

Epistle to the Hebrews Part IV – Table of Contents (tentative)

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Week 1: Faith: The Substance & Evidence**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:1**

*"The glory of our religion is, that it depends on,
and is received into invisible things.
They are far more excellent and glorious
than any thing that sense can behold or reason discover."
(John Owen)*

It is hard to conceive of a principle more central to the Christian religion than that of 'faith.' Martin Luther made justification by faith the pillar and foundation of his Protestant reforms, and *sola fide* – 'by faith alone' became one of the rallying cries of the 16th Century Reformation. But the centrality of any concept within a religion does not necessarily translate into a general and correct understanding of the concept within that religion. The author of this letter or sermon to the Hebrew believers did not make such an assumption with regard to his audience in the first century, nor should we in the twenty-first. It might even be said, and with a fair amount of both historical and present-day evidence in support, that the more important a tenet is, the more likely it will be misunderstood, misrepresented, and misapplied.

So today, within the professing Christian church, viewers are exhorted to send their money to 'faith' ministries in exchange for such items as paper prayer mats or prayer hankies – assured that the use of these props will make the viewers' prayers for physical healing, financial recovery, or marital bliss become a reality. Prosperity gospel preachers harangue their congregations that the only thing that stands between them and millions is a 'lack of faith.' And conservative evangelicals, while hopefully avoiding such egregious errors of judgment, still struggle with understanding the concept of faith and how it is supposed to be worked out in a believer's daily life.

One of the problems with any attempt to formulate a clear, biblical conception of faith, is the nuanced way in which the same term – *pistos* – is used

in Scripture. The verb form, for instance, is sometimes translated 'believe' and sometime 'trust.' And, as the example of Simon Magus in Acts Chapter 9 illustrates, the word does not always signify what we would call 'saving' faith (see Acts 9:13 and following). But the letters of Paul, at least, are abundantly clear that 'justification' is by or through faith and not of works, even if Simon Magus somehow did not get it right. Perhaps through the abiding influence of Martin Luther on subsequent generations of Protestants, we often limit our thoughts on 'faith' to the sphere of justification or salvation (another word with many facets in Scripture). But whenever we do so circumscribe our understanding with regard to 'faith,' we encounter passages that just will not fit inside the box. Paul's catalog of some of the spiritual gifts, in I Corinthians 12, is a case in point,

*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit **to another faith by the same Spirit**, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.* (I Corinthians 12:7-11)

The apostle's point in this discussion is the *distribution* of the charismata – that while every believer is gifted, not all believers have every gift. But do not all believers have *faith*? The very question is redundant and ridiculous, since 'believer' and 'one who has faith' are simply two ways of saying the same thing. Clearly, then, Paul speaks of 'faith' in I Corinthians 12:9 in a different sense than that of justifying faith. Perhaps he speaks of what we might call 'efficacious' faith: the faith that moves mountains, and the faith that is able to exorcise the more difficult demons (*cp.* Matthew 17:20-21).

In another instance the same word 'faith' is used with reference not to the instrument of one's justification, but rather to the system of doctrine that characterizes true, biblical Christianity. This is the *'faith which was once for all*

delivered to the saints' of which Jude writes in verse 3 of his short epistle. Common vernacular has long since adopted this usage, so that the words 'faith' and 'religion' are often treated as synonyms. Thus a census survey will ask for the respondent's 'faith,' meaning what religion the person claims – Roman Catholic, Protestant Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.

These examples are sufficient to show that whenever the topic of biblical study is 'faith,' the student must be careful to determine in which sense the term is being employed. No one will argue that the theme of chapter 11 of Hebrews is faith, so it is important that we ascertain the 'kind' of faith of which the author speaks if we are to have any hope of understanding and applying what he has to say about it. Fortunately he sets the matter out for us in clear print, in the last verse of the preceding chapter.

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.
(Hebrews 10:39)

The New American Standard Version of the English Bible translates the phrase *those who believe* as *those who have faith*. This is a perfectly good rendering, and perhaps more helpful to our current discussion. The word thus translated is the participle form of the verb *pisteuo* – to believe. Participles are 'verbal nouns' and act as subjects or objects within a sentence while retaining the active (action) sense of their verbal root. In this instance the participle is in the present tense, so the thought is of those *who are believing* or *who continue to have faith*. These are contrasted in verse 39 with *those who draw back to perdition*, and so a directional element is added to the verbal idea of 'believing' or 'having faith.' To summarize, then, the faith of which the author speaks in verse 39 is a steadfast, ongoing believing in a constant forward direction. This forward, goal-oriented (as opposed to the digression of 'drawing back') is emphasized a little later in this closing section of the epistle,

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...
(Hebrews 12:1-2)

These opening verses of Chapter 12 are, in a sense, a summary statement of the lives of those patriarchs and saints of whom the author writes in the 'Hall of Faith,' Chapter 11. The faith of those who ran the race before the advent of Christ continued to be forward oriented even though the goal was not attained in their own lifetime. The same can be said (indeed *is* said by the author of Hebrews) of those who are running the race on this side of Golgotha. Thus we conclude that 'faith' as it is being used in this section of Scripture, is not 'justifying' faith, nor is it 'mountain-moving, demon-exorcising' faith, nor is it 'doctrinal' faith, but rather it is 'persevering' faith.

Perhaps this is another example of an unfortunate placement of chapter divisions in the Bible. The author, in the closing verses of Chapter 10, has been exhorting and encouraging the Hebrew believers to endurance, something they '*have need of*' (10:36). He warns them again of the divine displeasure that abides on those, like the unbelieving children of Israel in the wilderness, who do not persevere to the end. The whole passage, verses 35 – 39 of Chapter 10, is so much an introduction to Chapter 11, that it ought to be considered afresh here,

*Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:
For yet a little while,
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.
Now the just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.
But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

(Hebrews 10:35-39)

It is 'faith' that makes the difference between 'drawing back to perdition' and enduring so as to receive the promise. Therefore, in light of the importance

of the topic, the author proceeds to define and describe this very faith as it worked itself through the lives of the 'great cloud of witnesses' who have gone before us, and continues to work in those who believe to the end of the age. Having determined that the 'type' of faith of which the author speaks is that of 'persevering' faith, it is important to avoid any misunderstandings on that score before we pursue the verse-by-verse exposition of what he has to say.

The fact that Scripture utilizes the same term with different facets of meaning does not necessarily imply that the concept itself is wholly different in each case. The reader must be careful here. It is apparent that not all 'believing' is 'saving faith' – as the case of Simon Magus proves. There can be a mental assent to the 'doctrinal' faith, or even a momentary emotional response to the 'mountain-moving' faith, that does not evidence a true regenerative work of the Holy Spirit within the person's heart. These are the stony and thorny ground hearers of whom Jesus Himself speaks in the Parable of the Seed Plots (*cp.* Matthew 13:18-23). It is also evident in the biblical history that the ability to perform miracles did not in and of itself prove the existence of 'justifying' faith. Consider the eschatological separation of the sheep and the goats, and Jesus' solemn words to those who had done 'so much' in His Name.

So there can be the appearance of 'justifying' faith without the reality of it, and there can be the appearance of faith that 'moves mountains' but also without the reality behind it. What about 'persevering' faith? Can it exist where justifying faith is absent? The very characteristic of this type of faith, as *persevering* or *enduring to the end*, answers the question as it is asked. Of course it cannot be present where saving faith is not. It is better to consider 'persevering' faith as an essential characteristic of 'justifying' faith rather than as a separate type of faith altogether. Not everyone who has justifying faith also possesses the charismata of faith of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians 12, but all who are justified through faith will most certainly persevere in that faith; that faith will, in fact, be their perseverance.

This is a bold statement, and one that is not universally received within professing Christendom. Among logically consistent Arminians it is taught that a Christian can 'lose' or 'abandon' the faith and thus forfeit his or her salvation. We are reminded of the manner in which that difficult and disturbing passage in Hebrews 6 (verses 4-6) is often used to support this claim. But such a conclusion goes against the nature of saving faith as it is described elsewhere in the New Testament. The error lies primarily in the Arminian's misconception with regard to the true *origin* or *source* of the faith that justifies. The Arminian, in emphasizing the characteristic of 'free will' as being essential to human nature, finds the origination of faith within the sinner's mind and heart. God in Christ Jesus has made the way open for sinners to receive forgiveness for their sins and inherit eternal life, but they must *believe*. Did not Jesus Himself tell us that the 'work of God' was 'to believe on Him whom He has sent'? But of course the answer to this question takes us to the very heart of the 'free will/predestination' controversy as it has raged throughout the centuries.

Indeed, faith or believing *is* the work that man must do in order to 'work the works of God.' But describing what man *must* do is not the same as admitting man *can* do it. The Arminian protests that 'ought implies can' – or, as it is sometimes put, 'responsibility implies ability.' If man is *responsible* to believe (and he is, all men are), then man must have the *ability* to believe. Otherwise God would be unjust in demanding what He knows man cannot do. The Calvinist, however, answers that God is just whenever He demands what is right, and demanding faith is right whether fallen man is capable of believing or not. Man's inability was brought about by man's own sin – it is a self-inflicted and not an inherent disability. Therefore the fact that man cannot believe, in and of himself, does not serve as a mitigating circumstance to the divine command to believe.

It is true, as the Arminian argues, that every example that we have in the New Testament of a sinner being saved is accompanied by that sinner *believing*.

No Calvinist would maintain that any sinner can be saved apart from believing. But once again appearances may be deceiving: the manifestation of faith from the mouth of a sinner does not necessarily mean that the source or origin of that faith was that sinner's own heart. At least not his *fallen* heart. The Calvinist holds, on the basis of biblical teaching, that faith is the 'natural' result of regeneration. The Holy Spirit takes out the evil, unbelieving heart and puts in a new heart, a heart immediately evidenced by the dual virtues of repentance and faith. The sinner graciously born again by the power of the Holy Spirit turns from sin in repentance and toward God in faith. That this entire process is the work of God and in no way the work of the sinner, is abundantly clear in the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians,

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:8-10)

The persevering nature of justifying faith is part and parcel with its having God as its source and origin. It is God who has begun the 'good work' in the believer, and it is He who will bring it to fruition without fail. Jesus Christ is, therefore, the Author *and* Finisher of our faith – He is the Alpha and Omega of the believer's *believing*. This is why the author of Hebrews speaks so confidently of his audience: "but we *are not* of those who are drawing back...but rather are those *who keep on having faith* to the preserving of the soul." What follows, beginning with verse 1 of Chapter 11, is an explanation of the nature of that persevering faith, how it works, and how it has worked throughout the ages.

"Now faith is the confidence of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
(11:1)

Contrary to popular opinion, Hebrews 11:1 is not a 'definition' of faith. The Bible is not a Webster's; the meaning of such important terms as 'faith' is not

to be found in this or that singular verse, but rather through the consistent and comprehensive study of the term's usage throughout Scripture. It is true that what the author says here about faith is, in one sense, 'definitive' – the copula ('to be' verb) is emphatically placed at the beginning of the sentence: "Now faith *is*..." But Delitzsch somewhat overstates the case when he writes, "It seems to us that a more complete and accurate definition of faith, and one more generally applicable, could not be devised than that which is here given."¹ The problem with such a statement is that it tends to the neglect of what the balance of Scripture says concerning faith. When we remember the context of the author's thought – that of *perseverance* – we understand that his 'definition' of faith has more the nature of a description of this particular and powerful characteristic of faith. It is that nature of faith that guarantees endurance to the end, and which characterized the life of all who endured throughout history – of that 'faith' the author speaks. So, if it is a definition, it is not a comprehensive one but rather a characteristic one.

The author posits two obstacles that face every believer in his or her race of endurance: *things hoped for* and *things not seen*. Faith, as it were, overcomes both – by bringing the 'hoped for' things into present reality, and by manifesting the 'things not seen' to sight. The power of faith as it is here described must be carefully considered as to its nature and its claims, for otherwise it will appear (as it does in too much loose writing on the subject) as wishful thinking and conjuring self-deception. For while the things which the believing heart seeks are present neither in space nor in time, and the faith which apprehends them is itself an abstract, intangible concept, if the whole event is not *real* it must therefore be delusional. This is the slander that has been leveled against Christianity and Christians from the very beginning – that it is ephemeral, a mere chasing after rainbow's ends.

¹ Delitzsch, Franz, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews: Volume 2* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock; 1978 rpt), 204.

But clearly the author of Hebrews does not view faith in this ethereal and immaterial light. To him it is substance and conviction and evidence. "Faith is its own certification, its own proof or evidence of divine realities, being itself a confident assurance of them."² We will have occasion through this study of the closing chapters of the Book of Hebrews to investigate the solid foundation upon which this claim is made. For now it must suffice to accept that the author himself does not treat 'faith' as 'the power of positive thinking,' but rather as a gracious energy within the believer that both enables and guarantees endurance.

A simple diagram of the first verse will set the obstacles to endurance graphically against faith's power to overcome:

Obstacle to Endurance

Things hoped for...

Things not seen...

Faith is:

the substance, assurance, confidence

the conviction, evidence, proof

"*Hope deferred makes the heart grow sick,*" writes Solomon in Proverbs 13. It is a reality that all men suffer, and to which many succumb. The gainsayers in these last days echo the chorus of abandoned hope, "*saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'*" (II Peter 3:4) Hope, one with love and faith the triumvirate of graces, looks particularly to the future and to the tangible, visible realization of good things anticipated. "The things here intended as 'hoped for,' are all the things that are divinely promised unto them that believe, - all things of present grace and future glory."³ Of these things faith is itself the 'substance' or 'confidence.'

These two English words, both valid translations of the Greek term *hupostasis* used in verse 1, are not technically synonyms. Commentators argue which of the two is closest to the author's original meaning. The argument (as

² Delitzsch, 211.

³ Owen, John, *Epistle to the Hebrews: Volume 7* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; 1991 rpt), 7.

with many such debates among commentators) is too fine, as 'faith' fits the requirements of either English rendering. The first, *substance*, is the more philosophical use of the Greek word and is one that is found frequently in extra-biblical Greek writings. In Platonic Greek philosophy, 'things' have both 'essence' and 'substance.' Substance, in this sense, becomes the tangible reality of a thing – the manner in which it exists. We might say that the *essence* of God is deity, whereas His *substance* is Spirit. The two terms are, of course, related and are easily confused. The essence is the indispensable reality of a thing, whereas its substance is the equally indispensable connection between the thing and our comprehension of it. The Greek word itself – *hupostasis* – literally means 'to stand under,' which indicates that of the two, the essence is primary, while the substance 'stands under' the essential nature of a thing.

In the case of Hebrews 11:1a, the essence of the thing spoken of is that it is 'hoped for.' This is the essential characteristic of that category of 'things' for which faith provides, and is itself, the substance. Things hoped for are, by nature, not present realities to the perceptions of sight, hearing, and feeling; they are not 'in hand.' For hope to endure it must be grounded upon something that, in a manner of speaking, one can 'hold on to.' This faith is to and provides for the believer. "It gives them (i.e., the 'things hoped for') the force of present realities and enables the person of faith to enjoy the full certainty of future realization."⁴ Lane continues,

This capacity of faith permits Christians to exercise a present grasp upon undemonstrable truth and to exhibit stability in the presence of hostility, knowing that the blessings for which they hope are firmly secured by the promise of God.⁵

It is but a short jaunt from this tangible, though unseen, substance to the 'confidence' by which faith overcomes the obstacle of deferred hope. The

⁴ Lane, William, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word Books; 1991), 329.

