; now he gives an instance of one who had been a notorious sinner, as though to shame us if *our* faith falls short of hers who had formerly been an harlot. Having shown that the patriarchs, who were so highly venerated by the Jews, were honored by God solely on account of their faith and its fruits, we next behold how an alien woman, belonging to an accursed race, was, because of her faith, adopted into the Old Testament Church. "It hence follows that those who are most exalted are of no account before God unless they have faith; and that, on the other hand, those who are hardly allowed a place among the profane and the reprobate, are by faith introduced into the company of angels" (John Calvin).

Rahab was a Canaanite, and therefore by nature "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel" and "a stranger from the covenants of promise." In her conversion and admission into the Old Testament Church, she was, in a peculiar manner, both a type and a pledge of the calling of *the Gentiles* and their reception into the Church of Christ in New Testament times. Thus did coming events cast their shadows before them. In such cases as Rahab and Ruth God gave early intimations that His redemptive purpose was not confined to a single people, but that it would reach out unto individuals among all nations. Their incorporation among the Hebrews was a plain foreshadowment of the "wild olive tree" being grafted in and being made a partaker of "the root and fatness of the (good) olive tree" (Rom. 11:17).

The salvation of Rahab was a signal instance of *the sovereignty* of God. "She was not only a Gentile, but an Amoritess, of that race and seed which in general was devoted unto utter destruction. She was therefore an instance of God's sovereignty in dispensing with His positive laws, as it seemed good unto Him; for of His own mere pleasure He exempted her from the doom announced against all those of her original and traduction" (John Owen). Being the supreme Potentate, God is not bound by any law or consideration other than His own imperial will; and therefore does He have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardens (Rom 9:18).

Most blessedly do we also behold here the amazing *grace* of God. Not only did Rahab belong to a heathen race, but she was an abandoned profligate, a "harlot." In singling her out to be the recipient of His saving favors, God indeed made it evident that He is no respecter of persons. By her own choice she was given up to the vilest of sins, but by the Divine choice she was predestinated to be delivered from that lust which is the most effective in detaining persons under its power, washing her whiter than snow by the precious blood of Christ, and giving her a place in His own family. It is in just such cases that the unmerited favour of God shines forth the more illustriously. There was nothing whatever in this poor fallen woman to commend her unto the favour of God, but where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

Not only may we behold in Rahab's case the exercise of Divine Sovereignty and the manifestation of Divine grace, but we may also pause and admire the wondrous working of God's *power*. This is best perceived as we take into careful consideration the almost unparalleled element which enters into her case. Here the Holy Spirit wrought entirely apart from the ordinary means of grace. There were no Sabbaths observed in Jericho, there were no Scriptures available for reading, there were no prophets sounding forth messages from Heaven; nevertheless, Rahab was quickened into newness of life and brought into a saving knowledge of the true God. Let it be duly noted that this woman, who had previously wallowed in open sin, was regenerated and converted *before* the spies came to her house: their visit simply afforded an opportunity for the avowal and public manifestation of her faith.

Let us also contemplate the marvelous workings of Divine *Providence* on this occasion. As the two spies, sent forth by Joshua to reconnoiter Jericho, drew near that heathen stronghold, they had no idea that one of God's elect sojourned there; and had they been aware of the fact, they had no means of knowing how to locate her in a city of such size. Admire and adore, then, the secret hand of God which directed them to the very house in which His child abode. "The LORD knoweth them that are His," and in the cloudy and dark day He searches them out. The same God who sent Ananias to the street called "Straight" to deliver Saul from blindness, guided the two spies unto the house of Rahab to deliver her from death. In like manner, wherever there is one or more of His elect amid the darkness of heathendom, He sends His Word or His servants to enlighten and edify the same.

But it is with *the faith of Rahab* we must be chiefly engaged on this occasion. It will be observed that she is mentioned in Hebrews 11 *after* the destruction of Jericho, though "she received the spies in peace" before that city was destroyed. The reason for this is because her preservation-which was the fruit of her faith-was after the hosts of Israel had

encompassed that city seven days. In seeking to ponder what is recorded in Scripture concerning the faith of Rahab we propose to look separately at the ground, the effect, the nature, the confession, the breadth, the imperfection, and the reward of the same.

1. *The ground of her faith.* “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). This does not mean that faith is *originated* by hearing the Word of God, any more than the shining of the sun imparts light unto the eye; no, faith is imparted by a sovereign act of the Spirit, and then it is instructed and nourished by the Word. In the prophetic song of Moses at the Red Sea it was declared, “The people shall *hear, and be afraid*: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till Thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which Thou hast purchased” (Exo. 15:14-16).

A striking fulfillment of the above prediction is found in the words of Rahab to the two 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, 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 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). This it is which explains the reference in Hebrews 11:31 unto the other inhabitants of Jericho, who perished because they “believed not.” The knowledge which they had of God and His wondrous works, through the reports which had reached their ears, rendered them without excuse.

What has just been before us affords an example of a most solemn fact which is oft repeated: how souls are affected by the Truth, and how quickly the impressions made wear off. The inhabitants of Jericho were deeply stirred by the reports of God’s judgments upon the wicked; they feared it was their turn next, and their hearts melted within them. How, then, are we to explain the fact that they did not all of them immediately and earnestly cry unto God for mercy? We believe the answer is found in Ecclesiastes 8:11, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” As the hosts of Israel encompassed Jericho each day and then returned quietly to their camp, space for repentance was granted its inhabitants; but when six days had passed, and the walls of the city remained as strong as ever, they felt quite secure, and hardened their hearts.

How, then, are we to account for the difference in Rahab? In this way: with them it was simply the stirrings of conscience and the workings of their natural fears, which soon subsided; but in her case the power of the Holy Spirit had wrought within her: God had “opened her heart,” and consequently she “attended unto the things which were spoken” (Acts 16:14). In other words, Rahab had been sovereignly quickened into newness of life, by which she was capacitated unto a saving knowledge of God Himself and the receiving His Word with meekness. Thus it was with the Thessalonian saints, whom the Apostle reminded, “For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also *in power*, and in the Holy Ghost” (1 Thess. 1:5). It is only in *such* cases that a radical and lasting effect is produced.

We must learn, then, to distinguish between three things: the Divine gift of faith, the foundation provided for its support, and the assurance that issues for its resting upon that foundation. The gift of faith is imparted at regeneration, being one of the attributes of the new nature: “all men have not faith” (2 Thess. 3:2) because all are not born again. The firm foundation which is provided for faith to rest upon is the sure Word of God: by it alone is faith supported-instructed and fed. The assurance which issues from faith’s resting upon this foundation is that confidence and certainty which fills the heart when God’s Word is received implicitly into it. Thus it was with Rahab. Quickened by the Spirit, faith was planted within her soul, hence when the report reached her of God’s wondrous works, she received it “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God,” (1 Thess. 2:13), and therefore did she say, “*I know* that the LORD hath given you the land.”

2. *The effect of her faith.* The faith of God’s elect is a living, energetic principle, which “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6) and produces fruit to the glory of God. Herein it differs radically from that notional and inoperative faith of frothy professors, which goes no deeper than an intellectual assenting to certain doctrinal propositions, and ends in fair but empty words. That faith which is unaccompanied by an obedient walk and abounds not in good works, is “dead, being alone” (James 2:17). Different far was the faith of Rahab. Of her we read, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” (James 2:25). This does not mean that her good works were the meritorious ground of her acceptance with God, but that they were the evidence before men that a spiritual principle had been communicated to her, the fruits of which justified or vindicated her profession, demonstrating that she was a member of “the Household of Faith.”

In “receiving the spies with peace” she made it manifest that she had a heart for the people of God, and was ready to do all in her power to help them. That clause of our text which we are now considering summarizes all that is recorded of her kindly conduct unto those two men in Joshua 2. She welcomed them into her home, engaged them in spiritual conversation, made provision for their safety, hid them from danger, and refused to betray them. We believe there is a latent reference to her kindness (as well as to Abraham’s) in Hebrews 13:1-3, for the word translated “messengers” in James 2:25 is the same as is rendered “angels” in Hebrews 13:2: “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” Alas, that so many professing Christians today, instead of heeding this exhortation, are almost ready to rend each other to pieces over every difference of opinion.

3. *The nature of her faith.* It was a *singular* faith. “The city of Jericho was about to be attacked; within its walls there were hosts of people of all classes and characters, and they knew right well that if their city would be set upon and stormed they would all be put to death. But yet strange to say, there was not one of them who repented of sin, or who even asked for mercy, except this woman who had been a harlot. She and she alone was delivered, a solitary one amongst a multitude. Now, have you ever felt that it is a very hard thing to have a singular faith? It is the easiest thing in the world to believe as everybody else believes, but the difficulty is to believe a thing alone, when no one else thinks as you think—to be the solitary champion of a righteous cause, when the enemy mustereth his thousands to the battle. Now this was the faith of Rahab. She had not one who felt as she did, who could enter into her feelings and realize the value of her faith. She stood alone. O it is a noble thing to be the lonely follower of despised Truth.

“Rahab’s faith was a *sanctifying* one. Did Rahab continue a harlot after she had faith? No, she did not. I do not believe she was a harlot at the time the men went to her house, though the name still stuck to her, as such ill names will; but I am sure she was not afterwards, for Salmon the prince of Judah married her . . . You cannot have faith, and yet live in sin. To believe is to be holy. The two things go together. That faith is a dead faith, a corrupt faith, a rotten faith, which lives in sin that grace may abound. Rahab was a sanctified woman. O that God might sanctify some that are here” (C.H. Spurgeon).

Hers was a *self-denying* faith. This is seen in her preferring the will of God before the safety of her country, and sheltering these men who were strangers before the pleasing of her fellow-citizens. But it appeared most conspicuously in the venturing of her own life rather than to betray the messengers of Joshua, who were worshipers of the true God. Her action was fraught with the most dangerous consequences to her; but her fidelity to God made her scorn the threats of her citizens, the promiscuous events of war, and the burning of her city. Thus, by faith she, in effect, renounced all for God. When He calls us to do so, we must part with all that we hold near and dear in this world. Spiritual faith is best evidenced by acts of self-denying obedience (condensed from T. Manton).

4. *The confession of her faith.* This is recorded in Joshua 2:9-11, which shows it was made at the first opening she had. It was quite a comprehensive one: she owned the wondrous works of the Lord, was assured He had given Canaan unto His people, and acknowledged Him as the God of Heaven and earth. Thereby she renounced all the idols of the heathen, glorified God with her lips, and illustrated the rule we have in Romans 10:10, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Moreover, by placing the scarlet cord in her window, she, as it were, publicly displayed her colours and made it known under whose banner she had enlisted. How her conducts puts to shame those who after a long profession of the truth are ready to tremble at the first approach of danger, and deem it prudence to keep at a safe distance from those who are exposed to persecution.

“It is the nature of true, real, saving faith, immediately, or at its first opportunity, to declare and protest itself in confession before men. Or confession is absolutely inseparable from faith. Where men, on some light and convictions, do suppose themselves to have faith, yet, through fear or shame, do not come up to the ways of expressing it in confession prescribed in the Scripture, their religion is in vain. And therefore our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Gospel, doth constantly lay the same weight on confession as on believing itself: Matthew 10:33, Luke 9:26. And the fearful, that is, those who fly from public confession in times of danger and persecution, shall be no less assuredly excluded from the heavenly Jerusalem, than unbelievers themselves: Revelation 21:8” (John Owen).

5. *The breadth of her faith.* Very blessed is it to note her further word to the spies: “Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father’s house, and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death” (Josh. 2:12, 13). Some contracted hearts, in which the very milk of human kindness seems to have congealed, would deem Rahab’s request highly presumptuous. Personally, we believe that her soul was so overflowing with gratitude unto the Lord for His saving such an abandoned wretch, that her faith now perceived something of the infinitude of the Divine mercy, and believed that such a God would be willing to show grace unto the whole of her family. Nor was she disappointed.

O that the breadth of Rahab's faith may speak unto our hearts. O that the blessed Holy Spirit may fill us with compassion for our unsaved relatives and friends, and stir us up to wrestle with God in prayer on their behalf. It is right that we *should* desire God to show mercy unto those who are near and dear to us: not to do so would show we were lacking in natural affection; it only becomes wrong when we ignore God's sovereignty and dictate instead of supplicate. It is blessed to observe that He who hath said, "according unto your faith be it unto you" and "all things are possible unto him that believeth," *responded* to Rahab's faith, and saved her entire household: though they, of course, only found deliverance by sheltering in the same house with her in which hung the scarlet cord-only under the Blood is there safety.

6. *The imperfection of her faith.* This appears in the reply which she returned to the king of Jericho (recorded in Joshua 2:3-5) when he sent unto Rahab requesting her to deliver up the two spies. Fearful of their lives, she told lies, pretending she knew not whence the men had come, and affirming they were no longer in her house. Such a procedure on her part can by no means be justified, for her answer was contrary unto the known truth. The course she followed resembled the direction which Rebekah gave to her son Jacob: in the general her intent was the fruit of great faith, for it had respect unto the promise of God (Gen. 25:33), but in various details (Gen. 27: 6, 7, etc.) it can in no wise be approved. The Lord, in His tender mercy, is pleased to pass by many of the infirmities of His children, when He sees an upright heart and a desire to accomplish His promises. "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psa. 130:3). God bears with much weakness, especially in the lambs of His flock.

"I observe there was a mixture of infirmity in this act, an officious lie, which cannot be excused, though God in mercy pardoned it. This is not for our imitation, yet it is for our instruction; and it shows us this, that faith in the beginning hath many weaknesses. Those that have faith do not altogether act out of faith, but there is somewhat of the flesh mingled with that of the spirit. But this is passed by out of God's indulgence; He accepteth us notwithstanding our sins before faith, and notwithstanding our weaknesses in believing. Before faith she was a harlot; in believing she makes a lie. God doth reward the good of our actions and pardons the evil of them, not to encourage us in the sinning, but to raise our love to Him who forgives us so great a debt, receives us graciously, and pardons our manifold weaknesses" (T. Manton).

It is blessed to see that neither in our text nor in James 2:25 does the Holy Spirit make any reference unto Rahab's failure; instead, in both places, He mentions that which was praiseworthy, and to her credit. It is the very opposite with the malevolent world, which is ever ready to overlook the good and reflect only upon the evil of an action performed by a child of God. It is a gracious spirit which throws the mantle of charity over the deformities and defects in a brother or sister in Christ, as it is honouring to God to dwell upon that which His Holy Spirit has wrought in them. If we were quicker to judge ourselves for *our own* sad failures, we would not be so ready to blaze abroad the faults of our fellows. Let each of us seek grace to heed that exhortation, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think* on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

7. *The reward of her faith.* "By faith the harlot Rahab *perished not* with them that believed not" (Heb. 11:31). The historical account of this is to be found in Joshua 6:22, 23, "But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel."

But not only was Rahab, and the whole of her family, preserved from the burning of Jericho which immediately followed, but as Joshua 6:25 tells us, she "dwelt in Israel." Thus, from being the slave of Satan she was adopted into the family of God; from being a citizen of heathen Jericho she was given a place in the congregation of the Lord. Nor was that all; later, she became the honored wife of a prince in Judah, the mother of Boaz, and one of the grandmothers of David. Her name is inscribed upon the imperishable scroll of sacred history: it is recorded in Matthew 1 among the ancestresses of the Saviour-she was one of the mothers of Jesus! From what depths of sin and shame did sovereign grace deliver this poor woman; to what a height of honor and dignity did sovereign grace elevate her. Truly, the rewards of faith are most excellent and glorious.

CHAPTER 23

The Faith of the Judges

(Heb. 11:32)

In some respects the verse we have now arrived at is the most difficult one in our chapter. It commences the last division of the same. Therein the Apostle changes his method of treatment, and instead of particularizing individual examples of faith, he groups together a number of men and summarizes the actings of their faith. The selection made, out of many others who could have been given, is most startling: those whose names we might have expected had been registered on this honour roll are omitted, while others we have never thought of are given a place. The order in which they are recorded seems strange, for it is not that of the chronological. This has puzzled some: one eminent commentator stating "The Apostle does not observe strict order, reciting them in haste": which is not to be allowed for a moment, for it ignores the superintending guidance of the Holy Spirit. Again; the prodigies performed by these men cannot be presented for *our* emulation: why, then, are they referred to?

The principle of guidance in the selection of some of the men here mentioned is obviously that of *sovereign grace*: no otherwise can we account for the passing over of such illustrious characters as Caleb and Deborah, Hannah and Asaph, and the inclusion of Jephthah and Samson—in the latter the free favour of God was more conspicuously displayed. The order in which they are mentioned is not that of time, but of *dignity*, for Barak lived before Gideon, Jephthah before Samson, and Samuel before David: God reckons those most excellent who bring forth the best fruits of faith—the more we excel in faith, the more God will honour us. Where faith shines the brightest the least are accounted the greatest, and the last become first; then how *we* should labour daily for an increase of faith.

Five of the six men named in our text were judges who ruled over Israel, though they came from very humble callings. From this we may learn that faith is a spiritual grace suited not only unto the temple, but also to the judicial bench and throne; that it is needed not only by those who occupy positions in the private walks of life, but also by those who fill public office. Governors equally with the governed require to have a true faith in the living God: instead of disqualifying them for the discharge of their important duties, it would be of inestimable value to them—enabling them to face difficulties and danger with calmness, inspiring with courage, endowing with wisdom, and preserving from many temptations which confront those in high places. He who is blest with a spiritual faith will have lowly thoughts of himself, as had Barak, Gideon, and David.

Remarkable achievements are credited to the men whose names are now before us. As we read the historical account of them in the book of Judges we may well marvel at them, but it is only as we view them in the light of what is said here in Hebrews 11 that we shall understand them aright. Other men besides these have vanquished lions, put armies to flight, and subdued kingdoms; yet *their* deeds proceeded from a very different principle. The mighty works of men chronicled in the Old Testament are given for a far higher purpose than the indulging of our love of the sensational. The exploits of Gideon and Barak, Samson and David, are only recorded in Holy Writ as they were wrought *by faith*: thus the Holy Spirit honours *His own* work.

One prominent feature which distinguishes many of the extraordinary performances of men of God set down in Scripture from the prodigies done by men of the world is that the Holy Spirit moved the sacred historians to faithfully register the infirmities under which faith so often wrought and the weakness which preceded it. The faith of these men was very far from being perfect, either in degree, stability, or unmixed purity. Like ours so often is, their faith was mingled with fear, oppressed by unbelief, hard beset by carnal reasonings. We have only to read through the 6th Chapter of Judges to see that the faith of the first one named in our text was painfully slow in exercise, though by grace, it was afterward mighty in execution. They were men of like passions with us, and from that fact we may take comfort—not in sheltering behind the same, but by refusing to despair when our faith is at a low ebb.

One thing which is common to all the individuals mentioned in our text is that the history of each of them was cast in a day of great spiritual declension. The time in which they lived is described at length in the book of Judges. Following the deaths of Moses and Joshua, Israel grievously departed from the Lord: cast off His Law, worshipped the idols of the heathen, and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25); darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. Yet even in those days God left not Himself without witness: inexpressibly blessed is it to behold the faith of individuals shining in the midst of a failed testimony; that here and there was a lamp maintained, illuminating the surrounding darkness. Nor is the number here specified without significance for to the six individuals mentioned are linked the "prophets" (who also ministered in seasons of apostasy), making *seven* in all—telling of the completeness of the provision made by the grace of God.

Thus we may see how that Hebrews 11, which describes at length the Life of Faith, would have been incomplete had no notice been taken of those times when Israel so grievously departed from God. It was during seasons of great spiritual darkness and gloom that faith wrought many of its mightiest works and achieved some of its most notable victories. For faith is not dependent on favourable outward conditions; it is sustained and energized by One who is infinitely superior to all circumstances. What is mentioned in our text and the verses which immediately follow are recorded *for our encouragement*. We too are living in a day when Christendom is in a sad state, when there is widespread departure from God and His Word, when vital and practical holiness is at a low ebb. But the arm of the Lord is not waxed short and they who lean upon it shall be sustained and enabled to do exploits in His name.

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets” (Heb. 11:32). The Apostle had already given abundant proof that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (v. 1), and had shown that “by it the elders obtained a good report” (v. 2); yet he had by no means said all which might be given on the subject. Numerous and notable examples of the power and fruits of faith had been advanced, and many others might still be cited; but it would not be convenient to enumerate each instance of faith recorded in the Old Testament. To have done so would extend the Epistle beyond due limits: so we now have a bare mention of the names of others, followed by a description in general terms of the effects of their faith.

The characters which we are now to contemplate, like the Apostles of Christ, and in smaller measure the Reformers at the close of the “Dark Ages,” were extraordinary men, specially raised up by God in times of crises, for the good of His Church and the benefit of the commonwealth. This needs to be carefully borne in mind, or otherwise we shall view them in a false perspective. Their calling was extraordinary, and so were their performances. They were endowed with uncommon powers, and supernaturally energized for their particular tasks. That which distinguished them from men like Caesar, Charlmagne and Napoleon, was that they were *men of faith*. It is not that the Apostle by any means commends *all* that they did, or that he excuses their manifold imperfections, which cannot be vindicated; he makes mention here only of their faith.

Gideon was raised up by God at a time when Israel’s fortunes were sunk to a low ebb. Three judges had preceded him, delivering the people of God from the hand of their enemies; but a fourth time they had apostatized, and now they were groaning under the servitude of the Midianites. So great was the number of those who had invaded their territory that they “left no sustenance for Israel” and “Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites” (Judg. 6:4, 6). But that was not the worst: the worship of Baal prevailed to such an extent among the favoured covenant people of God that to oppose it was considered a criminal act, deserving of death (Judg. 6:28-30). Nevertheless God had promised “the LORD shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone” (Deut. 32:36), and now, once again, He was about to make good His word.

To be delivered from the dire situation which now faced Israel called for a “mighty man of valor,” and such was Gideon, as we learn from the language in which the angel of the Lord first addressed him (Judg. 6:12). But something more than natural courage and daring was required in the one whom the Lord would employ—he must be an *humble* man of God that the glory might rebound unto Him alone. In order to that, the instrument had first to be prepared for the tasks to be performed—the servant fitted for the service he must do. “God must first do His work with Gideon, before Gideon could do his work for God. To accomplish this, God makes the wine-press of Joash to be to Gideon what he makes the backside of the desert to be to Moses” (E.W.B.). The servant of God must first be made to feel his weakness, before he is taught that all-sufficient strength is available for him in the Lord. Thus it was with Gideon; thus it is still.

It is blessed to observe the Lord’s dealings with Gideon: He now said “The LORD is with thee” (Judg. 6:12). This was to exercise his heart, which is ever the prime requisite. Aroused, Gideon enquired, “Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?” etc. (v. 13). Second “the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (v. 14). It is at this point so many interpreters go astray in their understanding of this incident. The *saints* “might” is in realized helplessness: “For when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). That word of Jehovah’s was designed to bring Gideon to the consciousness of *his own* utter inability to deliver Israel from the yoke of the Midianites.

The instrument must be experimentally fitted ere the Lord will employ it in His service; and the first part of this fitting process is to empty it of self-sufficiency that it may then be thoroughly dependent upon Himself. Gideon’s “might” consisted in conscious weakness, and as soon as that was realized he would be forced to believe the Lord’s declaration “Thou shalt save Israel.” That was the word addressed to his heart, and was the foundation on which his faith was to rest. Gideon now asked, “Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is *poor* in Manasseh, and *I am the least* in my father’s house” (Judg. 6:15): the Divine arrow had hit its mark, as Gideon’s humble confession attests.

The Lord has only one response unto acknowledged helplessness: “*Surely I will be with thee*, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man” (v. 16). How blessed! When faith truly realizes this, it exclaims, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). From that assuring word of the Almighty, Gideon knew that he had “found grace” in His sight, and asked for a sign: “Not because he doubted, but because he believed; not to prove the truth of Jehovah’s word, but because he would prove the truth of Jehovah’s grace in the acceptance of his offerings which he proposed to go and fetch: verses 17, 18” (E.W.B.).

Next, Gideon prepared and presented his offering (v. 19), and was bidden to place the same upon a rock (v. 20). This was followed by a miracle, fire issuing from the rock and consuming the offering, by which he “obtained witness” that he had found grace in Jehovah’s sight—the supernatural fire denoting his acceptance with God, filling him with awe and terror. Immediately the Lord quietened his heart with, “*Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die*” (v. 23): thus did he receive Jehovah’s blessing: that Gideon’s faith laid hold of that benediction is very evident from the next verse, “Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom”—“The Lord send *peace*.”