⁵ *Idem.*

substance of the things hoped for is apprehended by the mind and heart guided by faith, which results in confident and unwavering expectation of future visible realization. Once again it becomes clear that unless this faith is grounded itself in something objective and real, the whole process is one of mental gymnastics and self-deception. For instance, the 'things hoped for' cannot be merely the whims and fancies of the professing believer, but must themselves be firmly and objectively rooted in the revealed will and promise of God. It is upon the bedrock of divine revelation that faith builds the stable structure of enduring confidence; anything else is indeed shifting sand. "Faith is that gracious power of the mind whereby it firmly assents unto divine revelation upon the sole authority of God, the revealer, as the first essential truth, and fountain of all truth."⁶

Perseverance is a progressive concept, and one which ebbs and flows throughout the race. Perseverance sees the runner crossing the finish line, while he is still laboring in the race itself. Faith and hope combine to energize and stabilize the runner for the race set before him. They are mutually interrelated concepts that unite in the heart of the believer to produce steadfastness. "The proper object of hope is the future; the proper object of faith is the present but unseen. Hope is faith's comforter, and faith is hope's stay."⁷

Faith is fixed upon the present but unseen. This presents the second obstacle to endurance: the tendency of fallen man to focus on that which is seen and to denigrate and ignore that which is unseen. The believer knows, from the pen of the apostle, the relative merits of the seen versus the unseen,

For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
(II Corinthians 4:18)

Yet a mere intellectual assent to the insignificance of the 'seen' relative to the eternal glory of the 'unseen' does not necessarily make it easier for the

⁶ Owen, 11.

⁷ Delitzsch, 213.

believer to take his eyes off that which is visible before him, and to fix them on that which can only be perceived through another sense. This faith enables the believer to do, and in fact becomes itself the visible manifestation of the unseen reality: *Faith is...the evidence of things not seen*. Faith enters the realm of the unseen – whether past, present, or future – and, as it were, brings them to the sight of the believer. “Faith, then, is its own proof of the existence and active energy of unseen facts and realities, and able by its own immediate intuitions to dispense with the evidence of the senses and laborious proofs of reason. It carries the imperious conviction of the truth it holds within itself.”⁸

It must be evident through this discussion that, by its very nature, faith is both unattainable and incomprehensible to the unbeliever. On the surface this is a tautology, a statement of the obvious – the unbeliever cannot comprehend faith, because an unbeliever is one who does not have faith. But the matter goes deeper than this, and it is the indescribable power of faith that has forever engendered intense hostility from the unbeliever toward the believer. This is not merely the situation of one person being able to see the form of a Pegasus in a cloud, while his companion sees nothing more than a cloud. The unseen realities viewed so clearly by the believer are hostile to the unbeliever, and he is hostile to them in return. “To the unbeliever the promised good, the revealed truths, are an unsubstantial vision – mere creatures of the imagination; to the believer they are substantial realities.”⁹

C. S. Lewis vividly captured this aspect of faith in the volume of his Narnian Chronicles entitled *Prince Caspian*. Mary – not without design the youngest of the four visitors to Narnia – is for an extended period of time the only one able to see Aslan. Slowly, as the detritus of their worldly lives falls like scales from their eyes – first Edmund, then Peter, and finally Susan (this does not bode well for her) – are able to see the Great Lion with the eyes of their physical

⁸ Delitzsch, 212.

⁹ Brown, John, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Banner of Truth; 1964 rpt), 488.

senses. The unbelieving dwarf Trumpkin, however, is kept in the unseeing darkness until Aslan himself – with violent playfulness – ‘opens’ his eyes to see what Mary had seen all along through the sight of faith.

We will see as we progress through the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11, that the persevering faith of which the author writes – that which brought the saints of old safely and steadfastly to the end of their race – is not something that can be conjured up from within the mind of man; it is by nature other-worldly. “For faith recognizes itself as an operation from above; and as standing in living communion with the unseen God and the invisible world, it tastes the powers of the world to come projecting themselves into the present.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Delitzsch, 212.

Week 2: Faith & Knowledge**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:2 - 3**

*"Credo ut intelligam –
I believe, so that I may understand."
(Anselm of Canterbury)*

The relationship between faith and knowledge – between ‘believing’ and ‘knowing’ – has been the basis of an age-old debate among philosophers and theologians. The impact of the argument, however, goes far beyond the ivory towers of academia, to influence the everyday worldview of men and women within the church and without. Believers, especially, are challenged by what they read in the newspaper and in the Bible, to relate their faith to the growing body of scientific discoveries and claims. The exaltation of Reason during the late-Renaissance and Enlightenment eras (15th through 18th Centuries) put the greatest historical pressure upon faith to seek sanctuary within the walls of the cathedral, yielding the field to the rational, scientific study of Nature. This apparent victory of Reason over Faith was crowned by the philosophical works of Immanuel Kant which tore Faith from Reason and Reason from Faith, laying the seeds of the post-modern world of today.

Kant theorized the universe into two distinct realms – that which can be perceived, and thereby ‘known,’ by man’s senses and that which cannot. The first he called the ‘phenomenal’ realm, signifying those things that are ‘manifest’ (the meaning of ‘phenomenon’) to the senses and therefore objects of human reason and knowledge. Literally, the phenomenal realm consists of things ‘seen,’ a significant



Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

point with respect to our current study of Hebrews 11:2-3. But from a rational philosophical perspective, the phenomenal represents the entirety of Nature accessible to man's sense perception. In his own philosophical meanderings, Kant followed the ancient dictum of Aristotle, that only that which can be perceived can be known.

Kant, however, was raised in a devout Pietist Lutheran home and was consequently incapable of embracing the atheism to which his philosophy directed. He could not dispense with such things as morality, ethics, and emotion (though he himself was a notoriously dispassionate man). As a result he developed the 'noumenal' realm – that portion of the universe that can only be known, if known at all, through faculties other than the senses. This, for Kant, was the realm of the religious experience, of faith and not of reason. Nothing factual can be said of the Noumena, what is believed in regard to that realm is just that, believed. Thus the notion of Faith was divorced from Reason, and the heart disassembled from the mind.

The trend set in motion by Kant at the end of the 18th Century has progressed and grown to near universal scope by the end of the 20th. Most people – and by no means limited to philosophers – hold the concepts of Faith and Reason/Knowledge in two separate and hermetically sealed compartments. Evolution is accepted because it is 'Science.' Creationism is banned because it is 'Faith.' The relegation of faith to religious experience had the profound effect of making religious faith increasingly irrelevant to the modern world. When one believes (pun intended) that the more 'knowledge' gained by Science reduces by the same amount the 'need' for faith, it is inevitable that Faith with receded increasingly into oblivion as Science makes newer and bolder claims to knowledge. By this method the content of Christian 'faith' has been slowly (though more rapidly in recent years) drained out of many denominations, replaced by 'spirituality' and 'experience.' The process is epistemologically flawed, and spiritually deadly. The Holy Spirit anticipated Immanuel Kant by

some seventeen centuries, and rebutted him beforehand through the pen of the author of Hebrews.

"For by it the elders obtained a good testimony."

(11:2)

This verse continues the introduction begun in verse 1 to the concept of faith and its manifestation throughout the years of redemptive history. The 'elders' here becomes a general term - not the church office *presbuteroi*, though the word is the same - signifying all those who had gone before and whose faith experiences would subsequently be recounted. The term is coextensive with the "great cloud of witnesses" spoken of at the beginning of Chapter 12. The author moves from his description of the enduring, persevering nature of faith in verse 1, transitioning to numerous living examples of this faith beginning in verse 4. "Their decisions and actions reflected a stance of life that is the hallmark of faith and demonstrated the capacity of faith to sustain steadfast commitment to God."¹¹

Of these elders it is said that they "*received a good testimony.*" The adjective 'good' is furnished by the translators of the King James and New King James versions. Other translations render the same word by 'commendation' and 'approval.' The word is formed from the same Greek word from which we get the English 'martyr.' Literally the passage states that *by faith* the elders *received their martyrdom*. The aspect of approval or commendation, or 'good,' comes in when one considers what it is that qualifies a man to be a 'martyr.' First, he must die for the cause, whatever cause that may be. Second, his death must be recognized as having been 'for the cause,' and must be accepted by 'the cause' as worthy of the distinction 'martyrdom.' This may seem pedantic - everyone should know what a martyr is - but with the modern tendency to so overuse terms like 'hero,' and 'martyr,' that they ultimately lose all meaning, it is worth while reminding ourselves what the terms signify in their proper sphere.

¹¹ Lane, 330.

So, the 'elders' were 'faith martyrs.' That is a very interesting aspect and characterization of 'faith' by the author and, of course, by the Holy Spirit. For it indicates that the lives of faith enumerated in the subsequent verses were 'martyrdoms,' even though not everyone listed in the catalog literally and physically died on account of their testimony. Whether they were persecuted for their faith, killed for their faith, or steadfastly lived out their lives for their faith, they are all included in the 'great cloud of martyrs' (same word) spoken of in Chapter 12, verse 1. And while it is true that the Greek word *martruros* can with equal validity be translated by 'testimony' as by 'martyrdom,' it is important to realize that the 'testimony' of God's faithful has in it the quality and characteristic of a living martyrdom. This perspective will help clarify, and will lend proper weight to, the annals of faithful lives that fill the balance of Chapter 11.

Although it is left unsaid, it is not difficult to understand just who it is who renders these faithful lives acceptable as martyrdoms. 'The Cause' for which believers lay down their lives - while living and in dying - is God in Christ Jesus. One cannot have read the first ten chapters of Hebrews without comprehending the author's focus upon the supremacy and majesty of Jesus Christ, the fullness of the image and glory of God. And it is for the 'testimony of Jesus' - even in the ages before the Incarnation - that God's faithful martyrs lived their faith, and died for their faith. Hebrews Chapter 11, therefore, provides a unifying bridge of faith between the covenants, teaching New Covenant believers that their faith is of the same nature as the faith of the Old Covenant believer. To be sure, there are differences; and these will be highlighted in their proper place. But it should not jar the Christian's ears to hear that Moses *esteemed the reproaches of Christ* to be of far greater worth than the riches and power of Pharaoh's court. The faith of the New Covenant, what we often unthinkingly call Christianity, is rooted in the faith of the Old Covenant, called

with the same absence of thought, Judaism. Conversely, the faith of the New Covenant is the proper and only fruition of the faith of the Old.

Thus it is the same faith, though more fully revealed and comprehended, that guides the Christian forward to his or her 'martyrdom' as it guided the faithful elders before Christ's first advent. And it is still the case that God's approbation rests upon the one who *walks by faith*. The author is exhorting his audiences, both contemporary and subsequent, to hold fast the same persevering faith by which all men throughout the ages have obtained divine approval, if divine approval they have obtained. This passage alone thoroughly debunks any idea of separate and distinct 'dispensations' in which God's criteria of life and of approbation is different from the dispensations preceding and following. We can survey the whole of redemptive history from Abel to the last believer at Christ's Second Coming, and find at all times that *faith* was their testimony, their *martyrdom* in this world. *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* (I John 5:4-5).

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (11:3)

In this verse the Holy Spirit, inspiring the pen of the author of Hebrews, takes on and refutes Immanuel Kant, seventeen hundred years ahead of time. All of Kant's key terms are here: knowledge, faith, the phenomenal, etc. Indeed, the same Greek terms are used by the author of Hebrews as would be used by Immanuel Kant in his opus magnum, *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Perhaps a more detailed look at verse 3 will show just how much the writer of Hebrews anticipated Kant, and in anticipating provided believers after Kant with ammunition with which to refute the insidious philosophy he spawned.

By faith (pistei - פִּסְתֵּי) *we know* (noothmen - נֹוֹתְמֵן, same root as noumenos)

that the worlds were framed by the word of God

so that, not from the visible (phenomenon - פִּנּוּמֵנוֹן, Kant's phenomenal realm)

Did that which is seen (blepomenon - בִּלְפָּנֵינוּ, apparent to sight), *come into being...*

'By faith we know,' writes the author in a timeless refutation of the erroneous concept that faith and knowledge are distinct and separable virtues. The realm of that which is open to sense perception – Kant's *phenomenos* – is founded upon that which is not accessible to the senses: *not from the phenomenal*, the author writes, *have we come to know what is seen*. In other words – in Kant's words – knowledge is not attained by man only and exclusively through that which is manifest to his senses, but rather there is a more fundamental knowledge unattainable to the senses that grounds all subsequent knowledge. Faith and Reason are not two separate epistemological realms; rather true and proper Reason is built upon Faith – the 'knowledge' that comes only by the instrumentality of 'faith' and not by 'sight.'

The great archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm, formed his life's intellectual



Anselm (c. 1033 – 1109)

motto from the Latin equivalent of what the author of Hebrews writes in this verse. *Credo ut intelligam*, Anselm repeatedly said, *I believe in order that I may know*. Anselm understood that it was his faith that made the world – in the broadest sense of that term – knowable, comprehensible, thinkable. His life was, as he put it, *fides quærens intellectum* – ‘faith seeking understanding.’ It never occurred to Anselm that the faithful life was not also a reasoning life, or that the attainment of greater knowledge somehow displaces and annuls faith.

It is intriguing to consider how the author commences on his justification that *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. The majority of the chapter will be devoted to the *substance of things hoped for*, as the author describes the pilgrimages of the saints of old. But he commences with a brief, yet powerful, expansion upon the second part of faith’s persevering character, one that is not circumscribed by what lies in the future. *Faith is the evidence of things not seen*. Those things ‘not seen’ include, of course, the things hoped for; but they include so much more. ‘Things not seen’ consist of such facts as the origins of all that is seen, and the foundation of all knowledge – the ability of the mind to process that which is seen. This is sublime metaphysics in the truest sense – contemplating that which ‘lies beneath’ (for that is what the *meta* means in metaphysics) the perceptible world.

There is a certain dishonesty to modern science and to the modern concept of knowledge. It lies in the ‘belief’ that man can know all that there is to know through the application of the Scientific Method and of reason. There is no admission of the fact that there is far more that man does not know than that which he does. Furthermore, there is a much greater sphere of the universe that

is hidden to the eyes of reason, and unresponsive to the application of the Scientific Method. Perhaps the two most significant concepts within this realm of knowledge hidden from sight, are those of *origin* and *purpose*. It cannot be denied that the human psyche is oriented toward an awareness of presence and purpose in a manner unlike any other creature. Man is conscious of his heritage, his current being, and his legacy. The attainment of knowledge for 'knowledge's sake' is a false pursuit; it is meaningless without the corresponding meditation on man's presence and purpose. But these are issues beyond the scope of sense perception and of science. They are, as Delitzsch puts it with an exquisite jab at Kantianism, the "*noumenon* of faith."¹²

By faith we know that the worlds were framed by the word of God. Ultimately there is no scientific proof of the origin of the universe, as there is no way to duplicate the event in a laboratory and there was no one present at the time to record his observations.¹³ "The discernment of the unseen creative activity of God behind the visible universe exemplifies the capacity of faith to demonstrate the reality of that which cannot be perceived through sense perception."¹⁴ This is not the only place in Scripture where we find faith portrayed as the sight which apprehends the unseen. The apostle Paul speaks in the same manner in Romans 1, where remarkably he attributes a level of this 'faith sight' to every man, a characteristic of common humanity that renders man without excuse in the judgment.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
(Romans 1:20-21)

¹² Delitzsch, 216.

¹³ With the notable exception of the Lord Jesus Christ, personified Wisdom, who was "*with God in the beginning of His ways...*" (Proverbs 8:22ff).

¹⁴ Lane, 330.