The heart of Gideon being now fitted and established, God gave him his first commission: “Take thy father’s young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down” (vv. 25, 26). Such definiteness of language at once evidenced to Gideon that he had to do with One who knew everything—the bullocks his father had, and their very ages. Like his father Abraham, Gideon believed God and obeyed His command, for we read that, “Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father’s household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night” (v. 27). At this distant date, his action may seem to us trivial, but the sequel shows that Gideon acted at the imminent peril of his life: “Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it” (v. 30).

The immediate sequel supplied a much more severe testing of Gideon: “Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel” (v. 33). Enraged at the overthrow of the altar of Baal, the Midianites gathered their forces together and with their allies came up against Israel for battle. It is to be expected that Satan will wax furious when his territory is invaded and the Lord is magnified in the place where he has reigned supreme: that is why it so often follows that when a Christian has done his duty, it *seems* as though he has only made bad matters worse by increasing his troubles. Then it is that he is sorely tempted to regret he has been so “radical” in his conduct and to effect a compromise. Such a temptation is to be steadfastly resisted. More—the increasing troubles which faithfulness brings upon him are to be regarded as a golden opportunity for further exercises and acts of *faith*. Thus Gideon acted, and so should we.

We cannot now enter into a detailed comment upon the response made by Gideon to the open menace of the Midianites, and all that is recorded of him in Judges 6-8, but we commend those chapters unto the careful pondering of the reader. Let him carefully note, first, that “the spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon” (6:34), which supplies the key to all that follows: safeguarding the glory of God (preventing us from ascribing the honor to Gideon), and furnishing the vital word of instruction for our own hearts. We cannot overcome Satan nor refuse his temptation in our own strength. We cannot increase faith, or even maintain it in exercise by any resolution of mind or act of our own will. We cannot achieve victories to the praise of our God by our own faithfulness. It is only as we are strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man that we are furnished for the battle against the forces of evil; and that strength is to be definitely, diligently, and trustfully sought.

The infirmities of Gideon appear in that he imagined he must head a large army if the Midianites were to be vanquished: it was little by little that his heart was instructed, and the lesson was learned that God is not dependent upon *numbers*. His repeated request for confirmatory signs (6:36-40) also shows us that it is not all at once the saint learns to walk by faith and not by sight. But the Lord is long-suffering to usward, and bears with our infirmities when the heart is truly upright before Him. He granted Gideon the signs requested, though that is no guarantee He will do so for us; and He corrected his notion that a large force was needed: only a small fragment was employed—“by the three hundred men that lapped will I save you” (7:7). Then, when Gideon *believed* the Lord and *obeyed* His orders this word was given, “Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand” (7:9), which was completely verified in the sequel. Thus did the Lord use and work mightily by one who was poor and little in his own eyes (6:15), and who “did as the LORD had said unto him” (6:27).

Barak. Time (or space) fails us to enter into a full consideration of his history and exploits, so we must condense. Barak was raised up by God near the close of the twenty years when Jabin the king of Canaan “mightily oppressed the children of Israel” (Judg. 4:3). Deborah was acting as judge at that time—proof of the terribly low state into which the covenant people had fallen (cf. Isa. 3:12); though she was not a “judge” in the proper sense of the term (see 4:4 and

carefully compare 2:18), but a “prophetess,” and therefore a mouthpiece of God. It was through her that the Lord spake to Barak, saying “Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand” (Judg. 4:6, 7): *that* was to be the ground of Barak’s faith, *that* was the sure promise which described the thing to be “hoped for.” The infirmity of Barak is seen in 4:8, but the obedience of his faith appears in 4:10. A further word was given to him, “Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?” (4:14): he “heard,” “believed,” and obeyed, and a great victory was secured. It was *by faith* in God’s promise that Barak went forth against the enormous army of Sisera and vanquished the same.

Samson. Many mighty deeds are recorded of him in the book of Judges, such as his rending to pieces a lion, as though it had been a kid; his slaying of a thousand Philistines, single-handed, with the jawbone of an ass; his carrying of the gates of Gaza and their posts on his shoulders up a steep hill; his bursting asunder the strongest cords when bound by his enemies; his overturning the pillars on which stood the great temple of Dagon. How, then, did Samson perform these prodigies? *By faith.* In the Old Testament it is said, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him,” but that does not mean he was involuntarily impelled by a Divine power, like a hurricane carries things through the air blindly and unwittingly. No, the Spirit deals with men not as stocks and stones, but as moral agents; enlightening their minds, controlling their hearts, inclining their wills, and supplying physical strength for whatever task God allots.

“Faith cometh by hearing,” and in Samson’s case he “heard” through his parents the promise which God had made concerning him: “he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg. 13:5). The strength of his mother’s faith comes out beautifully in 13:23, where, quieting the fear of her husband, she said, “If the LORD were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.” Brought up in the strong faith of his parents, Samson *believed* what he “heard” from God through them, grew up in the confidence of the same and conducted himself accordingly. His last act was his greatest and best, furnishing the strongest evidence of his faith in God and being of most profit to His Church. After being so sorely chastened for his sins, and considering the situation he was then in, it called for no ordinary confidence in the Lord to do what is recorded in Judges 16:28-30.

Jephthath. By calling, Gideon was a farmer, Barak a soldier, Samson a religious Nazarite, while David was the youngest of his family and despised by his brethren. Samuel was first used by God while still a child—thus we may see how God delights to use lowly and weak instruments. But more striking still is the case now before us; Jephthath was one of dishonorable birth, a bastard, (11:1, 2), which the law excluded from the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2). Yet God, in an especial and extraordinary manner conferred His Spirit upon Jephthath and advanced him to the highest dignity and function amongst His people and prospered him exceedingly. From this we may learn that no outward condition, be it ever so base, can serve as a hindrance to God’s grace. That he was a man who feared the Lord is clear from Judges 11:9, 10. His message to the king of Ammon (11:14-27) shows that he *believed* what was recorded in the Scripture of Truth: he ascribed Israel’s victories to the Lord (vv. 21, 23) and called on Him to judge between Israel and Ammon (v. 27); and Jehovah rewarded his faith by delivering the Ammonites into his hand. His fidelity and perseverance in the faith is seen in the keeping of his vow of banning his daughter to continual virginity.

David. There is little need for us to attempt here an enumeration of the many works and fruits of his faith, nor to point out how often unbelief wrought within and through him. We agree with John Brown that it is likely the Holy Spirit has particular reference in our text unto David’s victorious combat with Goliath, when, quite a youth, and totally inexperienced in the arts and guiles of warfare, armed only with a sling and a few pebbles, he engaged in open fight the mighty giant of the Philistines, who was a veteran in the field and heavily armed for the duel. How are we to explain David’s temerity and success? In this way: he had received a revelation from God (as 1 Sam. 17:46, 47 plainly intimates), he rested on the same with implicit confidence, and acted accordingly. By faith he ventured; by faith he overcame.

Samuel. “The event to which we are disposed to think it most probable, from its miraculous character, that the Apostle refers, is that recorded in 1 Samuel 12:16-18: ‘Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call unto the LORD, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.’ A revelation was made to Samuel that the Divine power was to be put forth in connection with certain words which he spoke. He believed that revelation; he spoke the words, and the event followed” (John Brown).

The Prophets. They too exemplified the power of faith, both in what they did and in what they suffered. By faith they were enabled to achieve and endure what otherwise they could not have achieved or endured. They delivered nothing but what they received: hence the frequency of their announcement, “Thus saith the LORD.” They concealed nothing they had received: though it was a “burden to them” (Mal. 1:1, etc.), and though they knew full well their message would be

most unpalatable, they faithfully delivered the Word of God. They were undaunted by the people's opposition, setting their face as a flint (Ezek. 3:8, 9). They humbly submitted to God's requirements: Isaiah 20:3, Jeremiah 27:2, Ezekiel 4:11, 12. They wrought mighty works, especially Elijah and Elisha. All these things manifested the efficacy and might of a real faith in the living God. "Lord, increase our faith."

CHAPTER 24

The Achievements of Faith (Heb. 11:33-34)

True faith performs a prominent part in all experimental godliness. Where there is a total absence of the grace of faith, a man is without God and without hope in this world; but where that spiritual principle exists, if only in the very small degree, there has taken place a wondrous and miraculous change. The one who is the subject of it may not, for a time, understand its nature; but instead, make the greatest mistakes about it; nevertheless, that change is no less than one of passing from death unto life. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20): that little grain has a principle of *life* in it, and contains in embryo the future plant; so with the implanting of the principle of grace in the heart-it will yet develop into, or rather be consummated, in Glory.

It behooves each one of us to take diligent pains in ascertaining the *origin* of our faith. There are various kinds of faith spoken of in the Scriptures: there is a dead faith, a demon's faith, a fancied and forced faith, a creature and presumptuous faith-all of which are to be dreaded, for they come not from above. But spiritual faith is *Divine* in its origin: "it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). True faith is no offspring of nature, but has a celestial birth: "every good gift and every perfect gift is *from above*, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). Spiritual faith is the heart's persuasion of the Truth of God, and is produced in us by the almighty creative power of the Holy Spirit when He applies the Word in life-giving energy to the soul.

Now this faith is not only Divinely-communicated, but it is Divinely-*sustained*. Spiritual faith is neither self-sustained nor man-sustained. It does not support itself, nor does its possessor support it. It depends entirely upon God. Alas, alas the "faith" of the vast majority of professing Christians, instead of being of this *self-helpless* nature, fills them with a deceiving self-ability. Nothing is so dependent upon God in Christ; nothing so utterly unable to live without the Spirit's supporting power, as that faith which He Himself produces in the heart. But the "faith" of multitudes today is of a totally different nature, and we might accommodate and apply to them those words of Paul's, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings" (1 Cor. 4:8)-but *without* the Spirit.

This faith is not only Divinely-given and Divinely-sustained, but it is also Divinely-*energized*: it acts only by the quickening power of God. "Without Me," said Christ, "ye can do *nothing*" (John 15:5); then, certainly, without *His* enablement we cannot act faith upon Himself or His promises. But a spurious faith, springing up out of mere nature, self-made and self-supporting, is also a self-acting one. The possessors of it can believe when they like, as they like, and what they like. There is Christ, *they* can lay hold of Him. There are His promises: *they* can appropriate them. There are His offices: *they* can act faith upon them. Alas, such ability savours nothing of the faith which God gives to His people, and which causes them to lie at the footstool of His mercy as humble supplicants.

This faith is also *Divinely-increased*: "*Lord, Increase our faith*" (Luke 17:5). But let it be pointed out that such an "increase" does not render the Christian less dependent upon the Spirit of God-that would be a miserable increase: like the prodigal son getting his portion of goods and setting up for himself. Nor is it such an increase that now remains at one level, always acting with a certain power, always in the same lively exercise. Far from it; real Christians know from painful experience how often *their* faith is at a low ebb, and when apparently the most needed, is the worst crippled in its actings. Nor is it such an increase that its possessors should necessarily be conscious of it. Moses knew not that his face shone. Most probably the centurion and the Canaanitish woman little thought that they had "great faith." Sometimes those who have the most faith feel they have very little if any at all; while sometimes those who have little say they are rich and increased with goods.

In what, then, does an increase of faith consist? Is it not the Christian's growth, *as a believer*, a growth in a true, living, spiritual, experimental knowledge of himself as a sinner, and of God in Christ as the Father of mercies? Faith is fed by knowledge: not by mere notions in the brain, for those only feed a false and presumptuous confidence-but by a spiritual and Divine knowledge. As *this* knowledge increases, faith increases; as this knowledge is confirmed in the soul,

faith is confirmed and strengthened. “Blessed is the man whom Thou *chastenest*, O LORD, *and teachest* him out of Thy law” (Psa. 94:12). Again; “He *led* him about, He *instructed* him” (Deut. 32:10): God leads into a great variety of circumstances, and in these circumstances He causes His people to receive instruction. In that way they learn the truth in an *experimental* manner, and what they receive from the Word is confirmed more and more unto them. In that way they learn the vanity of the world, the fickleness of the creature, the depravity of their own hearts.

Now this Divinely-given and Divinely-supported faith is renewed or stirred into exercise by the operations of the Holy Spirit, and brings forth fruit “after its own kind”: that is, fruit which is spiritual in its nature and supernatural in its character. In other words, faith is an active principle: it “*worketh* by love” (Gal. 5:6). As it is energized by its Giver, it produces that which mere human nature is utterly incapable of producing. An unmistakable proof of this is seen in our present verses, where we read, “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” (Heb. 11:33, 34).