The phrase Paul uses – the *invisible attributes* of God *are clearly seen, being understood...* – utilizes all of the same words that we find here in Hebrews 11:3, and reinforce the epistemological reality that man possesses a faculty of sight that transcends his physical perception and enables him to comprehend the unseen verities of the universe with no less certainty than the visible world. We may infer from Paul's words that this faith-sight is one of the first casualties of sin, rendering man blind to the understanding of the deepest and most significant facts of the universe – its creation by the word of God, and man's exalted and responsible place within that creation. This is undoubtedly why Scripture so often speaks of sin as blindness, and of unbelievers as blind as well as dead in their trespasses and sins. Consider this with respect to Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees,

Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains. (John 9:40-41)

The faith implanted through regeneration restores this sight to the newborn child of God. The author of Hebrews employs this fact to give comfort to suffering believers, reminding them that along with the saints of old, they possess a vision that penetrates the shadows that lie along the perimeter of the known and visible world. They see beneath the *what* to the *why*, and comprehend that this universe which God created is the very same one that He governs and directs to His own sovereign and glorious ends.

The author goes on to address an aspect of the creation of the universe that has been a stumbling block to the unbeliever from as far back as philosophers turned their minds to the whole concept of origins. The ancients did, in fact, believe that the universe was created by a god, and almost all of the cosmologies of the ancient world attribute this act to a single deity. The distinction, however, between the product of human meditation on the subject

and divine revelation is the manner in which God created all things. The author of Hebrews explains how it is that faith convinces the believer that “*the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*” God did not form the worlds from substance, but rather spoke them into being with power. This is a powerful philosophical and theological contrast between the conclusions arrived at through human reasoning, and the revelation given by God in His Word.

It is a common conception among modern scientists, and is becoming an accepted principle in the view of common folk, that matter itself is eternal. This premise is essential for such theories as the Big Bang and Evolution – there can be no point at which matter did not exist in the universe, for otherwise there could have been no ‘start’ to the universe as we now know it. This doctrine of eternal matter was perhaps first articulated by the Greek philosopher Plato in his work, *Timaeus*. From Plato through the first century Jewish Hellenistic philosopher Philo, this same concept was seeping into the early church. To this the writer of Hebrews gives an emphatic rebuttal. “It may, in fact, have been the writer’s intention to correct a widespread tendency in Hellenistic Judaism to read Genesis 1 in the light of Plato’s doctrine of creation: ‘God’s all-powerful hand created the world out of formless matter.’”¹⁵

In Hebrews 11:3 we are presented with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* – out of nothing. Technically that is not what the writer says, but it does logically follow. He merely says that the visible universe was not formed by visible matter, but rather by the creative power of the word of God. But it does follow that matter itself cannot be eternal; cannot have been present prior to the creative activities of God. For if matter were eternal it would be co-eternal with God, and we would not yet have reached the ultimate origin of the universe. Believers accept on the testimony of God’s Word that both Space and Time are created spheres or dimensions of the universe, both spoken into being by God. Although this knowledge is obtained not by reason but by faith, that does not mean that it

¹⁵ Lane, 332.

is irrational. It is, rather, irrational to suppose that matter could exist without origin – that matter is eternal. The belief that all things were framed from nothing is *supra-rational*, it transcends human reason without violating it.

The author refers to creation ‘by the word of God.’ Commentators have mistakenly associated this with the revelation that we have from the book of Genesis with regard to the origin of the universe. While it is true that it is only through the revealed Word of God that we have the historical account of Creation, that is not what the author is getting at here in verse 3. The written account of Genesis 1 – 2 is also available to the unbeliever (the Bible, in fact, is considered a holy book in both Islam and Mormonism, yet neither religion holds to creation *ex nihilo*). It is *faith* that opens the eyes of the believer to see the creation of all things from nothing, and to see this as if it were *phenomena* – accessible to the physical organ of sight. The ‘word of God’ is *what* this faith-sight apprehends: that the universe was framed *by the word of God*.

The Greek word used in verse 3 is *rhēmati* (ῥῆμα), not the more familiar *logos*. The pronunciation of the word utilizes what is called a ‘rough breather’ – the word is spoken with an audible exhale as if it were blown out of the mouth. It is, in meaning and in pronunciation, the word *spoken*. The emphasis is placed strongly upon the *act* of God speaking the worlds into existence and order. God *spoke*, and it was so. God *breathed out* His word, and it came into being. That is what the believer sees with the eyes of faith – almost as if he were witnessing the creative act itself. Indeed, when the believer reads the creation account in Genesis, or the poet equivalent in Proverbs 8, his eyes are open to the powerful word of God breathing forth, and all things coming into sight from that which was unseen.

This characteristic of faith as being able to see the unseen has direct application to the endurance of believers under trial. The hope that is set before them is, to be sure, of the utmost importance and comfort. But they must also realize that the very structure of the world in which they live – including the

political and social atmosphere in which they suffer – is framed and sustained by the same ‘word’ that brought all things into being in the first place. Paul expands upon this theme in his epistle to the Colossians,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

(Colossians 1:15-17)

In the presence of so much opposition, it is of immeasurable comfort to know that the believer’s faith is grounded in the One who spoke all things into being, and who “*upholds all things by the word of His power.*”(Heb. 1:3)

Week 3: Ante-Diluvian Saints**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:4 - 6**

*"Abel – the second son of Adam
and first son of the promise."
(John Owen)*

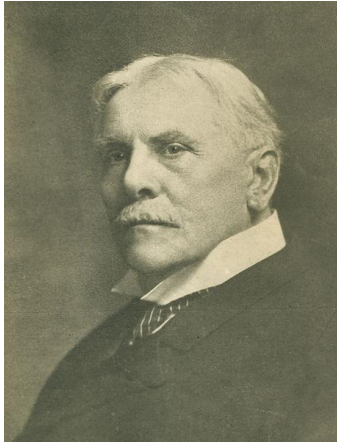
Mankind had some 4,000 years of experience on this planet before the wise men saw the star in the East, and the shepherds heard the herald angels sing. Christianity has been around only half that long since. Hence for two thirds of humanity's existence of living and dying on the Earth, the Gospel path of salvation was unknown, at least as it is in its present form. If we analyze the millennia prior to Christ's Advent, we realize that the largest portion of that segment of time was without the benefit of the Ten Commandments, given after roughly 2,500 years' worth of generations. This fact of both biblical and human history has caused a great deal of discussion and debate over the 'Christian' centuries as to the mode and method of human salvation in the eras before the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. There has been nothing close to agreement on this score, and the theories have often varied widely.

Dispensationalism, in its classical form, separates human history into seven epochs called 'dispensations.' According to the view of C. I. Scofield, these dispensations are:

1. The Dispensation of Innocency: before the Fall;
2. The Dispensation of Conscience: before the Flood;
3. The Dispensation of Human Government;
4. The Dispensation of Promise: from the calling of Abraham until Mt. Sinai;
5. The Dispensation of the Law: from Mt. Sinai to the cross of Christ;
6. The Dispensation of Grace: from the cross of Christ to the Second Advent;
7. The Dispensation of the Kingdom: the Millennium.

The word 'dispensation' is itself is biblical, being an accurate translation of the Greek word *oikonomia* – literally meaning 'law of the house.' Often the word

is translated 'economy' in modern English Bibles. It means 'a pattern of doing business,' or 'a paradigm of organization.' Dispensationalism is often misunderstood as focusing its division of time into chronological periods based



C. I. Scofield (1843-1921)

on significant biblical events. The proper use of the word, however, focuses not on epochs, but on the way in which God dealt with mankind. Hence classical Dispensationalism defines its seven eras not on the basis of events, but rather on what those events (as interpreted through Dispensational glasses) mean in terms of God's *oikonomia*. In particular, the emphasis is placed upon the manner of salvation in each dispensation, and there is a separate method or path to salvation in each. Again summarizing Scofield, the means of salvation within each dispensation is as follows:

1. Innocency: Do not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16).
2. Conscience: Do good and do not do evil, or love what is good and hate what is evil (Gen. 3:22).
3. Human Government: Believe God and build an ark (Gen. 6:16).
4. Promise: Believe God's promise (Gen. 12:1).
5. Law: Obey God and keep His commandments (Exod. 19:5).
6. Grace: Confess Jesus as Lord and believe in His resurrection (Rom. 10:9).
7. Millennium: Obey the personal and visible lordship of Jesus as King.¹⁶

From the perspective of Dispensationalism, therefore, our author in Hebrews 11 begins his survey of faith in the dispensation of Conscience – Dispensation #2. Scofield defines this era of salvific history thus,

By the fall, Adam and Eve acquired and transmitted to the race the knowledge of good and evil. This gave conscience a basis for right moral judgment, and hence the race came under this measure of responsibility-to do good and eschew evil.

¹⁶ The first six are extracted verbatim from *Bible Life Ministries'* summary of Dispensationalism. Dispensational literature is remarkably silent or ambivalent about the means of salvation in the Millennium.

The result of the dispensation of conscience, from Eden to the flood (while there was no institution of government and of law), was that "all flesh had corrupted his way on the earth," that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," and God closed the second testing of the natural man with judgment: the flood.¹⁷

In light of Hebrews 11:4 & 5 – depicting the *faith* of Abel and of Enoch as being the basis of their acceptance before God – anyone who holds both the inerrancy of Scripture and the dispensational teachings of Scofield must feel the challenge presented to one principle or the other. Did Enoch's 'walking with God' simply mean that he followed his conscience and 'did good and eschewed evil'? Was Abel's sacrifice more pleasing to God because of his 'right moral judgment'? More significantly, were Abel and Enoch justified on the basis of their own good works, or by faith?

It must be admitted by all involved in the debate that the relevant texts in Genesis provide little to go by. With regard to Abel, we are simply told that God "*respected Abel and his offering,*" but "*He did not respect Cain and his offering.*"¹⁸ Granted, we may infer the righteousness of Abel's life through God's subsequent warning to Cain, "*So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.'*"¹⁹

Less is said of Enoch, "*And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.*"²⁰ Again, one may infer from the phrase 'walked with God' that Enoch obeyed God, 'doing good and eschewing evil.' No doubt he did, and no doubt Abel 'did well,' but was this the basis of their salvation? Did God look upon these ante-diluvian's hearts and find wherewith to be pleased? To reward them with eternal salvation? That would seem on the face of it to make a liar of the author of Hebrews, who attributes both Abel's and Enoch's salvation to faith.

¹⁷ Scofield, C. I., *The Seven Dispensations*. http://www.biblecentre.org/topics/cis_rd_2_seven_disp.htm

¹⁸ Genesis 4:4-5

¹⁹ Genesis 4:6-7

²⁰ Genesis 5:24

We must turn back from any inclination to assign the justification of Abel and Enoch, or of Noah or Abraham, to the merit of their works or the quality of their lives. To entertain such a thought would be to violate the clear principle set forth by the apostle Paul, “...*knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*”²¹ Paul’s argument stretches back into history, through the ‘dispensation of Law’ into that of ‘promise’ – to the time of Abraham and the patriarchs of Israel. While he does not go so far back as to deal with justification of sinners before the Deluge – ante-diluvian saints – he goes back far enough to prove that his dogmatic statement in 2:16 cannot be limited to the ‘dispensation of Grace.’ In other words, the apostle maintains in the strongest language, that *no flesh* has ever been justified by works – including that of Abel, of Enoch, and of Noah.

So we say, with the author of Hebrews, that the men who were counted righteous in the generations between Adam and Noah, were considered as such on the basis of faith. This does not, however, answer all of the questions. For there still remains to be discovered what was the nature and object of their faith. Were these men ‘Christians before Christ’? It is often said that the saints before Christ’s Advent possessed *prospective* faith, whereas those after the Resurrection possess *retrospective* faith. In a sense this is true, but it is not all that helpful. It is useful to the extent that it reminds us that the degree of redemptive knowledge held by Abel was much less than that held by Moses, whose was less than that of David, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or John. And all of these bright lights from the dark past dim in comparison to the ‘greatness of the revelation’ given to Paul. Perhaps we can say, as a preliminary summary statement, that the faith of the ancients was of the same *kind* as the faith of Christians, but not of the same

²¹ Galatians 2:16

degree. This is, however, a hypothesis that must be tested against the evidence of Scripture.

There is one more (at least) difficult point with regard to salvation among the ancients. That is, what was the role, if any, of the Holy Spirit? If we maintain – as we must if we believe the teaching of the New Testament – that faith is the manifestation of regeneration wrought by the Holy Spirit, do we say that Abel was regenerate? Was Enoch ‘born again’? To the ears of most believers such statements are jarringly anachronistic. But there is no easy solution to the conundrum. We are presented in Hebrews 11 with a catalog of men who found acceptance – justification – in the sight of God through faith. But the nature and object of that faith, and the role of the Holy Spirit therein, remain to be studied.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. (11:4)

Consider the text from which this reference comes, Genesis 4:1-8.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

On the surface it appears that God is arbitrary in His judgment with regard to the two offerings tendered by these two sons of Adam. Cain offered of that which was his livelihood – ‘the fruit of the ground,’ – and Abel did the same – ‘the firstborn of his flock.’ Any differentiation made between the two offerings

themselves must be done on the basis of inference and analogy: inference in regard to what is said of one and not of the other, and analogy in regard to subsequent biblical teaching on sacrifice. But inference and analogy are not without value, and since they are the only means of analyzing Cain and Abel's sacrifices, they must serve.

One thing that is of note is the fact that both Cain and Abel *knew* about offering sacrifices to the Lord. The phrasing is intriguing from the standpoint of both the fact and the timing of their offerings: "*And in the process of time it came to pass...*" The New American Standard renders this phrase simply "*in the course of time...*" as does the English Standard Version. Some commentators see the periodicity of sacrifice, later codified into the Sabbath and annual feasts of Israel, foreshadowed here in the earliest examples we have of sacrifices to the Lord. Allusion is often made to Job's practice of sacrificing on behalf of his sons and daughters at the end of their weekly feast cycles. Whatever 'in the course of time' meant to Cain and Abel with regard to days or seasons, it certainly meant that they understood the need and responsibility that rested upon them to offer up sacrifices to the Lord.

This fact begins to open a crack in the door of understanding the minds of these two men, and perhaps a greater comprehension of why one's offering was accepted while the other's was not. Sacrifice, as an act of worship, has several intrinsic meanings associated with it – and it is reasonable to infer that at least one of these meanings motivated Cain and Abel to bring their offerings before God. The outcome of this act justifies us in concluding that the meaning assigned to the sacrifice was probably not the same for both brothers.

Sacrifice among pagan religions has always had the connotation of *appeasement* – it presupposes the wrath of an offended deity, and offers up a substitutionary sacrifice to appease that anger and, at least, to it away from the suppliant. Thus Cain might have offered up some of the fruit of the soil in order to encourage God's good favor upon the rest of the harvest, turning away His

wrath from smiting the earth. No doubt the first son of Adam had intimate knowledge of the curse that God placed upon the soil as a result of his father's sin,

*...cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

(Genesis 3:17-19)

A second purpose of sacrifice to the deity is that of *thanksgiving*. Man, especially ancient man, has always acknowledged the existence of a higher being who both created and sustains this world. In some cases the credit was distributed among a pantheon of deities, but in every culture there was the understanding that God, or the gods, wanted *gratitude* from man. Perhaps the offerings of Cain and Abel were in recognition and thanksgiving in regard to the health of the flock (Abel) and the productivity of the soil (Cain). If so, then these first recorded offerings would foreshadow the 'thank offering' prescribed in the Levitical code promulgated 2,500 years later.

The third meaning of sacrifice is somewhat similar to the first, and is of a much more pronounced significance in the Bible than either the first or the second. It is that of *atonement*. The difference between atonement and appeasement lies in emphasis. Appeasement focuses on the wrath – often considered arbitrary and unjust – of the deity, whereas atonement emphasizes the offense (sin) of man against a holy and just God. There is little of atonement in pagan rituals, but it is of the essence of biblical sacrifice. Job offered up to the Lord on behalf of his sons, saying, *"It may be that my sons have sinned and curse*

God in their hearts."²² Given the proximity of the narrative in Genesis 4 to that of man's sin and God's judgment in Genesis 3, and given the centrality of atonement to the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament, it is most reasonable to view the offerings of Cain and Abel in this light rather than that of the other two motivations. And when we do this, we encounter a significant difference between the two men and their sacrifices.

Cain offered to the Lord 'the fruit of the ground' – a vegetable offering. Later, under the Mosaic statutes, such an offering would comprise either a 'peace' or a 'thank' offering, but not a sin offering. It would represent an offering that presupposed atonement, rather than one which effected atonement. In other words, it would assume a condition of peace between the one who offered the sacrifice and God. But such a peace cannot exist where sin remains un-atoned. Delitzsch points out the proper relationship between the 'thanksgiving' aspect of the sacrifice and the 'atonement' aspect.

Sacrifice, in its complete form, proceeds on a twofold assumption, or is the fruit of a twofold conviction in the human mind: first, that we are not our own, but God's, and owe to Him the voluntary surrender of all that we have and are, and that gratitude for His mercies should lead us constantly to do and express this; and secondly, that man in his present sinful condition is an object of divine wrath, and cannot offer any sacrifice that shall be pleasing to God until his sinfulness is destroyed or taken away, i.e., has been atoned for.²³

It cannot be supposed that Cain was an atheist, that he did not have even the most rudimentary belief in the existence of God. His offering of any sacrifice, not to mention the closeness of his relationship to the original Parents, forces us to conclude that he was a 'believer' in this sense at least. But his 'faith' in God as the Creator and Governor of the world – a 'faith' that has been shared ever since by ignorant pagans and enlightened deists – was not the faith that comes from God, pleases God, and renders the sinner justified in God's sight.

²² Job 1:5

²³ Delitzsch, 226.

When investigating the reason behind God's acceptance of Abel's offering and His rejection of Cain's, the exegete must examine all inferences on the basis of subsequent biblical teaching. It is clear from the narrative in Genesis that God's approval of the one, and disapproval of the other, was apparent to both men immediately upon offering their sacrifices. Commentators have speculated as to the manner in which God manifested His approbation of Abel's sacrifice, and perhaps the most reasonable suggestion – on the basis of what God is recorded as having done later – is the consuming of the chosen offering by fire from heaven. Be that as it may, both men knew as they walked away from the altar that Abel had been justified and Cain had not. There are only two places to look to find the explanation: the nature of the sacrifice, and the condition of the man's heart. Indeed, it is most likely that these two are inextricably linked, with the second being the instrumental cause of the first.

Cain offered *"of the fruit of the ground"* to the Lord. We are not told if his offering was of the firstfruits, but we can infer from the same having been said of Abel's offering (who brought *"of the firstborn of the flock"*) that Cain's sacrifice was not from the first of the harvest. This in itself would indicate a serious disrespect toward God, and the mention of Abel's offering being from the firstborn teaches us that the principle of offering the first to the Lord was inculcated soon after Adam's fall. What we have in Cain's ritual may very well be the first example of 'lip service' religion in the history of mankind. To say that Cain's heart was not in it would be an understatement. Not only did he offer a peace or thank offering prior to a sin/atonement offering – presuming peace, peace when there was no peace – the material of his offering was apparently subpar. Sin was already crouching at the door of his heart; the test of sacrifices would merely bring it to murderous fruition. One can easily envision the path Cain was walking as one reads of the germination of sin in James 1,

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.
(James 1:14-15)

Cain's substandard offering manifested the wickedness of his heart, and his rejection of God's salvation. The narrative account of the two brothers is the first indication in Scripture of the two lineages of humanity – the sons of God and the sons of the evil one. Cain was the progenitor of the latter race, unfortunately the more populous and powerful of the two.

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

(I John 3:11-12)

It is important to recognize that Cain's wickedness is not to be viewed on a merely individualistic basis. As Adam stood as representative for the entire human race, so also Cain stood as representative for a segment of that race once fallen. He became a type, a pattern, of human rebellion. Even though his own posterity ran only until the Flood, the nature of his heart of rebellion would become paradigmatic for the worst part of humanity on through the ages. This teaches us that whatever the difference was between Cain's offering and Abel's, it is far more than sibling rivalry that we are dealing with.

If we accept the conjecture that God manifested His approval of Abel's offering through conflagration, we cannot picture Abel standing smugly and proudly by as the fire consumed his sacrifice. Rather we picture him in a stance not unlike the publican: head bowed, hands beating upon his chest, crying out, "Lord forgive me, the sinner." Cain's eyes were on Abel, but Abel's eyes were on the holy throne of God Almighty, and were consequently most likely closed in abject humility. "But inasmuch as the relation between God and man had been disturbed by sin, Abel's faith exhibited itself in recognizing and laying hold of the divine mercy in the midst of wrath and judgment, - an aspect of his

personal standing with regard to sacrifice, which had its correlative in his offering being of a life and of blood.”²⁴

We must not think that Abel found approval simply because he followed the rules, whatever rules there may have been at that time. It is far more likely that Abel had been given to understand the principle that would not be written down for several more millennia, that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”*²⁵ Abel therefore becomes the proto-believer as he subsequently becomes the proto-martyr. He is the first to acknowledge his guilt before a holy God, and to reach for the blood of atonement as an appeal to divine mercy for sin. It is too much to say that Abel knew at that time that his sacrifice prefigured the Cross and the shed blood of Jesus, but this we know in retrospect from the testimony of Scripture,

*...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to **the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.***
(Hebrews 12:24-25)

The example of Abel here at the beginning of the Hall of Faith presents us with the question of just how *persevering faith* is illustrated in the life of Adam’s second son. We have no way of knowing just how old Abel was when he was killed by his brother, but we can assume that he was as yet unmarried and had not begotten offspring. He was both the beginning and the end of his lineage. That this is so is inferred from Eve’s comment upon the birth of Seth – a son to replace the one who was killed. So it would appear that Abel’s life of faith was short, and that may very well be the point the author of Hebrews is trying to make by including the first martyr at the very beginning. Perhaps more than any

²⁴ Delitzsch, 225.

²⁵ Leviticus 17:11

other example in chapter 11, that of the antagonism of Cain toward his brother Abel best illustrates the effect of faith upon worldly relations,

...for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. (Luke 12:52-53)

Although Jesus did not mention 'brother against brother,' there is little reason to doubt that animosity toward the faithful would encompass all of the closest of human relationships. Cain evidently confronted Abel about the latter's holier-than-thou attitude putting the former into bad graces with God. When Rome fell the pagans blamed the Christians; when the Republican candidate loses, it is because the 'conservative Christians' were too vocal and scared off all the right-thinking folk. Nothing is new under the sun. The example of just one righteous man makes the rest of society look all that much more wicked, and society will not long tolerate such a light to continue burning. There is so much in the short life of Abel displayed for the believer's emulation. The blood of the first martyr calls out through the ages, not only telling us how he died in faith, but also how he lived the same faith. Abel's faith was an offense and a stumbling block to Cain, but Abel did not tone it down, as it were, in order not to make his brother mad.

Considering our working hypothesis of just who were the original recipients of this letter to the Hebrews, we can readily understand that Abel's unwillingness to give Cain unwarranted comfort, or to place his own lamp under a basket on behalf of his brother's feelings, would resonate within the Jewish Christian community in Rome. No doubt the pressure was intense to moderate, if not completely repudiate, the Hebrew Christian's belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The unbelieving Jews in Rome might have tempted the believers to follow them back into the ritual sacrifices of fulfilled Judaism, just as Cain might have tempted Abel to follow him in acknowledging God as Creator, but denying

Him as Judge and Redeemer. Abel did not budge; the author of Hebrews exhorts his audience to stand firm as well.

Application may be made of this living example to the modern tendency to compromise convictions in an effort to 'maintain contact' with a loved one. Children, professing faith, espouse themselves to unbelievers, and the parents quietly go along so as not to lose contact, and to display 'unconditional love.' Homosexuals are permitted, unrepentant and unchaste, into the communion of the church on the basis that 'love covers a multitude of sins' (if the particular church even holds homosexuality to be a sin). Marital infidelity and sexual perversity are tolerated among leaders of the church, on the excuse that the preaching is still good, and still leading many to Christ. Each of these examples, and countless more, must be seen for what they are: a defiling of the offering, a corruption of the faith, a following after Cain and ignoring the slowly fading voice of Abel. *Though dead, yet he speaks...*but what is he saying? And is anyone still listening?

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him, for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. (11:5)

The lineage of faith now jumps from the truncated line of Abel to that of his 'replacement,' Seth. Seventh from Adam – in generational parallel with the wicked Lamech – lived the next inductee into the Hall of Faith, Enoch.

Lineage of Cain (the sons of man)

Lineage of Seth(the sons of God)

Adam

Cain

Seth

Enoch

Enosh

Irad

Cainan

Mehujael

Mahalalel

Methushael

Jared

Lamech

Enoch

It is not hard to understand how the mind of the author of Hebrews could not pass over so momentous an event within the history of faith as the 'translation of Enoch' – *"And Enoch walked with God, and was not, because God took him."*²⁶ But as with Abel, there is more than meets the eye in the life and testimony of Enoch. Enoch lived his life parallel to a man who boasted in the blood-guiltiness of Cain, and swore to surpass even the wickedness of the paradigm of wickedness himself.

Then Lamech said to his wives:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;

Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech!

For I have killed a man for wounding me,

Even a young man for hurting me.

If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,

Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

(Genesis 4:23-24)

The beginning of the sin of murder was with Cain shedding his brother's blood, but we do not hear of Cain killing any other men. Yet the wickedness of that sin grew as it was passed down from generation to generation, until it manifested itself in full, unrepentant strength in Lamech. How fitting, how poetic, that while one man proclaims his defiance of God through the proud slaughter of other men, another in the same generation should so powerfully manifest true faith that *he was not found, for God took him*. One man brags to his wives of his ability to send other men to their deaths; another man is delivered from death completely. Who is thus manifested as having the power over death? Lamech, who is merely able to hasten a man's journey to where he will inevitably arrive at some point? Or God, who translates righteous Enoch without the faithful saint experiencing death at all? Anachronistic as it may be, one can almost hear the voice of Jesus from the clouds, just as Lamech finishes

²⁶ Genesis 5:27

his boastful self-adulation, *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*²⁷

What does Enoch's translation say to the Hebrew Christians? Was the author encouraging them, as so many modern charismatics attempt to do, to expect God to do the same in their lives as He did once or maybe twice within biblical history? One can almost hear a modern faith preacher exhorting his congregation that, if they only had enough faith, they could escape death and be 'taken up' by God. But that would be to wrench the passage completely from its context, and to presume upon God's actions rather than to lean upon God's Word.

Even otherwise sound and conservative commentators like Delitzsch consider Enoch's translation as a reward for his faith. "It was God's purpose in taking Enoch away, to deliver him from the power of death, as a reward of his faith in Himself, the living God."²⁸ This manner of speaking is not entirely without warrant from the text, for the very next verse mentions the anticipation of the faithful that God *"is the rewarder of those who seek Him."* The danger, of course, is in the connotation that can be made of the word 'reward,' especially by many in modern Christendom who view God almost as a cosmic vending machine of blessing and faith as the currency that activates one's desires.

First and foremost, the taking of Enoch by God so that he did not see death was a powerful testimony in the generation of Lamech that death was neither an essential human characteristic, nor was it even remotely within the control of man. The author of Hebrews puts Enoch's experience before his audience, reminding them just who had the power of life and death, encouraging them to look beyond those who were threatening them with bodily harm, to the One *who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell."* Just after the Lord Himself exhorts His disciples as to whom they should and should not fear, He says, *"Are*

²⁷ Matthew 10:28

²⁸ Delitzsch, 229.

*not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will."*²⁹

Second, and with particular application to the context of Hebrews 11, the translation of Enoch was a divine testimony to the persevering faith of that antediluvian saint. The world around Enoch was not getting better, and would degenerate even more in the coming generations until God would intervene and destroy the whole earth with water. The author of Hebrews does not make empty and groundless promises to his readers, telling them that their circumstances will get better, that the animosity against them because of their faith will decrease, that Christianity will eventually triumph over the hearts of those who were currently its inveterate enemies. Such triumphalism is without warrant either in biblical promise or historical example, yet it is a recurring theme among Christian preachers throughout the ages.

Yet we should not conclude by the author's use thus far of Abel – who was killed, and Enoch – who was translated from a most wicked environment, that he was advocating fatalism among his hearers. Neither triumphalism nor fatalism are appropriate attitudes for the believer. Rather fearless faith is the order of whatever day they may find themselves living. *Fear not* Cain, Abel; *fear*



not Lamech, Enoch; *fear not* your unbelieving Jewish neighbors, Hebrew Christians. But *fear God*, that is the enduring characteristic of persevering faith.

We would be remiss if we moved on from verse 5 without mentioning what many conservative commentators have seen as an ancient witness to the

John Owen (1616-83) doctrine of bodily resurrection. John Owen, for instance, writes "But herein God gave us a pledge and assurance that the body itself hath a capacity of eternal blessedness in heaven."³⁰ One must be careful with passages like Genesis 5:27, as well as Job's testimony in chapter 19, verses 25-26.

²⁹ Matthew 10:29

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;*

*And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God,*

The most that can be said concerning these passages, is that the subsequent teaching of Scripture concerning the resurrection of the body is foreshadowed by them. These ancient allusions to a deathless transfer from life (Genesis 5), or to the enduring reality of the flesh (Job 19), confirm our more informed understanding that death itself is the consequence of sin and not merely the natural mortality of humanity. The ancients could not have had a full understanding of what God had not yet revealed, but they differed powerfully from their contemporaries in their comprehension that death was, again pardon the anachronism, *"the wages of sin."* Still, to focus on the resurrection in the narrative of Enoch's translation is to miss the main point – that it is God who has the power over death and the grave, to consign whom He will, and translate whom He will.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (11:6)

The wording of this verse ties it most intimately with verse 5, though it also clearly applies to verse 4 and the testimony of Abel's faith, as well as to all of the faith-examples still to come. But the most direct connection is between Enoch, who received the testimony that *he was pleasing to God*. "It is the general proposition on which the conclusion in reference to Enoch is based. Faith is essential to all well-pleasing; Enoch pleased God; Enoch therefore had faith."³¹ Nothing is mentioned explicitly concerning *faith* in the Genesis narrative of Enoch's life and translation, so it is necessary for the author to tie up the loose

³⁰ Owen, 32.

³¹ Delitzsch, 230.

ends between his discourse on persevering faith, on the one hand, and his illustrative use of the translation of Enoch, on the other. That connection is found in the fact, recorded in the Genesis account, that Enoch *walked with God*. Reading this in Genesis, without further illumination from subsequent revelation, one is intentionally reminded of the state of communion between God and Adam before the Fall: “*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*”³² It was the frequent, probably daily, habit of Adam to walk with God in the Garden in uninterrupted communion – a blessedness altered forever by sin. Enoch’s life is an encouraging reminder to Man that such intimate communion with God, while no longer attainable to the degree of innocence, is still available.

It is probably appropriate at this point to detour on a short rabbit trail. The author of Hebrews begins his litany of the faithful, not with Adam, but with Abel. Adam and Eve are not mentioned in this discourse, and that in itself is significant. One can reasonably assume that it was through the teaching of their father Adam that Cain and Abel, and later Seth, learned of God, of the Garden, of sin, and of the first family’s expulsion from Paradise. But did Adam *believe*? Did he have *justifying* faith? Perhaps; but certainly no definitive positive answer can be made on the basis of biblical revelation.