There are two ways in which the remarkable contents of these verses may be considered: according as we look at their letter in a natural way, or according as we ponder them with an anointed eye. Water will not rise above its own level: the heart of the natural man being a stranger to spiritual things, cannot discern them when they are spread before him—that is why the majority of the commentaries are so largely devoted to the historical, grammatical, and geographical details of Scripture. There *is* an historical allusion in each clause of our text, but what the true Christian desires is to know the *spiritual* purport and the practical application of them unto himself. Only thus do the Scriptures become a *living* Word unto him. This is what we have sought to keep steadily in mind as we have passed from verse to verse of Hebrews 11, and which we will endeavour to be occupied with now.

“Who through faith subdued kingdoms.” The opening word takes us back to the list of worthies mentioned in the preceding verse, and here we are supplied with an enumeration of some of the wonderful works performed by them: nine fruits of their faith are mentioned—compare the ninefold “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22, 23. Therein we behold once more the marvelous and miraculous efficacy of a spiritual faith. “These instances are taken from things of all sorts to show that there is nothing of any kind whatever wherein we may be concerned but that faith will be useful and helpful” (John Owen). No matter what our lot may be—“pleasing or painful”; no matter what station we are called to fill—high or low; no matter how formidable or difficult the obstacles which confront us, “*All things are possible to him that believeth*” (Mark 9:23).

“Through faith subdued kingdoms.” The word here for “subdue” means “to fight or contend, to enter into a trial of strength, of courage on the field, to prevail in battle.” The historical allusion is to the exploits of Joshua and David: “Joshua subdued the kingdoms in Canaan, and David subdued those which were around that country, such as Moab, Ammon and Syria; and they both subdued these kingdoms through believing” (J. Brown). The important point to recognize is that the “kingdoms” here “subdued” were those which sought to prevent the people of God (Israel) from entering into and enjoying their rightful inheritance. Now let us spiritualize that fact. The Christian has been begotten “unto an inheritance” (1 Peter 1:3, 4): that “inheritance” is to be enjoyed *now*, by faith, for “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). But there are powerful enemies seeking to harass and hinder us, and they must be “subdued.”

There are two principal “kingdoms” which the Christian is called upon to “subdue”: one is within himself, the other without him—the “flesh” and the “world.” It was to the former of these that the Apostle had reference when he said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27). The same task is set before the Christian: “For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom. 6:19). The “flesh” or sinful nature within us *must be* “subdued,” or it will certainly slay us—bring about our eternal undoing: “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13).

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that *ruleth his spirit* than he that taketh a city” (Prov. 16:32). Does the reader exclaim, Such a task is a hopeless one! Joshua might have said the same when he first set foot in Canaan, and found it occupied with a powerful and hostile people. And, my reader, Joshua did not “subdue” them in a day, nor in a year! No, it was accomplished little by little. It meant fierce fighting, it meant the exercise of much courage and patience, it meant surmounting varied discouragements; but at the end God crowned his labors with success. And remember that it was *by faith* he “subdued kingdoms.” Ah, faith looks to God and draws vigor and strength from Him. True, I *am* weak and impatient in myself, yet “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

There is also a “kingdom” without, which the Christian must “subdue,” or else he will be destroyed by it: “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4). And *how* is the “world” to be “subdued”? 1 John 5:4 gives us the answer: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even *our faith*.” Sweetly is this signified in the

Song of Solomon: “Who is this that *cometh up from* the wilderness?” (8:5). Here the child of God, though toiling and struggling, worn and weary, is represented as rising above the world. And *how* is this accomplished? How is it that the spouse of Christ is enabled to rise above the immense hindrance of “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”—those things which are “in the world” (1 John 2:16)? She is seen “*leaning upon* her Beloved” (Song. 8:5). As He is our object, the world loses its power over us; as He is our strength, we get the victory over it.

“Wrought righteousness.” In their narrower sense, these words signify “to execute judgment, to enforce the laws of justice”: the historical reference would then be to such passages as Joshua 11:10-15, 1 Samuel 24:10, 2 Samuel 8:15. But in its wider scope “wrought righteousness” means the living of a holy life: “LORD, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” (Psa. 15:1, 2). “In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:35). “Righteousness” signifies up to the required standard; and to work righteousness means walking according to the rule of God’s Word: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

Now right actions must spring from right principles and must be performed with right ends if they are to be acceptable to God. In other words, they must issue from a living faith and have in view the glory of God. It is the absence of *faith* and the substituting of *self-interest* for the honor of the Lord which is the cause of all the injustice and oppression in the world today. But let it now be carefully noted that “subdued kingdoms” *precedes* “wrought righteousness.” This order is unchanging: evil must be hated before good can be loved (Amos 5:15), self must be denied before Christ can be followed (Matt. 16:24), the old man must be put off before the new man can be put on (Eph. 4:22-24). In other words, the “flesh” must be mortified before the “spirit” can be manifested.

“Obtained promises,” or secured the blessings promised. God assured Joshua that he should conquer Canaan, Gideon that he should defeat the Midianites, David that he should be king over all Israel. But outwardly, tremendous difficulties stood in the way of the accomplishment of those things, yea, apparent impossibilities prevented them. Gideon was put upon a great improbability when he was commanded to take but three hundred men, fall upon and destroy an immense host. David and his little company seemed to be no match for the armed forces of Saul, and after his death, for years the throne seemed as far away as ever. But where there is a real trust in the living God the most formidable difficulties may be overcome.

“Obtained promises.” Ah, it is one thing to hear and read about the wonderful things which the faith of *others* secures, but what about your *own* experience, dear reader? You may sincerely think that you believe in and are resting upon the sure promises of God, but are you obtaining a *fulfillment* of them in your own daily life? Are the blessings set forth in the promises actually in your possession? Are you securing the things promised? If not, is the reason to be found in your failure to heed what here precedes? *Before* “obtained promises” comes “subdued kingdoms” and then “wrought righteousness.” We must not expect to “obtain” the precious things set before us in the promises until we definitely and diligently set about the subjugation of the flesh, and *walk* according to the rules of God’s Word—regulating our conduct by its precepts and commands.

“Stopped the mouths of lions.” The historical reference is, of course, to Daniel in the den. It shows again the marvelous power of faith. This comes out clearly in Daniel 6:23: “So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, *because he believed* in his God.” But how far may this be of help to us? Is the answer far to seek: there are ferocious people, as well as fierce animals! There are savage oppressors and persecutors who seek to intimidate, if not destroy, the mild and harmless Christian. True, yet they should not terrify us, still less spoil our testimony, by causing us to hide our light under a bushel. Daniel would not be forced into compromising by the threat of the lions of Babylon, nor should we be by the menacing looks, words, and actions of the world’s lions today. Say with one of old, “I will trust and not be afraid.”

“Stopped the mouths of lions.” Why it almost looks as though faith were omnipotent? What cannot real faith do! We dare not set any limitations to it, for faith has to do with the living God, and nothings is too hard for Him. Ah, dear reader, faith lays hold of *the Almighty*, and not until your faith learns to do that is it of much worth. Is the Lord God a living reality to you, or do you have but a theological knowledge of Him? The ultimate reference in our text is to him of whom it is said, “The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). His mouth is opened against many a child of God, uttering lies, telling him that his profession is an empty one. Have you learned to “stop his mouth?” Do his false accusations no longer terrify you? Does he now find it useless to thus harass you any longer? It all depends: “stopped the mouths of lions” is preceded by “obtained *promises*”!

“Quenched the violence of fire.” The historical allusion is to the three Hebrews in Babylon’s furnace. It shows the efficacy of faith to rest upon the power of God in the face of great danger, yea, before what seemed to be certain death. Those three Hebrews resolved to perform their duty, no matter what the event, committing themselves unto the

disposition of a sovereign God. With full persuasion of His power to do whatever He pleased, and which would be most for his glory. Such an exercise of faith appears very, very marvelous to us. Ah, let it be fully borne in mind that Daniel and his fellows trusted God in times of peace and prosperity as well as in seasons of peril and adversity. If we *live* by faith, it will not be difficult to *die* by faith.

“Quenched the violence of fire.” A twofold spiritual application may be made of these words. First, we read of “the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph. 6:16), and these are to be “quenched” by “taking the shield of faith.” If we are subduing kingdoms, working righteousness, and obtaining promises, neither the mouth of the lion will be able to intimidate us, nor *the temptations of the devil* overcome us. Second, we read of faith which is “tried with fire” (1 Peter 1:7) or fierce afflictions: this fire (like Babylon’s) is *not* “put out,” but its “violence” or *power to injure*, is “quenched.” If the soul cleaves to God naught can harm it. It is faith, and not water, which quenches the fire: behold the martyrs *singing* amid the flames!

“Escaped the edge of the sword.” The historical reference is to such passages as 1 Samuel 18:4, 1 Kings 18:10; 19:1-3, Jeremiah 39:15-18: in several of which it seems as though those eminent servants of God escaped from danger more by fear than by faith—*fleeing* from those who threatened their lives. The life of faith is many-sided, and care needs to be taken to preserve the balance: to keep from mere passivity on the one hand, and from fanatical presumption on the other. While the Christian is to walk by faith, yet there is wrestling (Eph. 6:12) and fighting to be done (1 Tim. 6:12); we are to seek grace and develop all heroic virtues, such as courage, valor, hardness (2 Tim. 2:3), and endeavour by Divine aid to overcome everything which hinders us entering into God’s best. On the other side, the Christian must not refuse the use and aid of all lawful means in times of danger: “when they persecute you in this city, *flee ye* into another” (Matt. 10:23)—to refuse to do so is not faith, but presumption.

“Escaped the edge of the sword.” What is the deeper meaning of this? Our minds at once turn to Hebrews 4:12, “The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword”: confirmation of this is found in the fact that the Greek of our text reads “Escaped the *edges* of the sword.” But *how* is the Christian to “escape” the edges of the Spirit’s Sword? By being in practical subjection to the precepts of Scripture, walking in communion with God. It is when we get into a backslidden state and give way to the lusts of the flesh that the Word condemns our ways, pierces our conscience, and strikes terror to our hearts. God does not wound or afflict “willingly” (Lam. 3:33), but only when our conduct is displeasing to Him. If our hearts be right with God, His Word will strengthen and comfort, rather than cut and wound us. If we *judge* ourselves for all that is wrong, the Sword will not smite us; when we fail to, the Word searches and convicts us. Note Revelation 19:15, where the same figure of the “sharp sword” is seen in Christ’s mouth as He comes forth to destroy His enemies!

“Out of weakness were made strong.” In those words there may be a latent reference to Samson in the closing scene of his life, but most probably the historical allusion is unto Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 20:1 we are told that Hezekiah was “sick unto death,” and then he prayed unto the Lord, which was in marked contrast from Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:2), and Asa (2 Chron. 16:12). 2 Kings 20:3: “I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore” is much misunderstood: the key to it is found in 1 Kings 2:4: “If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee *a man on the throne of Israel.*” Hezekiah was conscious of his integrity and sincere desire to please God, but he had no son to succeed him to the throne, and therefore did he here call to mind His promise. The Lord responded to his faith, restored him to health, added fifteen years to his life and gave him a son.

“Out of weakness were made strong.” It is not simply that “the weak were strengthened,” but “out of *weakness* were made strong,” the emphasis being upon an extremity of feebleness. It shows us that the vigor of faith is not dependent upon health of the body! It is written “The prayer of faith shall (not the “anointing” of the “elders”) save the sick” (James 5:15 and cf. Phil. 2:27). But our text is not to be restricted to physical “weakness”; God is able to make the doctrinally and spiritually weak to stand: Romans 14:4. The secret of the Christian’s strength lies in maintaining a consciousness of his weakness (2 Cor. 12:10). The trouble is that as we grow older, most of us grow more independent and self-sufficient. The fact is that the oldest Christian has no more strength *in himself* than he had when he was but a “babe in Christ.” Just so soon as we fail to feel and acknowledge before God our personal weakness, do we fail to prove the sufficiency of God’s grace! Seek strength from Him daily.

“Waxed valiant in fight.” Probably the reference is to Samson (Judg. 15:15) and David. The phrase signifies that these heroes of faith refused to be intimidated by the might and number of their enemies; undaunted by the great odds against them, they refused to give way to a spirit of cowardice, and entered into a pitched battle against their foes: compare Deuteronomy 31:23, Joshua 1:7, Psalms 3:6, Acts 4:29. Once again we would stress the importance of the *order* here: “waxed valiant in fight” is preceded by “out of weakness were made strong!” and that in turn by “escaped the *edge* of the sword!” May we not easily perceive here why it is that we are so quickly and so frequently overcome by our spiritual foes?

“Turned to fight the armies of the aliens.” Such passages as Joshua 10:1-10 and 2 Samuel 5:17-25 may be consulted for typical illustrations of what is here in view, carefully bearing in mind that while the power of God giving success to the efforts of Joshua and David was the efficient cause of their victories, yet instrumentally, it was “through faith” they were wrought. The path of faith is one of conflict because the Adversary contests every step of the way. The chief reason why the individual Christian experiences so little victory in his spiritual warfare is because his *faith* is so little in exercise. And, we may add, the chief reason why the Church collectively is failing so lamentably to “turn to fight the armies of the aliens” is because there is so much jealousy and strife among its own members!

CHAPTER 25

The Pinnacle of Faith—Part One

(Heb. 11:35-36)

In his lengthy but most blessed description of the Life of Faith, the Spirit of God has, in Hebrews 11, passed from one phase of it to another, exhibiting to our view its many-sidedness. But there was one other aspect thereof which required to be delineated in order to give completeness to the whole, and that we have designated the “pinnacle” of faith, for to *suffer* for God, to meekly endure whatever affliction He is pleased to put upon us, to lay down our lives for the sake of His Truth if called upon to do so, is the highest point which faith can reach. Therefore, in the text which is now to engage our attention, He moved the Apostle to pass on to an entirely different sort of the fruits of faith from those mentioned in the preceding verses, and shows us the power of faith to support the soul under sufferings, even the acutest afflictions to which the human mind and body can be subjected.

“For hearing of these great and glorious things, they might be apt to think that they were not so immediately concerned in them. For *their* condition was poor, persecuted, exposed to all evils, and death itself, for the profession of the Gospel. Their interest, therefore, was to inquire what help in, what relief from faith they might expect in that condition? What will faith do where men are to be oppressed, persecuted and slain? Wherefore, the Apostle, applying himself directly unto their condition, with what they suffered and further feared on the account of their profession of the Gospel; he produceth a multitude of examples, as so many testimonies unto the power of faith in safe-guarding and preserving the souls of believers under the greatest sufferings that human nature can be exposed unto” (John Owen).

Not only were these instances of the sufferings of the Old Testament saints pertinent to the circumstances the Hebrew Christians of Paul’s time were in, but *we* too need to be informed of what faith in God and fidelity to His Truth may entail. At the outset of the Christian life we are bidden to first sit down and “count the cost” (Luke 14:28), which means that we are required to contemplate those sufferings which the following of Christ is likely to involve, and it is well that we should frequently remind ourselves that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). It is criminal silence on the part of any servant of God *to conceal from his hearers* that a true profession of the name of Christ will necessarily bring down upon us not only the scorn and opposition of the outside world, but also the hatred and persecution of the false religious world. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

The Lord Jesus Christ dealt openly in this matter, and plainly made known what was likely to befall those whom He called to follow Him, and expressly affirmed that He would admit none into the ranks of *His* disciples save those who denied themselves, took up their *cross*, and engaged to undergo all sorts of sufferings for His sake and the Gospel’s. He deceived none with fair promises of a smooth and easy passage through this world. So too does His faithful Apostle, in the verses which are to be before us, after setting before the Hebrews some of the grand and glorious achievements which the faith of their predecessors had wrought, now reminds them of *others* who were called upon to exercise *their* faith in the greatest miseries that could be undergone. Great trials and sore afflictions are to be expected in the path of faith. The Saviour Himself encountered them, and sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master.

“All the evils here enumerated, did befall the persons intended, on the account of their *faith*, and the profession thereof. The Apostle does not present unto the Hebrews a company of miserable, distressed creatures that fell into that state through their own default, or merely on the account of common providence, disposing their lot in this world into such a state of misery, as it is with many; but all the things mentioned, they underwent merely and solely on the account of their faith in God, and the profession of true religion. So as that their case differed in nothing from that which they might be called unto” (John Owen).

But not only were these sufferings encountered in the path of fidelity to God, but it was the exercise of *faith* which enabled those Old Testament worthies to patiently and spiritually endure them. Faith is a grace which draws down from Heaven whatever blessing of God is most needful to the saint, and therefore does it stand him in as good stead in the night of adversity as in the day of prosperity. Faith is a new-creation principle in the soul which not only energizes its possessor to perform exploits, but it also enables him to hold his head above the dark waters when floods threaten to drown him. Faith suffices the Christian to face danger calmly, to continue steadfast in duty when menaced by the most foreboding outlook, to stand his ground when threatened with sorest sufferings. Faith imparts a steadfastness of purpose, a noble courage, a tranquillity of mind, which no human education or fleshly efforts can supply. Faith makes the righteous as bold as a lion, refusing to recant though horrible tortures and a martyr's death be the only alternative.

Faith gives its possessor patience under adversities, for by faith he sees them in a Scriptural light and bears them by the enabling strength of Christ. How good and profitable is a sanctified affliction, but then only is it sanctified to us when faith is "mixed with" it. When faith is not in exercise, the heart is occupied with the things which are seen and temporal: only the creature's hand or the creature's treachery is viewed, and peevishness and resentment prevail; or worst still, we are tempted to entertain hard thoughts against God, and to say "the Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." But when the Spirit renews us in the inner man, and faith becomes active again, how differently do things then appear! Then we take ourselves to task and say, "Why art thou cast down O my soul, hope thou in God."

It belongs entirely unto the sovereign pleasure of God to order and dispose the outward conditions through which His Church passes upon earth: seasons of prosperity and times of adversity are regulated by Him as He deems best. Eras of peace and security and eras of persecution and peril are interchangeable, like day and night, summer and winter. Yet God does not act arbitrarily. It was not until after Abraham left Bethel and its altar, and journeyed southward (Egypt-wards) that there arose a famine in the land (Gen. 12:8-10). It was only when Israel "forsook the LORD God of their fathers . . . and followed other gods," that His anger was kindled against them, and "He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about" (Judg. 2:11-14). It was only when men "slept" that He suffered the Enemy to sow "tares" among the wheat (Matt. 13:25). It was after Ephesus *left* her "first love" that the Smyrean era of persecution was experienced (Rev. 2:4 and 9, 10). And it is because so many of the professing servants of God repudiated His Law during the previous generation that we are now plagued with a reign of lawlessness in the Church, home, and state.

God will not be mocked, and in His righteous government He visits the iniquities of the fathers upon their children, and hence it is that seasons of prosperity are followed by seasons of adversity. Yet during these seasons of adversity, whether they take the form of spiritual dearth or of physical peril, the godly remnant who sigh and cry because of the abominations which are found in what are termed the public "places of worship," or who meekly endure the persecutions of hypocritical professors or of the openly ungodly world, are no less acceptable with God, and are *as precious in His sight* as those whose lot was previously cast in times of the greatest earthly felicity.

The darker the night the more evident the few stars twinkling between the clouds. The more awful be the state of professing Christendom as a whole, the more suitable is the background for the children of God to display their colours. The fiercer be the opposition made against a spiritual faith, the grander the opportunity for bringing forth its choicest fruit. There is no higher aspect of faith than that which brings the heart to patiently submit unto whatever God sends us, to meekly acquiesce unto His sovereign will, to say "the cup which My Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). Oftentimes the faith which *suffers* is greater than the faith that can boast an open triumph. Love "beareth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7), and faith when it reaches the pinnacle of attainment declares, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

"There is as much glory unto a spiritual eye, in the catalogue of the effects of faith that follow, as in that which went before. The church is no less beautiful and glorious when encompassed, and seemingly overwhelmed with all the evils and dreadful miseries here recounted, than when it is in the greatest peace and prosperity. To look, indeed, only on the outside of them gives a terrible undesirable prospect. But to see faith and love to God, working effectually under them all, to see comforts retained, yea, consolations abounding, holiness prompted, God glorified, the world condemned, the souls of men profited, and at length triumphant over all; this is beautiful and glorious . . .

"It may also be observed that the Apostle takes most of these instances, if not all of them, from the time of the persecution of the church under Antiochus, the king of Syria, in the days of the Maccabees. And we may consider concerning this season: 1. That it was after the closing of the canon of Scripture, or putting of the last hand unto writings by Divine inspiration under the Old Testament. Wherefore, as the Apostle represented these things from the notoriety of fact then fresh in memory, and it may be, some books then written of those things, like the books of the Maccabees, yet remaining; yet as they are delivered out unto the church *by him*, they proceeded from Divine inspiration. 2. That in those days wherein these things fell out, there was no extraordinary prophet in the church. Prophecy, as the Jews confess, ceased under the second temple. And this makes it evident that the rule of the Word, and the ordinary ministry of the

church, *is sufficient* to maintain believers in their duty against all oppositions whatever. 3. That this last persecution of the church under the Old Testament by Antiochus, was typical of the last persecution of the Christian church under antichrist; as is evident to all that compare Daniel 8:10-14, 23-25; 11:36-39 with that of the Revelation in sundry places. And indeed the martyrologies of those who have suffered under the Roman antichrist are a better exposition of this context than any that can be given in words” (John Owen).

“Women received their dead raised to life again” (Heb. 11:35). Some have complained, because this clause is not placed at the end of verse 34, urging that it belongs there much more appropriately than it does at the beginning of verse 35, being a fitting climax to the miraculous achievements of faith enumerated in verses 33, 34. While it be true that the particular item here before us belongs to the same class of miracles found in the preceding verse, yet personally we regard it as suitable for placing at the head of what follows in verses 35-38, for it forms a suitable *transition* from the one to the other. And in this respect: those women passed through the sufferings of a sore bereavement before they had their beloved children restored to them—a reward for their kindness unto God’s servants.

“Women received their dead raised to life again.” The historical reference is to what is recorded in 1 Kings 17:22-24 and 2 Kings 4:35-37. How those remarkable cases show us once more that there is nothing too hard or difficult for *faith* to effect when it works according to the revealed will of God! But what is the *spiritual* application of this unto us today? Is it not faith’s seeking the Spirit’s renewal of languishing graces? the practical heeding of that word “Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die” (Rev. 3:2)! Or, to take a more extreme case, is it not a word of hope to the backslidden Christian, who has to all appearances lapsed back into a state of un-regeneracy? Is it not faith’s response to that word (addressed to Christians) “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. 5:14)!

“And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance” (v. 35). It is very touching to remember that the hand which first penned those words had taken a prominent part in inflicting torture upon the saints of God (Acts 8:3, 9:1), but, by grace, he was now a *sharer* of them (2 Cor. 11:24-27). The word “torture” here signifies “were racked”: those Old Testament saints were fastened to a device and then a wrench was turned which caused their joints to be pulled out of their sockets—a method of torture frequently resorted to by fiendish Romanists when seeking to force Protestants to recant. By this fearful form of suffering the graces of God’s people were tested and tried.

“Not accepting deliverance.” It was offered to them, but at the price of apostasy. Two alternatives were set before them: disloyalty to the Lord, or enduring the most excruciating suffering—surrender of the Truth, or being tortured by devils in human form. Freedom from this torture was offered to them in return for forsaking their profession. This is expressly affirmed of Eliezer and his seven brethren in 2 Maccabees. Yea, they were not only offered freedom from tortures and death, but promised great rewards and promotions, which they steadfastly refused. The *principal* design of Satan in setting torture before God’s saints is not to slay their bodies, but is to *destroy their souls*. Space has always been given to the victim for consideration and recantation: entreaties have been mingled with threats to induce a renouncing of their profession.

Thus, the real test presented was which did these saints of God esteem more highly: the present comfort of their bodies or the eternal interests of their souls? Let it be remembered that they were men and women of like passions with us: their bodies were made of the same tender and sensitive flesh as ours are, but such was the care they had for their souls, so genuine was their faith and hope in a better resurrection, that they listened not to the appeals and whinings of the outward man. The *same* issue is drawn, though in another form, today: alas, what countless millions of people lose their souls eternally for the temporary gratification of their vile bodies. Reader, which do you esteem the more highly: your body or your soul? Your *actions* supply the answer: which receives the more thought, care, and attention; *which* is “denied,” and *which* is catered unto?

“Not accepting deliverance.” The word for “deliverance” here is commonly translated “redemption” in the New Testament: its usage in this verse helps to a clearer understanding of that important term, and emphasizes the difference between it and “ransom.” “Ransom” is the paying of the price which justice requires, but “redemption” is the actual emancipation of the one for whom the price was paid. These saints refused to accept a temporal “redemption” or “deliverance,” because to have done so on the terms it was proffered to them would have meant the renunciation of their profession, apostasy from God. It was “through *faith*” they made this noble decision; it was love for the truth, which caused them to hold fast that which was infinitely dearer to them than an escape from bodily suffering. They had “bought the Truth,” at the price of turning their backs on the world and their former religious friends, and bringing down upon themselves the scorn and hatred of them. And now they refused to “sell the Truth” (Prov. 23:23) out of a mere regard to bodily ease.