It may be the case that Adam did what man so often, too often, does when confronted by offended deity – he ran. We know that false concepts of God (the essence of idolatry according to A. W. Tozer) had to begin somewhere and with someone. Is it possible the accentuation of the divine wrath and minimization of the divine mercy was the heritage of Adam to his sons? If so, one can see the struggle that Abel was up against and can understand why the wickedness of sin progressed so rapidly down the generations before the Flood. And it is more than mere conjecture that Adam might have responded to God’s just wrath

³² Genesis 3:8

through fear rather than faith, for we do know that his first reaction to the presence of God after his fall in sin was to hide himself in fear. *“So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”*³³

Be that all as it may, the context of culture in which Abel and Enoch lived is of some importance to our understanding the measure and strength of their faith, and to the comprehension of just what Hebrews 11:6 is saying to believers in every generation. Unbelief and the fleeing fear of divine wrath are characteristic of every age of fallen man upon the earth, and the backdrop to the life of every believer. The canvas may be painted with shades of polytheistic paganism, or scientific rationalism, but it is all unbelief. Sadly the unbelief of fear is often clothed in the socially acceptable garment of religion – as it was in the case of Cain offering sacrifice to God with an unbelieving heart. First century Judaism was just such a covering for unbelief – slavish obedience to ritual law, recitation of the Torah, and hearts that were far from God. To this safe haven of unbelief – at least as far as one’s neighbors were concerned – the Hebrew Christians were being tempted to go. Thus the stern reminder that he who would walk with God in a manner pleasing to Him, must walk by faith.

The logical consistency of the author of Hebrews is beautiful to behold. It is easy to look too intensely at the individual verses – the brushstrokes, as it were – so as to lose sight of the painting as a whole. We are reminded of the introduction to Chapter 11, found in the closing verses of Chapter 10,

*Now the just shall **live by faith**;
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has **no pleasure** in him.* (Hebrews 10:38)

The two aspects of ‘God-pleasing’ from verse 6 both hinge upon the same faith of which the author is writing throughout this section of his epistle. Faith ‘believes that God is’ and faith ‘believes that God rewards those who seek Him.’ “The

³³ Genesis 3:10

one requires faith of assured conviction, the other faith of confident expectation."³⁴ These two aspects of true faith are indispensable one to the other. The first, of course, is obvious: how can any man be pleasing to a God in whom he does not believe? Atheism does not please God, but that is not what the writer is getting at. The 'and' in verse 6 is not to be interpreted as merely separating two items on a list, but rather as inseparably joining two sides of one coin.

It was not enough for Cain to 'believe' that God existed, even believing enough to bother offering a sacrifice. It was not enough for Lamech to 'believe' in God's curse upon anyone who harmed Cain, even believing enough to invoke that curse sevenfold upon himself. Neither of these men were atheists, yet neither of them pleased God. For neither of them believed in the moral reciprocity between God and the man who diligently seeks Him. They were, millennia ahead of their time, deists. But God will not be worshipped by such as proclaim His transcendent existence with one breath, and deny His imminent participation in the worshipper's life with the next. God comes to every man as he came to Abram, "***Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.***"³⁵

³⁴ Delitzsch, 230.

³⁵ Genesis 15:1

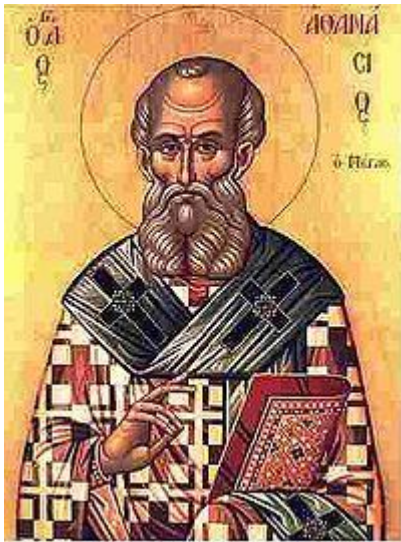
Week 4: Contra Mundum: The Faith of Noah**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:7**

*"The experience of Noah shows that
judgment and salvation are simultaneous events."
(William Lane)*

At 27 years of age, the Alexandrian deacon Athanasius was already in the midst of theological controversy. He was the recognized point man in the struggle against the heretical teachings of Arius, who famously claimed "There was a time when Christ was not." Arius denied the fullness of Christ's divinity, making Him a subordinate 'god' to the one Almighty God, the Father. Arius' doctrine, had it prevailed, would have truncated the Church's understanding of the Trinity and plunged Christianity into deism 1700 years before that false doctrine was even given a name. Enter Athanasius – a man for his season if ever there was one.

Athanasius was convinced by his reading of Scripture that the fullness of deity belonged to Jesus Christ – that He was of the same 'substance' as God, and not merely 'similar' as Arius taught. The controversy raged throughout the Church until finally the Emperor Constantine intervened in an attempt to bring ecclesiastical peace through the first ecumenical council at Nicæa. Athanasius' powerful intellect and his command of the Scripture won the day, and the Council pronounced the teachings of Arius to be heretical. Athanasius' biblical defense of the deity of Christ laid the foundation for the development of a fuller theological understanding regarding the biblical doctrine of the Trinity – a teaching not explicitly stated in the Bible, but one that follows from many clear statements concerning the deity both of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Consequent to his efforts at Nicæa, Athanasius has the rare distinction of being recognized as a 'saint' by the Egyptian (Coptic), Roman Catholic, and Greek

Orthodox churches, and as a great theological teacher by Protestants. But his life subsequent to the Council in AD 325 was hardly full of parades and praises.



Athanasius (c. 298-373)

Though condemned theologically, Arianism was still the more popular view among the rank and file 'Christians' of that era, including several emperors. Athanasius' steadfast refusal to compromise, his refusal to reinstate an unrepentant Arius into communion, earned him a total of seventeen years of exile – in five different installments over his forty-five year career as bishop of Alexandria. The story is told, perhaps apocryphal, of the patriarch being

warned by his friends that 'the whole world is against you, Athanasius.' To this he replied, 'Athanasius contra mundum' – then Athanasius is against the whole world. Truth or legend, the man's life and steadfast faith was indeed 'contra mundum,' and it is this attribute of persevering faith that finds its greatest biblical example in the next inductee to the Hall of Faith: Noah.

The faith of Abel was displayed through his sacrifice of a sin offering in contrast with the peace offering of Cain, and in his refusal to compromise the truth when confronted by his angry brother. But Abel's faith, though strong and durable, did not have a long life in which to prove its perseverance. No doubt it would have, had circumstances turned out differently. Enoch's life, we must assume, was longer than Abel's, and his faith persevered through 365 years of witnessing the progressive wickedness of the human race. God manifested His approval of Enoch in the translating of that antediluvian saint in the same generation as the murderous Lamech, but we are not given any further information with regard to how Enoch's faith displayed itself in the midst of his own 'perverse generation.'

With Noah we come to the first example of persevering faith with reference to a specific act on the part of the man, in response to a specific command on the part of God. The faith of Abel and of Enoch, as it were, rides safely through the Flood in Noah. In Noah we find both aspects of persevering faith evident: the *substance of things hoped for* and the *evidence of things not seen*. Several other important features are brought to light in the brief but pregnant reference to Noah found in Hebrews 11:7. The fear of the Lord is united inseparably with persevering faith. And the concept of *salvation* to the believer is juxtaposed with that of *judgment* to the world. There is a great deal in the life and faith of Noah to give comfort to the Hebrew believers, and to steel their spiritual nerves against the opposition and persecution they faced. And what was true in the first century for struggling Christians in Rome is no less true in the 21st century for struggling Christians in the United States.

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (11:7)

The genealogies of the first chapters of Genesis make for interesting study, containing only a very few names among the multitudes who populated the earth in the years before the Deluge. It is unlikely that the men who are denominated in these lists all represent first-born sons; it is possible that none of them were the first of their families. There is a stylistic use of numerology involved, as is the case with biblical genealogies in both Old and New Testament. Enoch, for instance, was the representative of faith in the seventh generation – seven being a significant biblical number. Ten is also such a number, and in the tenth generation we meet Noah. It is, of course, the product of conjecture, but we may be able to interpret this as the generation of Enoch representing the fullness of man's antediluvian sin (remember Lamech), and the tenth generation

manifesting the long-suffering nature of God. Neither of these statements is without some support in the record.

Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." (Genesis 6:1-3)

Immediately following the genealogy of Seth, culminating in the tenth generation with the birth of Noah, we have this account of the accumulation of human sin, the statement of impending judgment by God, and the display of divine long-suffering: *"yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty."* Enoch was translated from the generation of man that reached the pinnacle (nadir?) of depravity, as represented by the wicked Lamech. Noah was raised up in the generation that saw God's long-suffering patience finally come to an end, to be the vehicle by which both the lineage of the sons of Adam and of the sons of God would be carried through the judgment of the Flood. In putting together the list of faithful men here in Hebrews 11, the author of this epistle could not have helped but notice that the laudatory phrase, *"he walked with God,"* is used in the Bible with respect to only two men: Enoch and Noah.

Sidebar: Methuselah and Lamech

In the biblical record of the antediluvians, and even in the era of the patriarchs of Israel, length of years was indicative of divine favor. Conversely, it was evidence of divine displeasure for a son to precede his father in death. When Pharaoh asked Israel/Jacob how old the patriarch was, he responded with a commentary on his age which, though advanced, had not yet attained to the longevity of his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. This was a lament by Israel, indicating his understanding that the progressively decreasing lifespan of men was a manifestation of God's judgment.

In the context of Noah's life this concept is noteworthy in the life of Noah's father, Lamech, and his grandfather, Methuselah. The latter is famous for being the oldest man recorded in the Bible, at 969 years. What is often overlooked is the fact that Methuselah died the year before the Flood, perhaps another manifestation of divine father - allowing the ancient man to 'depart in peace, having seen the consolation

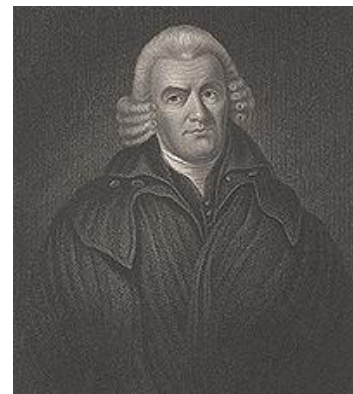
(Noah)' of mankind. Also noteworthy, however, is the fact that Noah's father Lamech preceded his own father Methuselah in death, perhaps illustrating the infiltration of the sins of the sons of Man into the lineage of the sons of God. Conjecture, to be sure; yet conjecture that flows from the biblical record. There is food for thought even in the genealogies!

Back to Noah. The author of Hebrews informs us that God warned Noah of the impending judgment, and as a result the faithful man was 'moved with fear.' This phrase sounds a note very uncommon in the modern Church, where 'fear' has been replaced by 'reverence,' and the notion of a holy God rousing from His throne in righteous judgment is inimical to the 'God is love' paradigm. But here we have faithful Noah, hearing of God's intention to rid the earth of man's corrupting influences through a cataclysmic flood, and responding in a manner that proves that fear and faith are thoroughly miscible concepts. Noah's gut reaction to the announcement of divine judgment was *true*, and a true manifestation of faith. It is the very same reaction that every believer will and must have when he or she contemplates that divine warning that abides,

But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (II Peter 3:7)

No righteous man (the term signifying a righteousness derived through faith, not inherent) can view eternal damnation calmly, none can consider 'the fire that is never quenched and the worm that never dies' apathetically.

Every heart to fear. This was not 'reverence,' though undoubtedly reverential. This was fear – the natural and appropriate human reaction when presented with the unveiled wrath of God against sin and sinful man. John Brown of Haddington comprehended the intensity of the divine warning given to Noah: "An evil of such



John Brown (1722-87)

tremendous magnitude, inflicted on account of sin, placed in a very striking light the irresistible power, the immaculate purity, the inflexible justice of God, and was fitted to fill the mind with reverence and godly fear.”³⁶ The lack of such fear is one of the most serious indictments – indeed, the summary indictment – that the apostle Paul lays against unbelieving man.

*Destruction and misery are in their ways;
And the way of peace they have not known;
There is no fear of God before their eyes.* (Romans 3:16-18)

But Noah’s fear was not a paralyzing terror, nor should the fear of any believer prevent him from proceeding in obedience and faith. It is unfortunate, if not demonic, that such a disconnect has been fostered in the modern church between fear and faith. The mantra of “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” has, it is to be feared, dulled the faculty whereby man registers awe and dread before unmitigated and unsheathed power and holiness. The familiarity that breeds contempt has crept into modern Christianity through such false teaching as that which portrays God as ‘Abba or Papa.’ And the laudable desire to encourage intimacy between the believer and his heavenly Father has overstepped appropriate bounds, once commonplace in human society, which elevated the father both as a member of the family and of society. The writer of Hebrews applauds Noah’s fear just as much as Noah’s faith; indeed, to him the two virtues are inseparable.

“*Moved by fear*” Noah built the ark. This is what Noah is famous for: building the ark, and thereby preserving both his own family and the species of land animals alive through the Flood. Several generations of glossy color Sunday School lessons have set in the minds of many believers the picture of smiling animals happily riding the waves with an elderly shepherd/captain beside them. The darkness, the terror, the death and destruction of the greatest

³⁶ Brown, John; *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; 1964), 502.

part of that 'good' creation of God, are all absent both from the pictures and from the minds. Noah's faith, as the author of Hebrews puts it, saw '*things not yet seen.*' When those things became visible to sight, and the judgment of God was finally unleashed, one cannot imagine Noah smiling.

And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights... And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive. (Genesis 7:10-12, 21-23)

The biblical record is indecisive on the point, but traditional interpretation has Noah building the ark over a period of one hundred years. This calculation stems from one passage – Genesis 5:32 – putting Noah's age at five hundred just before the narrative of God's impending judgment upon sin; and another – Genesis 7:11 – giving Noah's age as six hundred years when he entered the ark. The important point, however, is not exactly how long Noah worked on the ark, but that his faith persevered throughout that time as seeing what was unseen, and trusting what was promised. The testimony of God on behalf of Noah is succinct: "*Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.*"³⁷

But did Noah completely occupy his time, however long that time was, with ship building? If he had done so, that would have been enough to 'condemn' the unbelieving world around him. But it is apparent from other biblical witness to the event that Noah did much more. Peter calls the ancient saint a "*preacher of righteousness,*" indicating that Noah was more than a mere silent witness to the holy judgment of God against human sin. Like the faithful

³⁷ Genesis 6:22

men in Nehemiah's day, who worked with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, Noah preached and built, built and preached. He erected the vehicle of God's salvation before the very eyes of his unbelieving neighbors, and all the while – one cannot doubt – pleaded with them to *"be saved from this perverse generation."*³⁸

This does not mean that every believer is called to put word and deed together in a regular ministry, to be a 'preacher of righteousness.' But it does signify that deeds of faith are never alone, never without verbal support. And it also testifies that the message has always been the same: the righteous judgment of God upon sin coupled with the merciful offer of salvation through faith. Noah preached a flood to a generation that, as many modern creationist scientists believe, had never seen rain. The writer of Hebrews makes particular note of the fact that Noah was warned of *things not seen* – a not-so-subtle nod to the first verse in the chapter – but also an indication of the obstacles that Noah faced with his contemporaries. Being warned of the Flood, Noah warned his neighbors – but there is good reason to suspect that rain had not yet come upon the earth. Prior to the Deluge it would appear that the condensation of dew and natural springs from the ground were the means whereby the plants were watered – a global terrarium, as it were.