“Not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection”: that last clause shows the *ground* of their steadfastness. The primary force of the expression *here* is a figurative one, as the verse as a whole clearly shows: they

were offered a “resurrection” on the condition of their recantation, namely a “resurrection” from reproach to honour, from poverty to riches, from pain to ease and pleasure—it was a “resurrection” from the physical torture which threatened them: compare Hebrews 11:19. But their hearts were occupied with something far, far better than being raised up to earthly comforts and honours; their faith anticipated that morning without clouds, when their bodies would be raised in glory, made like Christ’s, and taken to be with Him forever. It was the hope of *that* which supported their souls in the face of extreme peril and sustained them under acutest sufferings.

“That they might obtain a better resurrection.” In passing, let it be noted that God had set before the *Old Testament* saints the hope of resurrection—they were not nearly so ignorant as the dispensationalists make them out to be, in fact were far wiser than most of our moderns. Resurrection has always been the topstone in the building of faith (Job 19:25, 26), that which promised eternal reward, and that which gave life unto their obedience. A further proof of this fact is found in Acts 24:14-16: the faith of the “fathers” embraced “a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” That glorious resurrection will more than compensate for any bodily denials or bodily sufferings which the Christian makes or experiences for Christ’s sake.

“And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment” (Heb. 11:36). This verse supplies further details of what some of the Old Testament saints were called upon to suffer for their fidelity to the Truth, sufferings which have been frequently duplicated during this Christian era. We are here informed of the various methods which the enemies of God employed in the afflicting of His people; no stone was left unturned in the persevering and merciless efforts to produce a denial of the Faith. While these things are harrowing to our feelings, yet they also serve to make manifest the sufficiency of Divine grace to support its recipients under most painful trials, and should evoke thanksgiving and praise unto Him that is able to make the weak stand up under the fiercest assaults of the Enemy.

“And others had trial of cruel mockings.” Let us, when we are reproached for Christ’s sake and ridiculed because of our adherence to God’s truth, call to mind that *this* was the *mildest* form of suffering which many who went before us on the pilgrim path were called upon to endure! The sneers and unkind words of our foes are not worthy of a pang in comparison with the far sorer pains which other believers have had to bear. It has ever been the portion of God’s servants and people to be derided, reproached and insulted: see Galatians 4:29, 2 Chronicles 36:16, Jeremiah 20:7, Lamentations 3:14; and my reader, if *we* are not being “mocked”—sneered at, scoffed at—it is because we are too lax in our ways and too worldly in our walk. Human nature has not changed; Satan has not changed; the world has not changed; and the more Christlike is our life the more we shall drink—in our measure—of the cup He drank from.

“And scourgings.” The reference is to the lashings of their backs with whips of wire, which were most painful to experience, for they lacerated the flesh, drew blood, and mascerated the body. It was not only a painful form of suffering, but a most humiliating one as well, for “scourgings” were reserved for the basest and most degenerate of men. The Lord Jesus was subjected to this form of ignominy and suffering from His enemies (Matt. 27:26), and so also were His Apostles (Acts 5:40, 16:23). It is true that *we* are now (for the immediate present) spared these corporeal “scourgings,” but there is such a thing as being lashed by the tongue and harrowed in our minds; nevertheless, happy are we (Matt. 5:10-12) if we are so honoured as to experience a little fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. But let us see well to it that we do not retaliate: ponder carefully and turn into earnest prayer Psalm 38:12-14; 1 Peter 2:21-23.

“Yea, moreover of bonds.” The reference is to cords, chains, manacles and fetters, binding them fast, so that they could not run away. In this item we see how “the excellent” of the earth (Psa. 16:3) were basely dealt with as though they had been the vilest of malefactors. Does your heart go out in pity to them, dear reader? Ah, what if *you* are “bound” even now with something far, far worse than outer and material ropes and chains! Multitudes are held fast by habits they cannot break; their souls are fettered by iniquities from which they cannot free themselves. Sin has taken them captive, and has full dominion over them. Has it over you? Or, has Christ set you free—not from the hateful presence of indwelling sin, but from its reigning power. Daily ought we to pray and strive against everything which limits us spiritually.

“And imprisonments,” which was the lot commonly apportioned to robbers and murderers. Here again we see the saints of God treated as the offscouring of the earth, and let it be remembered that the prisons of those days were of a far different order from the comfortable buildings in which criminals are now incarcerated. One has only to read the experience of Jeremiah 38:11-13 to get some idea of the meaning of this word in our text: God’s children were thrown into dark and damp dungeons, far below the level of the earth, unheated, unpaved, unilluminated. One cannot read this clause in our text without thinking of dear Bunyan. Ah, my reader, nothing but a *real* faith in the living God could have enabled those believers to have remained faithful unto death. The whole of the verses which have been before us exhibit the efficacy and *sufficiency* of a spiritual faith to endure the worst that men and devils could inflict upon its favoured possessors. Is *yours* only an easy-chair “faith”?

CHAPTER 26

The Pinnacle of Faith—Part Two

(Heb. 11:37-38)

There has been no greater instance of the degeneracy of human nature and its likeness to the Devil than in the fearful fact that so many who have occupied prominent positions—magistrates, ecclesiastical dignitaries, kings and emperors—were not content to take the bare lives of true worshippers of God by the sword, but invented the most fiendish methods of torture to destroy them. That educated men and women in high places, that those professing the name of Christ, should conduct themselves like savages, that their rage against the “excellent of the earth” should express itself in such villany and inhumanity, is a most dreadful demonstration of human depravity when the hand of God is withdrawn. With what infinite patience does the Most High bear with the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction!

But why should God allow many of His dear children to encounter such terrible experiences? Among other answers, the following may be suggested. First, for the more thorough trial of His champions, that their faith, courage, patience, and other graces, might be more manifest. Second, to seal or ratify more plainly the Truth which they profess. Third, to encourage and strengthen the faith of their weaker brethren. Fourth, to give them more sensible evidence of what Christ endured for them. Fifth, to cause them to perceive the better the torments of Hell: if those whom God loves are permitted to endure such grievous and painful trials, what must we understand of those torments which the wrath of God inflicts upon those whom He hates!

The teaching of Scripture upon the various reasons why God calls upon His children to suffer at the hands of the openly wicked, or, as is more often the case, from those professing to be His people, is full of valuable instruction, and calls for prayerful pondering. One of the advantages gained from such an exercise is the plainer perception of the very real and radical difference there is between that spiritual and supernatural faith which is possessed by God’s elect, and that notional and natural faith which is all that millions of empty professors have. Should it please God to remove His restraining hand and permit open and fierce persecution to once more break forth upon the true followers of the Lamb, the difference just mentioned would be made apparent, for “When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word,” the stony-ground hearer is soon “offended” (Matt. 13:21), or, as Luke 8:13 expresses it, “fall away.” But different far is it with the good-ground hearer.

“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). That faith which is “the gift of God” *endures to the end*. The testing of that faith, the fiery trial thereof serves the better to make manifest the Divine origin of it: only that faith which has come from God is able to endure the testing of God. Just as it is in *the furnace* that genuine gold is most quickly distinguished from tinsel, so it is under sore trials that the difference between spiritual and natural faith becomes the more apparent. Like much of the *imitation* jewelry of the day, the creature-faith of empty professors may look more glittering, be more bulky, and have more attraction for the outward eye, and be better calculated to adorn its possessor than does the genuine faith of God’s elect, which is often small in size, dull in appearance, and lacking in attractiveness to the human beholder.

Yes, dear reader, it is *the fiery trial* which puts to the proof the kind of faith we really possess. Let the two faiths—that natural faith which man originates, and exercises by an act of his own will, and that spiritual faith which is the gift of God and which man can no more exercise of himself than he can create a world—be placed side by side in the crucible; let the burning flame try which is the genuine metal; let the hot fire play around them both, and the false faith (like imitation gold) will soon melt away into a shapeless mass of base metal; but the true faith will come forth uninjured by the fire, having lost nothing but what it could well spare—the dross with which it has been mixed. See that fact strikingly and solemnly adumbrated in Daniel 3: the furnace of Babylon harmed not the three Hebrews who were cast into it—it merely destroyed their bonds; but it *consumed* the Babylonians (v. 22)!

Let it be duly noted that in 1 Peter 1:7 the Apostle, when comparing faith with gold, accredits to the former a higher value: it is “much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” Gold, though its genuineness may be proved by enduring the test of fire, is yet a perishing thing—a thing of the earth, a thing of time. That gold for which men toil so labouriously and sell their souls to acquire, is of no avail on a deathbed, still less will it stand any in good stead in the Day of Judgment! At death it has to be left behind, for none can take it with him into the next life. Then how much more precious is that *faith* which, instead of, like gold, leaving its possessor under the wrath of God, will be “found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ!”

But the point to which we would now direct special attention is that it is not so much the faith itself as “the *trial* of faith” which is more precious than of gold which perisheth. This is clear to the spiritual mind: trials and temptations are the means which God employs to make manifest to the soul the reality and strength of that faith which He bestows, for there is in every trial and temptation an opposition made to the faith which is in the heart, and trial and temptation, so to speak, threatens the life of faith. How so? Because under the trial, God, for the most part, *hides* Himself: the light of His countenance is no longer visible, His smile is overcast by a dark providence. Nevertheless, He puts forth a secret power which upholds the soul, otherwise it would sink into utter despair, be swallowed up by the power of unbelief. Here, then, is the conflict: the trial fighting against faith, and that faith against the trial.

Now then in this trial, under this sharp conflict, in this hot furnace, the spiritual and supernatural faith is not burned or destroyed, but instead, grips firmly the promise, and the faithfulness of Him who has given it. And thus “the trial of faith” becomes exceedingly *precious*. It is “precious” to its possessor when its genuineness is made the more manifest to him. It is “precious” in the sight of God’s people, who discern it, and derive strength and comfort from what they witness in the experience of a fellow-saint who is thus tried and blessed. It is “precious” in the sight of God Himself, who crowns it with His own manifest approbation and puts upon it the seal of His approving smile. But above all things it will be found “precious” at the final appearing of the Lord Jesus in glory, for then He “will be admired in all them that believe” (2 Thess. 1:10).

To suffer the hardest things as well as to do the greatest, is all one to faith. It is equally ready for both when God shall require; and it is equally effectual in both, as God shall strengthen. The performing of spectacular exploits and the enduring of terrible affliction differ almost as much to the flesh as do Heaven and Hell, but they are one to faith when duty calls. This is very evident from the section of Hebrews 11 which is now before us (vv. 33-38), the closing portion of which is about to engage our attention. At the beginning of this section we are furnished with a list of the marvels which were wrought by a God-given faith: at the close thereof we are given a list of fearful sufferings and privations which were patiently and courageously borne by a God-sustained faith. The latter, as much as the former, demonstrates the supernatural character of that faith which is in view throughout our chapter; yea, forms a most glorious climax thereto.

We say that the fearful sufferings experienced by God’s people form a blessed climax in the Spirit’s unfolding of the Life of Faith: those sufferings mark, in fact, the pinnacle of its attainments. Why so? Because they make manifest a heart that is completely subject to God, that bows submissively to whatever He is pleased to send, which has been so completely won to Him that torture and death are deliberately chosen and gladly preferred to apostasy from Him. A “Meek and quiet spirit” is of “great price” in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4), and nothing more plainly evidences the *meekness* of the Christian-his lying passive as clay in the hands of the Potter-as faith’s willing acceptance of whatever lot our Father sees fit to appoint us. To be faithful unto death, to have unshakable confidence in the Lord, though He suffers us to be slain, to trust Him when to sight and sense it seems He has deserted us, is the highest exercise of all of faith.

Ere closing these introductory paragraphs, let us seek to point out the various *actings of faith* in times of danger, trial, and persecution. First, faith recognizes that “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev. 19:6), that He is on the throne of the universe, and “doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand” (Dan. 4:35). Yes, dear reader, a spiritual faith perceives that things do not happen by chance, but that everything is regulated by the Lord God. Second, faith recognizes that everything which enters our lives is ordered by Him who is our Father, and that our enemies can do nothing whatever against us without His direct permission-the Devil could not touch Job nor sift Peter until he first obtained leave from the Lord! Oh what a sure resting place is there here for the troubled and trembling heart. Third, faith recognizes that, no matter how fiercely Satan may be permitted to rage against us, or how sorely men persecute, their malicious efforts will be made to work together for *our good* (Rom. 8:28).