This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. (Genesis 2:4-6)

There is no further record in Genesis of the earth subsequently being watered by rain, and the vivid description of the initiation of the Deluge would strongly indicate that something was happening that had never happened before.

³⁸ Acts 2:40

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

(Genesis 7:11-12)

Many older commentators – John Owen, John Brown, Franz Delitzsch as examples – view the *'things not seen'* as referring to the flood itself. This would be a tautology, a statement of the obvious. Man had never seen a global deluge, for there had never been a global deluge before. But had there been rain prior to the Great Flood, it would not have been beyond the extension of human reason to comprehend a flood of rain. On the other hand, had the heavens never before opened up, the warning that Noah proclaimed to his generation would have appeared to be foolishness, at least to those who were perishing. Science notwithstanding, the parallel drawn by the New Testament between Noah's ark and Christ bears the continued analogy between the message that Noah must have preached and the Gospel preached by Paul, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*³⁹ What foolishness is the message of the Gospel – that man can be saved from death through the death of a Man.

It is evident from Peter's interpretation of Noah's ministry and message that the ancient preacher carried the very same message – appropriate to his time – as that proclaimed by the likes of Peter and Paul. Peter's words are not crystal clear in their significance, but it is at least evident that he draws a direct parallel between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the ministry of Noah,

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype

³⁹ I Corinthians 1:18

which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...

(I Peter 3:18-21)

Through deed and accompanying word, Noah “condemned” his generation. On the one hand, the condemnation of which the author of Hebrews speaks “need imply no more than that the life of a person of firm faith and faithfulness of God constitutes a sharp rebuke to a godless generation.”⁴⁰ On the other hand there is every reason to expect that the message Noah preached to his contemporaries was as full of warning with regard to the coming judgment as was God’s own message to Noah. “The world that perished had materially the same message delivered to them as that which Noah had received...They disbelieved, and mocked, and were disobedient, and perished.”⁴¹

After however long God’s longsuffering patience endured the disobedience of men, Noah entered the ark and thus became *the heir of righteousness which is according to faith*. The use of the term ‘heir’ by the author seems to serve a dual purpose. First, it indicates that Noah would become the new Adam, the progenitor of the surviving branch of the human race. In this sense he was to ‘inherit’ the earth, upon the death of all other contenders. Second, it draws the contemporary believer back to the underlying theme of this section of Hebrews – the requisite endurance that leads to the inheritance of the promise.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

(Hebrews 10:35-36)

The application of Noah’s life and faith to the Hebrew Christians of the first century is both evident and powerful. They were enduring opposition and oppression, persecution and even death, for the testimony of Jesus Christ that

⁴⁰ Lane, 340.

⁴¹ Brown, 506.

they held. But would any of them – whose numbers were surely greater than eight – face either the magnitude or the endurance of unbelief encountered by Noah? Will there ever be a believer, to the end of the age, who will find himself as ‘contra mundum’ as did Noah? Yet he persevered – seeing the unseen and trusting the promise – and lives on as perhaps the greatest example of persevering faith among the great cloud of witnesses watching from above.

Week 5: Excursus: Salvation Before The Flood**Text Reading: Romans 5:1 - 12**

*"Let us remember that whatever differences there are
between the Old and the New Testament way of salvation,
the Old was effective."
(William Deas Kerswill)*

Excursus is a word derived from the Latin, meaning 'rabbit trail.' No, not really; but that is what this is: a rabbit trail. Leaving the theme of persevering faith being developed in Hebrews 11, we take the opportunity of the Deluge to investigate a perennial question among both theologians and non-theologians as they read their Old Testament Scriptures: "How were men saved in the Old Testament?" If sinners were not saved in the Old Testament era, then the inclusion of men such as Abel, Enoch, and Noah serves no clear purpose as examples of enduring and overcoming faith. No one doubts that God's grace has extended to sinners from the dawn of time; the difficulty comes in when one considers the methodology or instrumentality of their salvation apart from a clear enunciation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christian scholars, at least those who are not dispensationalist in their soteriology, tend to accord to Old Testament saints a visionary knowledge of the Messiah only slightly less clear than believers on this side of the Cross. A famous adage puts it thus: Old Testament saints had faith that looked forward to Christ; New Testament saints have faith that looks backward to Christ. There is, of course, some truth to this; but overall it is too simplistic, and even anachronistic. It is not a principle that naturally flows from reading the Old Testament narratives themselves, but only from reading the New Testament retrospectives, Hebrews 11, for example. Because we do not have a developed and systematic doctrine of salvation (at least not a *New Testament* doctrine of salvation) in the Old Testament, we are challenged by the nagging question as to what exactly Abel, Enoch, and Noah *understood* regarding the path of their salvation.

A denial of the hermeneutical system of Dispensationalism does not translate into a denial of biblical 'dispensations.' Clearly there is a paradigm shift at the time of the Flood, a reordering of the human race in Noah and the start of a singling out of one human family (Shem) until the call of one man (Abram). Thus Noah provides as good a place as any to pause and think about not just the three men inducted into the Hall of Faith, but all of the men and women who lived between Adam and Noah and who found salvation for their souls. In this excursus upon salvation prior to the Flood, we will attempt to see by the same light as those men saw and to, so to speak, dim the light of the New Testament that we might accustom our eyes to the shadows of the Old. William Deas Kerswill, a 19th Century Presbyterian scholar, offers a thought-provoking comment on the handicap that New Testament believers operate under when considering the lives of Old Testament saints. He writes, "although we have a sum total of more light upon the great question of salvation than he had, yet of that which he had we have less than he."⁴² An excellent analogy may be drawn from the concept of 'light pollution.' We who live along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States are no longer accustomed to seeing the multitude of stars that are in the heavens on a clear night; there is too much ambient light surrounding us. When we do have the opportunity to view the night sky from a vantage point with less light pollution - offshore, for instance, or in the Mid-West - we are often unable to locate the familiar constellations due to the abundance of 'new' stars now visible to our eyes. So it is with the reading of the Old Testament: not to say that the New Testament revelation is 'light pollution' (every analogy has its weak point!), but rather to say that the brightness of the revelation given in the New Testament - a revelation not known to the Old Testament saint - often masks Old Testament truths that would have been evident to the saint of that era. Again Kerswill writes,

⁴² Kerswill, William Deas, *The Old Testament Doctrine of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication; 1904) reprinted by BiblioBazaar, 10.

We have been accustomed to walk by the greater light so long, that the lesser light means still less to us than it did to him. Hence it will be observed that while we may be in danger of placing a New Testament meaning upon an Old Testament statement, and thus make it mean too much, we, accustomed to the greater light of the New Testament, are in danger of seeing in the Old Testament too little.⁴³

Just as in the star-gazing analogy, the issue of dimming the lights is a matter of gain, not loss. It is not as though the New Testament saint is at a loss due to the abundance of revelatory light given to him – that would be a ridiculous thought. Rather it is a matter of what can be gained in deeper understanding both of God and of His great plan of salvation, by dimming the New Testament lights and straining a bit harder to see by the light of the Old.

We start by going back to the point of crisis – the Fall, and the consequent Curse that Man brought upon himself by his rebellion. In particular, we find in Genesis 3 the solemn monologue of the offended Deity against the three principle actors in humanity's demise: the Serpent, the Woman, and Adam. From the perspective of human salvation the curse pronounced upon the Serpent is of lesser interest, so we will consider only those words directed to the man and his wife.

To the woman He said:

"I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;

In pain you shall bring forth children;

Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it':

Cursed is the ground for your sake;

In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,

And you shall eat the herb of the field.

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread

Till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken;

For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

(Genesis 3:16-19)

⁴³ Kerswill, 10-11.

Three tangible consequences may be discerned from this passage, results of the Fall that would be a continual reminder to men and women of the sin of their original parents and of the abiding nature of the divine anger. The first is pain in childbirth – no generation would enter upon life on this planet apart from the vivid memory of man's fall. Pain in childbirth seems to be a phenomenon unique to humans, although it has to be admitted that animals are somewhat inept when it comes to expressing their discomfort. Nevertheless, pain in childbirth is a universal reality and a perpetual reminder (at least to the antediluvians) of the curse upon Eve. The whole trauma associated with childbirth in the ancient world bore (pun intended) witness to a situation that was not intended to be. Not only labor pains, but miscarriages, stillbirths, and women themselves dying in childbirth, along with high infant mortality all serve to put the human race on notice that the Earth that was given to them freely was no longer their Paradise.

The second facet of the Curse was toil and frustration in work. A man's labor was not in and of itself a part of the Curse: man was created to 'tend' the Garden, to work with his hands and to subdue the earth under his righteous efforts. The Curse teaches us by implication that the original plan was not for a man's work to be fruitless, or even difficult, but rather that his labors would yield their intended results without struggle or frustration. All of that was cast away when man fell, and now the futility of labor is so much a part of every generation of human history that we have lost sight of the sanctity and original blessedness of work itself. Because work was cursed, man now curses work. Still, in the first generations after Adam's fall, the weeds and the rocks and the less-than-adequate harvests would have been infuriating reminders of what should have been if not for man's rebellion. As with childbirth, the curse upon man's work means more than just the sweat of his brow. Pestilence, famine, disease, depletion of the soil's nutrients, necessary migration, starvation – all are

encompassed within this one verse in Genesis 3. Man now considers these things 'scientifically,' and has made great strides in reducing the impact of the Curse upon the land. Before the Flood, however, the night sky was darker and the memory of the Curse more vivid in the mind of man as he came home from a day of toil.

Finally, and most significantly, the third aspect of the Curse upon humanity was the physical fulfillment of the probationary warning, *"in the day that you eat of it, dying you shall die."* Man who was intended to rule over the earth as coregent with God – as God's Vicar, so to speak – would now ultimately return to the very dust from which he was drawn. The long lives of the antediluvians kept the full impact of this facet of the Curse somewhat in the background. Still, there were murders: Cain's murder of Abel, and Lamech's boastful killings were undoubtedly merely representative of something that was commonplace among human society. Even the selection by the author of Hebrews speaks in broad terms to the phenomenon of death as it started to grip the human race in the generations before the Flood.

Murder was the first recorded sin after the original, and Abel's death before he married and extended his line through children was graphic evidence of man's new mortality. But notice the progression of revelation as it moves from Abel through Enoch to Noah. In Abel we have a life cut short by violent death; in Enoch a man translated apart from death in the same generation as the violent murderer Lamech, and in Noah a man preserved alive while the entirety of the human race (apart, of course, from those few on the ark) was put to death by divine judgment. "The first died, but even in death was not lost to God, nor forgotten of Him; the second died not at all, but God took him, by miraculous translation, to Himself; the third was wonderfully preserved in life when all the world perished."⁴⁴ In the midst of the trauma of human existence, the biblical

⁴⁴ Delitzsch, 233.

revelation gives hope of victory over death – but only as that victory is achieved by God.

Thus the antediluvian generations of the human race had ample reminders – at the beginning of life, during life, and at the end of life – of the horrific breach in the relationship they once had in Adam with God. Their understanding of this relationship was now clouded by the corruption of their hearts and minds, yet the reminders remained. The restoration of a man's relationship to God logically required the healing of this breach, an act referred to theologically as 'justification.' "By Justification we mean man's acceptance with God, or his being regarded and treated as righteous in His sight, as the object of His favor, and not of His wrath; of His blessing, and not of His curse."⁴⁵

But it is one thing to know, as a fallen man, that justification is required in order to be restored to divine favor, and another thing altogether to hope that such justification may be available. What was it that gave Abel hope? What steeled Enoch's walk in the midst of such a perverse generation? What caused Noah to persevere, *contra mundum*, for upwards of a hundred years? Was there anything for human hope to grasp? Indeed there was, and the narrative gives us both the hope itself, and the evidence of at least some men holding on to it.

The very same passage that announces the multifaceted Curse also announces the ultimate Hope. Interestingly it was not spoken either to the woman or to the man, but to the Serpent.

*And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.* (Genesis 3:15)

Modern evangelical scholars call this verse the 'protoevangelium' – the first preaching of the Gospel. But that is to borrow from the abundant light of

⁴⁵ Buchanan, James *The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1955), 17.

the New Testament. For the antediluvian sinner, it spoke of the ultimate victory of Man – through the seed of Woman – over the one who seduced Man into sin. It is hard to say just how deep the understanding of the first generations of the human race with regard to the nature and identity of the ‘seed of Woman.’ Several statements made during that time would indicate that the vision was cloudy, to say the least. It would appear that Eve considered the birth of Cain to in the light of the promise of a ‘seed.’

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”
(Genesis 4:1)

Apparently Eve was an early adherent of the doctrine of primogeniture – the superiority of the firstborn – for she had nothing noteworthy to say at Abel’s birth. Ironical, actually, considering the way the two turned out. Still, her mind was on the ‘seed’ when, after Cain proved his nature by killing Abel, Seth is born.

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, “For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.”
(Genesis 4:25)

Later, after ten generations of downward spiral into abject wickedness, we still find the hope flickering at Noah’s birth, when his father Lamech said,

Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed.”
(Genesis 5:28-29)

Seeing by the light by which the antediluvians saw, can we detect the subtle difference in Lamech’s perspective compared to Eve’s? Lamech, a man, sees in the hope a relief from that part of the Curse that afflicted man particularly – the toil and frustration of work. Eve, not only a woman but *the* Woman, has

her eyes turned to the 'seed' that would come from her, who would undo the horrible disaster her sin and that of her husband wrought upon the earth. Is there a hint here as to the tendency of women to be more sensitive in matters of religion than men?

The antediluvians had sufficient revelation to guide them in the way of a return to their God, but for the most part they did not follow even the light they could see. Still, the history of the ancient world even outside the biblical record bears testimony to the importance of those same things that would have been reminders to the antediluvians of just how far they had fallen. Pagan religions from time immemorial have treated as sacred the event of childbirth, and the harvest, the changing of seasons (especially the turn from ever-shortening days to slowly lengthening ones). The same aspects of human life that figure in the Curse of Genesis 3 became sacred seasons and important points of passage long after man had forgotten their original significance. The underlying feature of all such pagan considerations is that of the hope of continued existence for man. And when one considers that man's life begins in pain, barely makes it to adulthood (at least in the ancient world) and is marked by toil and strife until finally yielded up in death, it becomes apparent that the only reason mankind would continue to hope for a continuance of this miserable progression has to be a subliminal belief that it will get better, somehow, some day.

We might at this point offer a provisional statement of what it was that the antediluvian saints 'did' in order to attain salvation. Only later revelation would explicitly link the sinner's faith with God's prevenient grace.⁴⁶ But it may be said of Abel and Enoch and Noah that they held fast to the simplicity of the promise: the God who promised the Seed would be the One through whom it would come. Certainly this does not answer all of the questions concerning salvation in the Old Testament, but at least it is a start.

⁴⁶ It is probably not without significance that divine revelation was not recorded until the link between sovereign election and human faith was made in the Pentateuch.