Fourth, by mixing itself with God’s promises, faith obtains present help, strength and consolation from God. It derives peace and comfort from that sure word, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa. 43:2). It counts upon the assurance “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Finally faith looks away from the present conflict, and views the promised rest. It anticipates the future reward, and as it does so, is assured that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). Such are some of the workings of faith when God’s children are called upon to pass through the furnace.

“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” (Heb. 11:37, 38). These verses continue the list of sufferings begun in verse 35. They enumerate the various kinds of persecution to which many of the Old Testament saints

were subjected. They are of two types: first, such as fell under the utmost rage of their enemies, enduring a martyr's death; second, such as to escape death, exposed themselves to great miseries which were undergone in this life.

It may be helpful at this point for us to raise the question, How are such dreadful sufferings to be harmonized with the Divine promises of *temporal* blessings on those whose ways please the Lord. Dispensationalists are very fond of emphasizing the *temporal* character of the Old Testament promises, imagining that the promises of the New Testament are of a greatly superior character. In this they err seriously. On the one hand, the verses which are now under consideration describe the temporal experiences of some of the most eminent of the *Old Testament* saints; on the other hand, the *New Testament* expressly affirms godliness has "promise of the life *that now is*, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). The answer to our opening query is very simple: such promises as those in Deuteronomy 28:1-6 (which still hold good to *faith!*) are to be understood with two exceptions: unless our sins call down Divine chastisements, or unless God is pleased to make trial of our graces by afflictions.

"They were stoned." This form of death was appointed by God Himself to be inflicted upon notorious malefactors: Leviticus 22:2, Joshua 7:24, 25. But our text has reference to the Satanic perversion of this Divine institution, for here it is the enemies of God inflicting this punishment upon His beloved and faithful people. "The devil is never more a devil nor more outrageous, than when he gets a pretense of God's weapons into his own hands" (Owen). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, suffered death in this form. It is touching to remember that the one who first penned our text, himself "consented" to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1): and later he himself was stoned at Lystra.

"They were sawn asunder." This was a barbarous method of execution which the later Jews seemed to have learned from the heathen. There is no record in Scripture of anyone being put to death in this way, though tradition says Isaiah ended his earthly career in this manner. That some of the heroes of faith perished in this way is clear from our text, evidencing the malice of the Devil and the brutal rage of persecution. Their endurance of such torture demonstrates the reality and power of the Spirit's support, enabling them to remain true to God, and in the midst of their agonies sweetly commit their spirits into His hands, to the astonishment of their murderers. How this should stir us up to bear patiently the far smaller trials we may be called upon to encounter.

"Were tempted." This may be considered two ways, as pointing to an *aggravation* of their sufferings, or as referring to a *separate* trial of faith; we will take it in both respects. First, as signifying an intensification of their other trials, the reference would be to their persecutors setting before them the promise of relief upon their repudiation of the Truth-liberty at the price of perfidity. The baits of immunity and advancement were offered to them on the condition that they would abandon their strictness and join the ranks of the loose livers of that day. We believe that our text also includes *the temptings of Satan*, seeking to fill their minds with doubts as to God's goodness and power, urging them to recede from the stand they had taken. Because they remained resolute, refusing to yield to the insidious demands of their persecutors, they were cruelly butchered.

"Were tempted" may in the second place, be contemplated as referring to that life of ease and pleasure which worldly advancement and riches might provide. History solemnly records that numbers of those who courageously endured long and cruel imprisonment (and other sore trials) for the Truth's sake during the reign of the papist and bloody queen Mary of England, yet upon the accession of queen Elizabeth were freed, elevated to high places, and obtaining much wealth and power, denied the power of godliness and made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. But those in our text were possessed of a faith like unto that of Moses (11:24-26), and therefore were enabled to withstand the powerful temptations of the world. Poverty, dear reader, is often sent by God upon His people as a merciful means of delivering them from the dangerous snares which wealth entails.

"Were slain with the sword": there is probably a double reference here. First, to the sword of *violence*, when persecutors in their fury fell upon the servants and people of God, butchering them for their fidelity: see 1 Samuel 22:18, 21, 1 Kings 19:10. Second, the sword of *justice*, or rather injustice, the law being enforced against the saints. Probably this form of death is mentioned last to signify the *multitude* of martyrs who by their blood sealed up the Truth: literally rendered our text reads, "they died in the slaughter of the sword," which denotes the insatiable thirst of the persecutors and the large number which they felled. Papists have exceeded pagans herein: witness their cruel massacres in France and other places: well may the Holy Spirit represent the whore Babylon as being "drunk with the blood of the saints" (Rev. 17:6).

"They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins," which means they were hounded out of their homes, and forced to go forth and exist as they might, without any settled habitation. "They were driven out to share the lot of wild animals, and were reduced to wear their skins, instead of clothes woven by man. This form of suffering is mentioned here, to show, on the one hand, the cruelty of religious persecution; and, on the other hand, the mighty sustaining power of faith. What power indeed is this! It was not merely the compulsion such as that which enforced the wandering of society's outlaws. It was rather the deliberate choice like that of Moses (vv. 24-26). Any day, anyone of these wanderers could

have rejoined their fellowmen, enjoyed their society, and shared their comforts; but they preferred this lot to apostasy” (E.W.B.)

“Being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” These terms set forth the variety and intensity of the sufferings experienced by the homeless saints. “Destitute” means they were deprived of the ordinary necessities of life, and further signifies they were denied the kind assistance of relatives and friends: they were driven forth without the means of subsistence and were beyond the reach of succour from all who cared for them. “Afflicted” probably has reference to their state of mind: they were not emotionless stoics, but felt acutely their sad condition. No doubt the Enemy took full advantage of their state and injected many unbelieving and harassing thoughts into their minds. “Tormented” is rather too strong a word here: we understand the reference to be unto the ill-treatment they met with from the unfriendly strangers encountered in their wanderings, who regarded them without any pity and evilly treated them.

“Of whom the world was not worthy.” This parenthetic clause is brought in here for the purpose of removing an objection: many might suppose that these despised wanderers were only receiving their just due, as not being fit to live in decent society. To remove this scandal the Apostle put the blame where it rightly belonged, affirming that it was society which was unworthy of having the saints of God in their midst. In its wider aspect, the “world” here takes in the whole company of the ungodly; but in its narrower sense (that of the context), it has reference to the apostate “world”—all history, sacred and secular—is harmonious on this point: the most merciless, conscienceless, cruel, and inveterate persecutors of God’s elect have been *religious* people!

“Of whom the world was not worthy.” Here we see the difference between *God’s* estimate and that of unregenerate religionists concerning the Children of Faith. God regards them as “the excellent” of the earth in whom is His “delight” (Psa. 16:3). “A true believer by reason of his union with Christ, and of the abode of the Spirit of sanctification in him, is worth more than a million worlds; as a rich and precious jewel is of more worth than many loads of filthy mud” (W. Gouge). The excellency of saints appears also in the benefit and blessings which they bring to the places where they reside: they are the “salt of the earth,” though the corrupt multitude around them realize it not. Their presence stays the hand of Divine judgment (Gen. 19:22), brings down blessing (Gen. 30:27), and their prayers secure Divine healing (Gen. 20:17). How little does the world realize how much it owes to those whom they hate so bitterly!

“They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.” Not only were they without a settled habitation, but they were compelled to resort to desolate places and the dens of wild beasts in order to escape the fury of their foes. The word for “wandering” here is different from the one used in the previous verse: there it signifies to go up and down from house to house, or town to town, in hope of finding succour; but in which they were disappointed. Here the term denotes a wandering in unknown territory, going (like a blind man) they knew not whither: it is the term used of Abraham in verse 8, and of Hagar in Genesis 16:6, and of wandering sheep in Matthew 18:12. What a commentary upon fallen human nature: these saints of God were safer among the beasts of the field than in the religious world inflamed by the Devil! While these lines are being read, there are probably some of God’s children in foreign lands suffering these very experiences.

Seeing that faith in the living God will alone support the soul under manifold trials, how necessary it is that we labour in the fear of the Lord to get our hearts rooted and grounded in the Truth, so that when afflictions or persecutions come we may be enabled to show forth the power and fruits of this spiritual grace. Faith has to overcome the fear of man as well as the love of the world! Whatever sufferings God may appoint in the path of duty, they are to be patiently borne as seeing Him who is invisible. Their enemies clothed death in the most hideous and horrible forms that hatred could devise, yet the faith of those saints boldly met and endured it. How thankful *we* should be that God’s restraining hand is still upon the reprobate, for human nature has not improved any.

CHAPTER 27

The Family of Faith

(Heb. 11:39-40)

“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” (vv. 39, 40). Several details in these verses call for careful consideration. First, to what does “the promise” here refer to? Second, in what sense had the Old Testament saints “not received” the promise? Third, what is the “better thing” which God provided for us. Fourth, what is here meant by

“be made perfect”? Widely different answers have been returned to these questions, and even the most reliable of the commentators are by no means agreed; therefore it would ill-become us to speak dogmatically, where men of God differ. Instead of wearying the reader with their diverse views, we will expound our text according to what measure of light God has granted us upon it.

As we approach our task there are several considerations which need to be borne in mind, the observing of which should aid us not a little. First, ascertaining the relation of our text to that which precedes. Second, discovering the exact relation of its several clauses. Third, studying it in the light of the distinctive and dominant theme of the particular Epistle in which it occurs. Fourth, weighing its leading terms in connection with their usage in parallel passages. If these four things be duly attended to we ought not to go far wrong in our interpretation. Our purpose in enumerating them is principally to indicate to your preachers the methods which should be followed in the critical examination of any difficult passage.

As to the connection between our present verses and those which precede, there is no

difficulty. The Apostle, having so forcibly and largely set out the virtue and vigour of faith by the admirable workings and fruits thereof, both in doing and in suffering, now gives a general summary: they all “obtained a good report.” The relation of the several clauses of our text to each other, may be set out thus: “and these all” refer to the entire company which has been before us in the previous verses; a “good report” is ascribed to them; yet they had not “received the promise”; because God had provided something “better” for the New Testament saints. The dominant theme of Hebrews is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The leading terms in our text will be pondered in what follows.

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith.” Two things are here in view: the persons spoken of, and that which is predicated of them. The reference is to all spoken of in the previous parts of the chapter, and by necessary inference, to all believers before the incarnation of Christ who exhibited a true faith. The words “*these* all” is restrictive, excluding others who had not the faith here mentioned. “Many more than these lived before Christ was exhibited, yea, lived in the time and place that some of these did, yet received no good report. Cain lived and offered a sacrifice with Abel, yet was none of these. Ham was in the ark with Shem; Ishmael in Abraham’s family with Isaac; Esau in the same womb with Jacob; Dathan and Abiram came through the Red Sea with Caleb and Joshua: many other wicked unbelievers were mixed with believers, yet they obtained not any such good report. Though their outward condition was alike, yet their inward disposition was much different” (W. Gouge).

Thus it is today. There are two widely different classes of people who come under the sound of the Word: those who believe it, and those who believe it not. And those of the former class have also to be divided, for while there are a few in whom that Word works effectually in a spiritual way, many have nothing more than a natural faith in its letter. This latter faith-which so many today mistake for a *saving* one-is merely an intellectual assent to the Divine authority of the Bible and to the verities of its contents-like that possessed by most of the Jews of Christ’s day, and which though good so far as it goes, changes not the *heart* nor issues in a godly life. A supernatural faith, which is wrought in the soul by the operations of the Holy Spirit, issues in supernatural works, such as those attributed unto the men and women mentioned in Hebrews 11. It is a Divine principle which enables its possessor to overcome the world, patiently endure the sorest afflictions, and love God and His Truth more than life itself.

“Having obtained a good report through faith.” Because of their trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and because of their walking in subjection to His revealed will, they received approbation. There is probably a threefold reference in the words now before us. First, unto God’s own testimony which He bore to them: this is found in His Word, where their names receive honourable mention, and where the fruits of their faith are imperishably preserved. Second, to the Spirit’s bearing witness with their spirit that they were the children of God (Rom. 8:16), the rejoicing which they had from the testimony of a good conscience (2 Cor. 1:20): this in blessed contrast from the world’s estimate of them, who regarded and treated them as the offscouring of all things. Third, to the esteem in which they were held by the Church, their fellow-saints testifying to the unworldliness of their lives: this shows our faith should be evidenced by such good works that it is justified before men.