Week 6: Abraham: Alien & Sojourner**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:8 - 16**

*"Where there is no call from God,
there can be no faith or trust in God."
(John Owen)*

The apostle Paul offered a very non-charismatic promise to believers throughout the ages when he told Timothy that "all who would live godly in Christ will suffer persecution."⁴⁷ One of the purposes of the author of Hebrews in writing of the experiences of faithful men and women throughout the ages is to confirm the apostle's words, and to show that it has always been so. One particular form which this persecution takes is the loss of worldly possessions. Indeed, this was an experience with which the Hebrew believers were already familiar (*cp.* Heb. 10:34). It has been the working thesis of this study that the original recipients of this letter were Jewish converts to Christianity who had suffered along with the entire Jewish population of Rome, being expelled from the Imperial City by edict of the Emperor Claudius. It is evident from secular Roman historians that the cause of this forced exile of the Roman Jewish community was an internecine conflict most likely centering on the assertion that Jesus Christ was the Jewish Messiah. Seutonius explains the edict of Claudius very succinctly, "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."⁴⁸

Having returned to Rome after the Claudian Edict was rescinded by Nero, the Jewish believers however remained under the opposition and persecution of the unbelieving portion of that community. Tempers were bound to flare up again, and a reprisal of the expulsion under the new emperor was certainly within the realm of possibility. These circumstances conspired to tempt the

⁴⁷ II Timothy 3:12

⁴⁸ Seutonius *The Twelve Caesars: Claudius* 25.1-5.

believing community in Rome to inch their way back into the relative safety, and traditional security, of the old Mosaic religion.

We would like to think that the threat of material loss is insufficient to tempt a Christian to falter or, worse, to fall back into full denial of the faith. But the reality of the matter is that our fallen nature is very earthbound, tied by sense and emotion to the things of this world – to family, to home, to the security that comes from material goods. The awareness that a too-evident manifestation of one's Christian faith might bar promotion and raise tempts modern believers to become not merely inoffensive in the midst of their unbelieving coworkers, but downright mute. There is truly nothing new under the sun, and the cords that bind our baser nature to the material world were just as strong in first century Rome as they are in twenty-first century America. The writer of Hebrews wisely approaches the topic of persevering faith from multiple vantage points, seeking to strengthen believers from all manner of assaults coming from all possible directions.

In this endeavor the patriarch Abraham serves two separate purposes by way of illustration. It is no wonder that the 'father of the faithful' should be spoken of more often in Hebrews 11 than any other inductee in the Hall of Faith. But it is significant that the treatment given to Abraham by the author of Hebrews lays out in two distinct pericopes: verses 8-16 and verses 17-19. These passages are not meant to be a mini 'Life of Abraham,' and are very much lacking in historical detail. Enough is given, however, to suit the writer's purpose: to secure and strengthen the reader's faith by furnishing a well-known and vivid illustration from history. As each of the former examples has served a particular purpose relative to the myriad dangers facing the Hebrew believers in Rome, so also the two passages dealing with the exemplar Abraham each touch upon a particular temptation, and illustrate how persevering faith is powerful to overcome it.

Commentators are tempted to provide a thorough recounting of Abraham's life and travels as exposition of what the author of Hebrews has to say in these short verses. To be sure, the details of Abraham's life form the backdrop against which his persevering faith is displayed. Delving too deeply in the Genesis account of the life and times of the patriarch risks the real danger of losing the forest for the trees. It can safely be assumed that the author expected his readers to have sufficient knowledge of the narrative of Abraham's life to formulate that backdrop in their minds, and to be able to quickly set his summary of events in their perspective. It is hard to imagine, however, that the writer intended his audience to go off on a long rehearsal of how old Abram was when he left Ur of the Chaldees, that he sojourned in Haran until his father Terah died, how old he was (and how old Sarah was) when Isaac was born, etc. It seems more likely that he desired his readers feel the impact of a broad summary of Abraham's faith experience as it pertained to their own unique situation, temptations, and challenges. The underlying message of Abraham's life, as it is summarized here in Hebrews 11:8-12, is that he was a man of faith whose every tie with this world was severed – and most never reconnected during his own lifetime.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (11:8)

John Owen makes the wise comment upon this verse that “Where there is no call from God, there can be no faith or trust in God.”⁴⁹ He distinguishes between the more general call that all believers have, first from the Gospel and then from God's Word, from those unique and rare revelations of the divine will of which we read in the Scriptures. But the overall point remains the same: faith must be founded upon promise; grounded in the word of the Lord. The whole subject of ‘God speaking’ is a tricky one today, but it probably was in the days of

⁴⁹ Owen, 58.

Abram, son of Terah. How does one know that it is really God who is speaking? The reformed believer will possess sufficient distrust of his own mind and heart, due to the vestiges of sin which indwell the body, to refrain from too often saying 'The Lord is telling me thus and so,' or 'God spoke to me about such and such.' It suffices to the cautious and reverent student of God to realize that the divine word came very rarely to man after the Fall, and grew increasingly rare as the generations succeeded one another. The prophets of Israel, men to whom God continued to speak, set the tone for themselves and for the rest of us: *"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."*⁵⁰

There is a noticeable trend in biblical theophanies: the frequency of direct, audible communication between God and man decreases with the advent of the Law and of the community of Israel – never entirely disappearing, but occurring with greater irregularity and infrequency. Abraham was on the farther side of Sinai, and the straightforward manner in which Scripture portrays God speaking to him in Ur of the Chaldees ought to be taken at face value. And it stands to reason – if one simply meditates momentarily upon the nature of God – that a man to whom God truly speaks, will truly know it is God who is speaking to him. The 'God' who speaks to so many modern believers no longer causes the dread terror so often recorded in the Bible as the immediate and natural reaction of the man to whom God spoke. Perhaps this is because the only god who is speaking now is the deity of one's own mind? One cannot help but wonder what it must have been like to have the Almighty speak one's name, but to think that the experience would be anything less than fabulously terrifying is to blaspheme God.

God spoke to Abram, calling him from his ancestral land in Ur to travel to a place that God would both show him and give him, in a manner of speaking. The author of Hebrews conflates several events the covenantal dialogue initiated

⁵⁰ Isaiah 8:20

by God with Abraham, not the least by using the patriarch's covenantal name rather than his original Abram. This condensation of the historical data encourages us to look for the overall point that the writer wishes to illustrate and emphasize through Abraham. It would seem that the closing phrase in verse 8 guides us into the author's line of thought: "*not knowing where he was going.*"

The theme of Abraham's life that the writer of Hebrews wishes to highlight in these verses is the manner in which, by faith, the patriarch turned his back on all that he knew – all that constituted his security and heritage in this world – to venture forth into the absolute unknown. Abraham illustrates the faith of which Jesus himself speaks,

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.
(Matthew 10:37-39)

The author of Hebrews overlooks the fits and starts in Abraham's walk of faith, as Stephen also did in recounting the patriarch's life in his spirited defense of the faith (*cp.* Acts 7:2-8). Stephen, however, does mention Abraham's stop over in Haran, still in the regions of Mesopotamia, where he lived until Terah his father passed away. It is encouraging to believers to realize that Abraham's early tentative steps in the direction of God were not counted against him; rather his growth in faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. We cannot know from the text in Genesis whether Abram's sojourn in Haran was within the scope of God's call to Abram (it appears that it was Terah's intention to move to Canaan with his family, but only traveled as far as Haran).⁵¹ What is important to the author of Hebrews, and to the Holy Spirit, is that Abraham did follow that unique call and left behind his known world to journey into the unknown.

But the mere fact that Abraham left Ur (and later Haran) and moved to Canaan is not in itself all that spectacular. Men have migrated from ancestral

⁵¹ *Cp.* Genesis 11:31

homelands and settled in foreign, and often untamed, lands throughout history. It is a remarkable feat of courage, whenever it is done, and the terror of the unknown is just as real in every case. One cannot help but admire the immigrant who travels with no more than what he carries, to a land of a foreign tongue and culture, in order to make a new life there. Nor does it take much imagination to sense the destabilizing terror that must have accompanied those sold into slavery, and forcibly removed from their kith and kin, to start at the very bottom of the social food chain in an alien land. What Abram did willingly was courageous, but it was no more than millions of men have done both willingly and unwillingly throughout history. There must be something more to Abraham's case, and indeed there is.

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (11:9-10)

That which is truly noteworthy about Abraham's travels is a point consistently and sadly missed by dispensational commentators. Reading the Genesis accounts with strict literalness, and holding their exposition of Abraham's life to that same hermeneutic, dispensational scholars cannot see past the 'land' of Canaan. To be sure, it was the physical territory of Canaan that was promised to Abraham, to be the possession of his descendants after him. This promise was finally fulfilled in its entirety during the reign of King Solomon.

Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River¹⁴ to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. (I Kings 2:20-21; cp. Genesis 15:18)

From this highpoint in Israel's history everything went downhill – the division of the kingdom, followed by the progressive loss of power and territory,

until ultimately they are forcibly returned to the land of their patriarch's birth, the land of the Chaldees.

But it was not Canaan that stayed Abraham's faith! That anyone should think that the dirt of Palestine was strong enough to anchor the patriarch's faith is incredible in the light of both the Genesis accounts of his life, and the commentary upon that life found here in Hebrews 11. It is even more remarkable that any should think that the ultimate purpose and plan of God is to return Abraham's descendants to that land. The land was no more than a type and a shadow, just as the tabernacle and later the temple were merely shadows of the reality that was to come. The parallels between what the author says here in Hebrews 11:9 regarding the land of Canaan, and what he wrote earlier concerning the tabernacle, cannot be coincidental. In this passage Abraham was sojourning in Canaan while *"looking for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* Earlier he spoke of Christ as the High Priest of the tabernacle *"which the Lord pitched, not man."* This tabernacle is also referred to as *"the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation."* The earthly tabernacle was a type and shadow of the heavenly reality; so also the earthly Canaan typified and foreshadowed the heavenly prototype, the *"city whose builder and maker is God."*

The author refers to the 'city' whose builder and maker is God, which is interesting considering the actual life and travels of the patriarch Abraham. The only city in biblical history that qualifies as the earthly counterpart to this heavenly reality is Jerusalem, an ancient city that was very much in existence in Abraham's day (it was called Salem at that time, and the high priest and king of the city was Melchizedek). But Jerusalem did not figure into the narrative of Abraham's life, nor of that of his son Isaac or his grandson Jacob/Israel. What the author is doing, therefore, is summing up a large part of redemptive history into one statement – in a manner of speaking bringing Abraham forward in time to when Jerusalem was the center of Israel's religious and political life. In doing

so, the writer connects more powerfully with his audience, far more familiar with the centrality of Jerusalem in Jewish thought than Canaan (which in the first century AD was not called Canaan, but Palestine).

But what is true of David's Jerusalem is true of Abraham's Canaan and vice versa. Neither one of them were ever more than murky images of an underlying reality. Delitzsch writes,

As the heavenly sanctuary is one not made with hands, but pitched by God Himself to be the archetype of the sanctuary on earth, so the heavenly city here is the formation and building of God, and an archetype of that earthly city which god had once so favoured with His presence, and to which the hearts of the readers of this epistle still so dangerously cling.⁵²

We do the patriarchs, and the Word of God, great injustice when we limit the vision of their faith to Canaan. We denigrate the majesty of the divine promise, and the dignity of the heavenly original, when we bring the people of God back to these paltry shadows and dare to call it a glorious Millennium. Such thoughts cannot be conducive to true persevering faith, for they are anchored in the mundane, dwelling in the shadows instead of basking in the light. "Throughout the Old Testament the desire of believers is for a rest and a possession which is more and more clearly seen to lie beyond the realm of nature and the present world."⁵³

We cannot say with any certainty how much of all of this Abraham himself understood. He lived many generations removed from Adam, and several generations removed from the Deluge. We are told by Joshua, in his summary of the patriarchal period, that the fathers of Israel were pagans,

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your

⁵² Delitzsch, 238.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 237.

*fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; **and they served other gods**. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.* (Joshua 24:1-3)

Yet it cannot be that the generation of Abram was so far removed from the heritage of Eden as to confuse Canaan with Paradise. We must leave room for divine instruction given to the patriarch but not recorded in Scripture, and we must allow for the development of Abraham's understanding alongside the growth of his faith. It is the clear view of the Holy Spirit, through the pen of the author of Hebrews, that Abraham was not fixated on what is today so ironically called 'the Holy Land.' Delitzsch again seems to understand the overall meaning of the patriarchs' lives of faith when he writes,

The promise made to the patriarchs related, so far as the outward word went, simply to future possession of the land of Canaan. But their inward longing in the midst of their earthly pilgrimage for a fixed dwelling-place rose beyond this. Unconsciously to themselves, or at any rate not with full consciousness, their desires reached on and upwards to the eternal city which the New Testament reveals as the home and expectation of all saints.⁵⁴

In spite of all the intricate charts and literal interpretations of the ancient prophecies, it seems unlikely that Abraham will trade the reality he now knows for the shadow in which he once sojourned. His faith was sustained not by the promise that his descendants would hold sway over a miniscule portion of earth's real estate, but by the knowledge that the possession of that real estate foreshadowed a much greater possession. True faith, rather than sight, has always been the guide leading the people of God to the reality of His will and purpose. It always looked forward, not to some 'greater' earthly possession or influence, but to the ultimate fulfillment of which the earthly events and places of redemptive history were just stations along the way. Abraham's faith "was shown in his preference of the future and invisible for the seen and the present,

⁵⁴ Delitzsch, 237.

and in the blindness of his confidence, or rather in that spiritual insight which was contented to see and walk only by the light of God.”⁵⁵

It is not too difficult to see how the example of Abraham would be encouraging to the believers in Rome. Their previous loss of possessions on account of their profession of faith in Jesus Christ was undoubtedly still vivid in their minds, stoking the fears of a revived persecution. The intensity of this danger is in large measure lost on modern readers, both because we dwell in remarkable security in our own country and because we do not realize just how ‘wonderful’ it was to live in Rome in the days of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. But it is a wonderful thing, too, to live in the United States at the beginning of the 21st Century, and the temptation to let one’s Christian testimony fade into the background in order to preserve one’s position and possessions, is still very strong. Abraham is indeed the ‘father of the faithful.’ But his paternity is not truly appreciated or apprehended unless it maintains the same eternal vision of that city to which all believers are directed, *whose builder and maker is God*.

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude – innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. (11:11-12)

The birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah is a notable example of divine grace, perhaps the most famous of all such examples in the Old Testament. The record of Abraham having a son by his wife Sarah is used time and time again in Scripture as an exemplar of faith – *“and Abraham believed God and it was credited unto him as righteousness.”* Generally interpretations of the birth of Isaac focus upon the advanced age of Abraham and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb, both salient points in the story that intensify the faith aspect of the miracle. But there is an aspect of the whole event that rarely is considered: why was it so important to Abraham that he have a son? The answer to this question is found first in the

⁵⁵ Delitzsch, 235.

flow of redemptive history up to Abraham's day, and second in the use of the word 'seed.'

If it was an heir that Abraham wanted, then his servant Eliezar of Damascus would have sufficed in that culture, as would Ishmael born of Abraham and Sarah's maidservant Hagar. That the fertility problem did not reside with Abraham is also attested by the fact that he had other sons by Keturah after Sarah's death. Ancient Near Eastern culture offered several ways for a man to secure his posterity, and Abraham availed himself of them – but not in fulfillment of the divine promise, and he knew that.