“Received not the promise.” The singular number here implies some pre-eminent excellent thing promised, and this is Jesus Christ, the Divine Saviour. He is said to be given according to “the promise” (Acts 13:23). God’s “promise” was declared to be fulfilled when He brought Christ forth (Acts 13:32, 33). In Acts 2:39 and 26:6 Christ is set forth under this term “promise.” Christ Himself is the prime promise, not only because He was the substance of the first promise given after the Fall (Gen. 3:15), but also because He is the complement or accomplishment of all the promises (2 Cor. 1:20). The great promise of God to send His Son, born of a woman, to save His people from their sins, was the Object of faith of the Church throughout all the generations of the Old Testament era. Therein we may discern the rich grace of God in providing for the spiritual needs of His saints from earliest times.

“Received not the promise.” As several times before in the Epistle, “promise” is here used metonymically for the thing promised, and this it is which explains the “received not.” As Owen expressed it, “The promise as a faithful engagement of future good, they received, but the good thing itself was not in their days exhibited.” They did not live to see historically accomplished that which their faith specifically embraced. As the Lord Jesus declared to His disciples, “Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Matt. 13:17). Herein we behold the strength and perseverance of faith, that they continued to look, unwaveringly, for so many centuries for Him that should come, and came not in their lifetime.

“God having provided some better thing for us.” The verb here looks back to the eternal counsels of Divine grace, to the Everlasting Covenant; it is a word which denotes God’s determination, designation and appointment of Christ to be the propitiatory sacrifice, and the exact season for His advent. “When the fullness of the time was come (the season ordained by Heaven), God sent forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4). Thus it should be clear that the contrast which is pointed in the sentence before us, is that between “the promise” *given* and “the promise” *performed*. It is at that point, and no other, we find the essential difference between the faith of the Old Testament saints and the faith of the New Testament saints: the one looked forward to a Saviour that *was* to come, the other looks back to a Saviour who *has* come.

It seems strange that what is really so obvious and simple should have been regarded by many as obscure and difficult. In his “Great Cloud of Witnesses” E.W. Bullinger began his comments on this passage by saying, “These verses must be among those to which Peter referred when he said, speaking of Paul’s Epistles, there are ‘some things hard to be understood.’ For they confessedly present no small difficulty.” But what is there here which is “hard to be understood”? The very Epistle in which this verse occurs supplies a sure key to its correct interpretation. As we have said above, the great theme of it is, the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and those of our readers who have followed us through this series of expositions, will recall how many illustrations of this have been before us. Another one is present in 11:39, 40: “*they* received not the (fulfillment of) the promise,” *we* have—“God having provided some better thing for us”: cf. 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34 for the word “better.”

It is really pathetic and deplorable to see what most of the moderns make of our present verse. In their anxiety to magnify the contrast between the Mosaic and Christian economies, and in their ignorance of much of the contents of the Old Testament Scriptures, they have seized upon these words “God having provided some better thing for us” to bolster up one of their chief errors, and have read into them that which anyone having even a superficial acquaintance with the Psalms and Prophets should have no difficulty in perceiving to be utterly untenable. Some have said that “better thing” which we Christians have is eternal life, others that it is regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit, others that it is membership in the Body of Christ with the heavenly calling that entails—denying that these blessings were enjoyed by any of the Old Testament saints. Such is a fair sample of the rubbish which is now to be found in most of the “ministry,” oral and written, of this degenerate age.

In their crude and arbitrary attempts to rightly divide the word of truth, those calling themselves “dispensationalists” have wrongly divided the family of God. The entire Election of Grace have God for their Father, Christ for their Saviour, the Holy Spirit for their Comforter. All who are saved, from the beginning to the end of earth’s history, are the objects of God’s everlasting love, share alike in the benefits of Christ’s atonement, and are begotten by the Spirit unto the same inheritance. God communicated to Able the same kind of faith as He does to His children today. Abraham was justified in precisely the same manner as Christians are now (Rom. 4). Moses bore the “reproach of Christ,” and had respect unto the identical “recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:26) as is set before us. David was as truly a stranger and pilgrim on earth as we are (Psa. 119:19), and looked unto the same eternal pleasures at God’s right hand as we do (Psa. 16:11; 23:6).

The worst mistakes made by the “dispensationalists” grow out of their failures at the following points: first, to see the organic union between the Mosaic and Christian economies; second, to perceive that the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” were but two different administrations under which the blessings of the “Everlasting Covenant” are imparted; third, to distinguish between the spiritual remnant and the nation itself. The relation between the patriarchal and the Mosaic dispensations and this Christian era may be stated thus: they stood to each other, partly as the beginning does to the end, and partly as the shell does to the kernel. The former were preparatory, the latter is the full development—first the blade (in the patriarchal dispensation), then the ear (the Mosaic), and now the full corn in the ear, in this Christian era. In the former we have the type and shadow; in the latter, the antitype and substance. Christianity is but the full development of what existed in former ages, or a grander exemplification of the truths and principles which were then revealed.

The great fact that the Everlasting Covenant which God made with Christ as the Head of His Church formed the basis of all His dealings with His people, and that the terms and blessings of that Eternal Charter were being administered by Him under the “old” and “new” covenants, may be illustrated from secular history. In practically every country there are two chief political parties. The policy, and particularly the methods followed, by these rival factions, differ radically, yet though the one may succeed the other in power, and though great changes mark their alternative regimes, and though

many diverse laws may be enacted or cancelled from time to time, yet *the fundamental constitution* of the country remains unchanged. Thus it is under the Mosaic and Christian economies: widely different as they are in many incidental details, nevertheless God's moral government is always according to the same fundamental principles of grace and righteousness, mercy and justice, truth and faithfulness, in the one era equally as much as in the other.

The distinction between the regenerated remnant and the unregenerate nation during Old Testament times, is as real and radical as that which now exists between real Christians and the multitude of empty professors with which Christendom abounds; yea, one is the type of the other. Just as empty professors now possess a "form of godliness" but are destitute of its "power," so the great bulk of the lineal descendants of Abraham were occupied only with the externals of Judaism-witness the scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day-and just as the lifeless religionists of our time are taken up with the "letter" of the Word and have no experimental acquaintance with its spiritual realities, so the unquickened Israelites of old were engaged with the outward shell of their ritual, but never penetrated to its kernel. There was an election within an election, a remnant who were Jews "inwardly" (Rom. 2:29), among the great company surrounding them who were Jews only in name, outwardly.

The spiritual portion of that Old Testament remnant of God's saints was identically the same as that of the Christian's now. They were the recipients of the free gift of grace in Christ (Gen. 6:8) as we are. They possessed eternal life (Psa. 133:3) as truly as we do. They rejoiced in the knowledge of sins forgiven (Psa. 32:1, 2) as heartily as we do. They were as really instructed by the Spirit (Neh. 9:20) as we are. Nor were they left in total ignorance of the glorious future awaiting them: "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" (Heb. 11:13, 14). The word for "country" there is not the ordinary one "chora," but "patris," which signifies Homeland, or Fatherland-*such* a "country" as one's father dwells in.

The question, then, returns upon us: Seeing the Old Testament saints enjoyed all the essential spiritual blessings of which Christians now partake, *exactly what is* the "better thing" which God "provides for us"? The answer is a *superior administration* of the Everlasting Covenant: 7:22. In what particular respects? Chiefly in these. First we now have a better view of Christ than the Old Testament saints had: they saw Him, chiefly through types and promises, whereas we view Him in the accomplishments and fulfillment of them. Second, there is now a broader foundation for faith to rest upon: they looked for a Christ who was to come and who would put away their sins; we look at a Christ who has come and who has put away our sins. Third, they were as minors, under teachers and governors; whereas we are in the position, dispensationally, of those who have attained their majority: Galatians 4:1-7. Fourth, there is now a wider outpouring of God's grace: it is no longer confined to an elect remnant in one nation, but reaches out to His favoured people scattered among all nations.

"That they without us should not be made perfect." "The law (or Mosaic economy) made nothing perfect but the bringing in of a better hope did" (Heb. 7:19). The "perfecting" of a thing consists in the well-finishing of it, and a full accomplishment of all things appertaining thereto. There is no doubt that the ultimate reference of our text is to the eternal glory of the whole Family of Faith in Heaven, yet we believe it also includes the various *degrees* by which that perfection is attained, and the *means* thereunto. They are, first, the taking away of sin-which makes man most imperfect-and the clothing him with the robe of righteousness, in which he may appear perfect before God. These were secured by the life and death of Jesus Christ. In that, the Old Testament saints were not "made perfect *without us*," for their sins and our sins were expiated by the *same* Sacrifice, and their persons and our persons are justified by the *same* Righteousness.

Second, the subduing of the power of indwelling sin, enabling those justified to walk in the paths of righteousness, which is through the enabling of the Spirit. In this too the Old Testament saints were not (relatively) "made perfect *without us*," as is clear from Psalm 23:4; 51:11 etc. Third, the Spirit enabling those who are united to Christ to stand up against all assaults, and to persevere in a spiritual growth; in this also the Old Testament saints were not "made perfect *without us*," as is evident by a comparison of Psalm 97:10 with 1 Peter 1:5. Fourth, the receiving of the soul to Glory when it leaves the body: this also was common to Old and New Testament saints alike-we are not unmindful of the carnal theory held by some who imagine that prior to the death of Christ, the souls of saints went only to some imaginary Paradise "in the heart of the earth"; but this is much too near akin to the subterranean *limbus* of Romanism to merit any refutation.

Fifth, the resurrection of the body. In this the whole Family of Faith shall share alike, and at the same time: "In Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward *they that are Christ's* at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:22, 23). And *who are* "Christ's"? why, *all* that the Father gave to Him, *all* that He purchased with His blood. God's Word knows nothing of His people being raised in sections at intervals. Sixth, the reunion between the soul and body, which takes place at Christ's appearing. In Hebrews 12:23 the Old Testament saints are referred to as "the *spirits* of just men made perfect," but they are still "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body" (Rom.

8:23). In this too all the redeemed shall share alike, being “caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Seventh, the entrance into eternal Glory, when Old and New Testament saints alike shall, all together, be “forever with the Lord.” Then shall be completely realized that ancient oracle concerning Shiloh “unto Him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). Then shall be fulfilled that mystical word, “I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 8:11). As the Lord Jesus declared, “I lay down My life for the (Old Testament) sheep. And other (New Testament) sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be *one flock* (Greek and R.V.), one Shepherd” (John 10:15, 16). Then it shall be that Christ will “gather *together in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52)-not only among all nations, but through all dispensations.

In all of these seven degrees mentioned above are the elect of God “made perfect”; in all of them shall the Old Testament and New Testament saints share alike: all shall come “in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). God deferred the resurrection and final glorification of the Old Testament saints until the saints of this New Testament era should be called out and gathered into the one Body: “God has so arranged matters, that the complete accomplishment of the promise, both to the Old and New Testament believers, shall *take place together*; ‘they’ shall be made perfect, but not without ‘us’; we and they shall attain perfection together” (John Brown). Thus to “be made perfect” is here the equivalent of *receiving* (the full accomplishment of) the promise, or enjoying together the complete realization of the “better thing.” Verses 39 and 40 are inseparably linked together, and the language used in the one serves to interpret that employed in the other, both being coloured by the dominant theme of this Epistle.

Thus our understanding of these two verses which have occasioned so much trouble to many of the commentators, is as follows. First, though the Old Testament saints lived under an inferior administration of the Everlasting Covenant than we do, nevertheless, they “obtained a good report” and went to Heaven at death. Second, the “better thing” which God has provided for the New Testament saints is a superior administration of the Everlasting Covenant, that is, we enjoy superior *means of* grace to what they had. Spiritual and heavenly blessings were presented unto the Church in the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations under temporal and earthly images: Canaan being a figure of Heaven- Christ and His atonement being set forth under symbolic ceremonies and obscure ordinances. As the substance exceeds the shadows so is the state of the Church under the “new” covenant superior to its state under the “old.” Third, God has ordered that the entire Family of Faith shall be “perfected” by the same Sacrifice, and shall together enjoy its purchased blessings throughout an endless eternity.

The *practical application* of the whole of the above unto our hearts, was well put by John Calvin: “If they, on whom the light of grace had not as yet so brightly shone, displayed so great a constancy in and during evils, what ought the full brightness of the Gospel to produce in us! A small spark of light led them to Heaven; when the sun of righteousness shines over us, with what pretense can we excuse ourselves if we still cleave to the earth?”