So much of the Old Testament historical narrative is interpreted in a vacuum, so to speak, because it is disconnected from the overarching Promise of the Seed of Woman (Gen. 3:15). To the faithful there could be no 'promise' in the lesser sense that did not orient itself to this Promise in the greater. What this meant for Abraham is that his being called and chosen of God – a wonderful blessing in its own right, to be sure – was still hollow if it did not align itself with the Promise of the redemptive Seed. Thus the writer of Hebrews, along with most of the other writers of Scripture who refer to this ancient story, does not use the word 'son' in 11:11, but rather 'seed,' *"by faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed."* The issue at stake was far more than just an heir; it was the perpetuation of the lineage of the Seed of Woman, as the apostle Paul makes abundantly clear in his epistle to the Galatians.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

Abraham was aware, or was made aware by God, of the ancient Promise that held forth the only hope for the redemption of Man. This Promise must be allowed hermeneutically to tie together the events of redemptive history into a cohesive whole. The author of Hebrews indirectly reminds his readers that this Promise was extended through Abraham by way of a miraculous birth –

foreshadowing another miraculous birth closer to their own time, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Biblical history must never be read independently of the overall flow of redemptive history. “All stability, all perpetuity in every state, here and hereafter, ariseth from the purpose of God, and is resolved thereunto.”⁵⁶

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (11:13)

Regardless how one interprets the promises made to Abraham – whether limited to the temporal possession of land in Canaan, or expanded to citizenship in the heavenly city – there can be no question of the patriarch’s having received his ‘inheritance’ during the span of his earthly life. Abraham lived a stranger in a strange land, and died in the same state. The cave that he purchased so that he might bury Sarah ‘from his sight’ was to hold his mortal remains as well, and to be the only piece of real estate with *Abram ben-Terah* on the title deed. The enduring faith of Abraham concerning the divine promises, is one of the strongest biblical proofs of consciousness after death. Scripture frequently points to the ‘unwavering’ faith of the patriarch during his lifetime, and here in Hebrews 11:13 we read of that faith enduring not only *unto* but *into* death.

The English translations of the opening phrase in verse 13 are somewhat unfortunate in that they all tend to repeat the ‘in faith’ formula from previous verses. There is, however, a different form in verse 13. Rather than the dative case of the word ‘faith’ – translated ‘in’ or ‘by’ faith in other passages – the author here employs a distinct preposition before ‘faith,’ the Greek *kata*. This preposition commonly means ‘in accordance with,’ so that the most literal rendering of the author’s words would be, “*in accordance with faith these all died...*” This phrase should not be interpreted as meaning the patriarchs believed all their living days...and then died. While it is a valuable and encouraging

⁵⁶ Owen, 71.

lesson to give examples of men and women who persevered in faith through to the end of their lives, there is little actual content of hope there if that is the end of the story. Thus Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob did not merely die 'in faith,' they died 'in accordance with faith.' Their faith, in other words, carried them through and passed with them through the veil into the shadowlands. Delitzsch writes of the patriarch, "being men who had seen and greeted afar off the promised good, and led in consequence a pilgrim-life, they died in the exercise of the same confident expectation."⁵⁷

This is an important point to the overall message that the author of Hebrews is bringing to his readers. He is not merely illustrating enduring faith through the lives of men and women who had lived before and now were gone. Rather he is describing the ancient people of God, who lived by the same faith as those who first received this epistle, and who were standing right there with them as 'a great cloud of witnesses.' What the author is saying is that the patriarchs looked forward to exactly that which his contemporaries now possessed, and indeed could not possess it themselves apart from them. It may be true that there is no systematically developed doctrine of the afterlife in the Old Testament, but nothing within its pages makes any sense unless those who lived in that time anticipated a continued conscious existence.

This would be nothing more than what one finds throughout the ancient world in all its literature. Men, when they died, were 'gathered to their fathers,' which was "a reunion, not of corpses, but of persons."⁵⁸ Each culture had its own concept of the afterlife, but consciousness was a common denominator. In Jewish tradition, the rabbinic teachings concerning 'Sheol' evolved through the generations until arriving around the time of the Babylonian Exile to 'Abraham's Bosom.' The pseudepigraphical *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, among other rabbinic writings, speaks of Abraham as the intercessor for the righteous dead. "You have

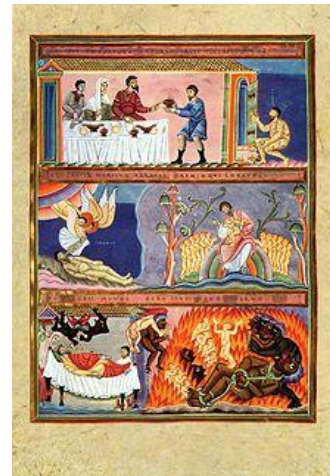
⁵⁷ Delitzsch, 244

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

escaped from the Abyss and Hades, now you will cross over the crossing place... to all the righteous ones, namely Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Enoch, Elijah and David"⁵⁹ The Scriptures of the Old Testament speak so frequently of Sheol, and of judgment to the wicked and peace and rest to the righteous, that it would seem the later doctrine of Abraham's Bosom could be defended on the basis of 'good and necessary inference' no less than many New Testament doctrines.

Abraham's Bosom

Abraham was early recognized by the Hebrews as their founding father, the 'rock from which they were hewn' as the prophet Jeremiah puts it. It was but a small step to make the patriarch the head and comfort of the afterlife as he was the progenitor of this life for the Jews. Thus the doctrine of a two-leveled Sheol arose within Judaism from uncertain origins but with such firmness of conviction that it was the accepted view in Jesus' day, and sanctioned by His own usage. The passage is in only one of the gos-



The Story of Dives & Lazarus

pels, in Luke chapter 16. Many commentators call the words of Jesus here a parable, but many others object that the features of a parable are missing entirely – that Jesus is speaking of an actual place and of real people.

*There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to **Abraham's bosom**. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you*

⁵⁹ *Apocalypse of Zephaniah; 9.2*

received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

(Luke 16:19-26)

Whatever one concludes regarding the reality of the story – whether it relates true, historical events or is merely a parable – it is of significance that the Lord speaks of the abode of the dead as being a place of consciousness, and of judgment. The passage reflects the view common in Second Temple Judaism, that Sheol was divided into two realms – Upper Sheol and Lower Sheol. Jesus' teaching is unique from that of the rabbis in that He fixes a gulf between the two spheres that none may cross, a divide between the unrighteous and righteous that is determined in this life and immutable in the life to come. *"It is appointed unto man once to die and then comes judgment."*

As interesting as a digression into the teaching of Abraham's Bosom might be, the most important point for this discussion is to show that there existed a firm and growing conviction among the Jews that physical death did not erase consciousness. It is, therefore, a logical step to infer that the continuance of consciousness meant the continuance of faith and hope. "Dying in accordance with faith" then means that the patriarchs continued, in a sense, their sojourn of expectation beyond the grave. Certainly it can be said that they still had not 'received' their inheritance even two thousand years later, yet they *"died in accordance with faith"* and faithfully waited the consummation of the promise. The abiding faith of Abraham, even beyond his physical death, sheds light on Jesus' enigmatic statement to the Pharisees,

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad. Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

(John 8:56-58)

There is a unity to the people of God; that is what the author of Hebrews is saying in this chapter and the next, a unity that transcends the various dispensations and covenants. The unifying principle is, of course, the Seed Jesus Christ for whom the patriarchs endured landless sojourning all their lives, and for whom the Roman Christians anticipated the loss of their property, their reputations, their civil rights, and perhaps even their lives. "The object of [the patriarch's] hopes, then, was the same glorious world of the future which the New Testament reveals, though for them its true character, and their present hold upon it, might still be covered by an impenetrable veil."⁶⁰

The steadfastness of the patriarchal faith that endured through a life of 'strangerhood' and passed through to a death of anticipation, led to their proclamation to their own generation that they were "*strangers and pilgrims*" on this earth. The author of Hebrews is probably reminiscing upon actual statements recorded in Genesis from the mouths of the patriarchs. For instance, the account of Sarah's death gives occasion for Abraham to testify to his wandering state in this world.

Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."
(Genesis 23:1-4)

Jacob's first conversation with Pharaoh in Egypt carries the same tone of wandering as did his grandfather's request before the elders of Hebron so many years before.

Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How old are you?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."
(Genesis 47:8-9)

⁶⁰ Delitzsch, 245.

Lest Pharaoh (or we) might be tempted to think less of Jacob for having such a nomadic life, we immediately read in Genesis 47:10 that *"Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh."* Surely the lesser was blessed by the greater. Selah.

For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. (11:14-15)

When one reads the narratives of Abraham's life in light of the inspired commentary provided by the author of Hebrews, it become apparent that the patriarch's status as 'an alien and a stranger' in the land of Canaan was not involuntary. As the author stated in verse 13, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob owned their landless condition as being descriptive of their lives. Here in verses 14-15 he informs us that it was also descriptive of their hearts; it was their chosen manner of life for they were *seeking a homeland*. Each of the patriarchs had occasion to leave Canaan during their lifetimes, all because of famine in the land. In none of the instances did they head back east to their ancestral homes; rather they went further west to Egypt. One might conclude that this was pragmatic, on account of food being plentiful (and somewhat closer) in Egypt. But the narrative concerning Abraham's search for a wife for his son Isaac puts an exclamation point on the patriarchal departure from 'Ur of the Chaldees.'

*Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac." And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?" But Abraham said to him, "**Beware that you do not take my son back there.** The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your*

*descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; **only do not take my son back there.**" So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.*

(Genesis 24:1-9)

Abraham was pretty sure that a wife for his son Isaac would come from his father's people, from among his uncles' daughters. But what he was absolutely sure of was that under no circumstance was Isaac to return there. The patriarch even freed his servant from the responsibility of finding a wife for Isaac, if the woman chose not to accompany him back to Canaan. Twice, however, Abraham calls the servant to oath in the matter of Isaac's returning to the east – it must not happen.

How does this refusal to return to their ancestral home coordinate with their lack of any permanent possession in the land of their promise? It rests, again in faith, upon the fact that the physical land of Canaan not only signified the inheritance of their posterity but also was the tangible type of the heavenly land to which they truly yearned and toward which their lives inexorably moved. "The shell of their longing might thus be of the earth (i.e., Canaan), its kernel was heavenly and divine."⁶¹ The implication to the Hebrew Christians, and to believers in all ages and lands, is clear. Our sojourn is analogous to that of the patriarchs. They did not turn back, nor may we. "Their glance was forwards, not backwards. The country they were longing to reach is a higher and a heavenly one."⁶²

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (11:16)

The Old Testament is replete with 'names of God,' each of which signifies some attribute or characteristic of the divine nature and purpose. The 'memorial

⁶¹ Delitzsch, 247.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 246.

name' of God is, of course, the well-known tetragrammaton - The Old Testament is replete with 'names of God,' each of which signifies some attribute or characteristic of the divine nature and purpose. The 'memorial name' of God is, of course, the well-known tetragrammaton - YHWH, "I Am that I Am." But of all the divine names revealed in Scripture, our author directs us to the most personal: the adoption of the patriarchs by God into His very own name. "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" becomes *the* covenant name of God to Old Testament Israel. "For he gives himself this name in the confirmation of his cove-



nant, in and by which he glorifies himself in the communication of all good things, temporal and eternal."⁶³ Each of the patriarchs was adopted into this divine name in turn, as their perseverance in faith rendered God 'unashamed' to take them into His intimate self-disclosure. Jacob's turn came during the dream of the ladder ascending to heaven, as the Abrahamic covenant was renewed by God

with Abraham's grandson.

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

(Genesis 28:12-14)

It is interesting that this vision came just as Jacob was doing what Abraham absolutely prohibited that Isaac should do: he was heading east to the land of Abraham's family, in search of a wife (and a life). This may very well be one more instance of misdirection in the patriarchal lives, for there were many. In any event, Jacob's life in the land of his uncle Laban was one of strife and

⁶³ Owen, 99.

turmoil, and seeds were sown there that would reap a harvest of further turmoil once the patriarch returned to Canaan. But at this point, on the very boundary of the promised land, God assures Jacob that He will bring him back to the land. *"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."*⁶⁴

The principle being taught throughout these events of the patriarch's lives, interpreted for us by the author of Hebrews, is the centrality of both the earthly realm of Canaan and the heavenly abode that it represented. Is this not the underlying meaning of the vision of Jacob's Ladder? Given the circumstance – Jacob's departing from his father's tent to travel back to the ancestral home of his grandfather – why would God give him a vision of a heavenly ladder unless He was strengthening in Jacob the 'other-worldliness' of the promise? Angels can ascend and descend to minister to God's people without the aid of ladders. Ladders are for humans to climb – and this one led to that same heavenly land to which the faith of Abraham and the faith of Isaac were directed.

God *"was not ashamed to be called their God"* writes the author of Hebrews, to indicate the divine intimacy with all those who are, by faith, the descendants of Abraham. Furthermore, this name reinforces the view discussed earlier, that the patriarchs' faith lived on with their continued consciousness beyond the grave, as Jesus himself argues in defense of the resurrection.

But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Matthew 22:31-32)

By saying that God was 'not ashamed' to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the author of Hebrews draws his readers' minds back to something he said in Chapter 2, using identical language and tying together contemporary believers with ancient patriarchs,

⁶⁴ Genesis 28:15

*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason **He is not ashamed** to call them brethren.* (2:10-11)

A life of wandering and suffering, a landless people who embrace their status as aliens and sojourners because they yearn for a heavenly homeland – that is the characteristic description of the people of God in all ages. Yet the temptation to sink roots in the ‘here and now’ was powerful to the Hebrew Christians, and continued to intensify in the decades after this epistle was written. In the second century AD, the writer of the *Shepherd of Hermas* reiterates the teachings of the apostles, exemplified by the lives of the patriarchs,

You know that you, who are servants of God, are dwellers in a foreign land; for your City is far from this city (i.e., Rome). If then you recognize your City, in which you shall dwell, why do you prepare here fields and expensive displays and buildings and dwellings, which are superfluous? The person who prepares these things for this city does not intend to return to his own City.⁶⁵

Another second century author sets the same tone,

Christians dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share of all responsibilities as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a homeland to them, and every homeland is foreign.⁶⁶

One can hardly find more eloquent words to summarize the faith-life of the patriarchs, and of all believers throughout time: *Every foreign county is a homeland to them, and every homeland is foreign.*

⁶⁵ *Shepherd of Hermas*; 1.1

⁶⁶ *Epistle of Diognetus*; 5.5-9

Week 7: Jehovah Jireh – In Context**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:17 - 19**

*"No man ever was or can be
obliged to believe that to be, which is not;
or that that shall be, which shall never be."
(John Owen)*

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest shown among Christian authors and songwriters to the 'names of God' found in the Bible. Most of these names – *Jehovah Rapha, Jehovah Tsidkenu, El Shaddai, etc.* – are found in the Old Testament. This is to be expected, as the Old Testament is uniquely the revelation of the Godhead *en toto*, and particularly of God the Father. Unfortunately, however, the profound lack of familiarity with the Old Testament among professing believers today leads to the phenomenon of these names of God being taken out of context, and attached to whatever theme or subject the author or songwriter happens to be dealing with. This happens, sadly, with the New Testament as well – as an example from a children's song illustrates.

In his epistle to the Philippian Church, the apostle Paul pens the famous phrase, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* The 'all things' of Philippians 4:13 has often been attached to pretty much anything a believer can think of. A popular Christian children's group of the late-1980s applies the *"I can do all things"* to such things as taking tests, cleaning one's room, and obeying one's parents. All of these are, of course, good things – and things which young believers ought to strive to do with all their strength. But the apostle was not talking about taking a math test; he was talking about *contentment*. Contentment is perhaps the believer's most persistent enemy in regard to peace of mind and heart – thus it is in this area that the strength of the Lord is so vitally important. Paul was enlightening his readers with respect to the power of the Holy Spirit within him, teaching him how to be content in any and all circumstances.

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

The writer or writers of this particular children's song has laudable motives – to encourage children in their day-to-day tasks and responsibilities. But laudable motives can never justify misinterpreting or misapplying Scripture. It is hermeneutical malpractice to apply *Jehovah-Rapha* – The Lord who Heals – as a carte blanche promise for physical healing. Similarly, *Jehovah-Nissi* – The Lord my Banner – was never meant to be a flag/icon flying over the congregations of churches that have little knowledge, and even less interest, in the Regulative Principle of Worship. And the name of God that appears within the Old Testament narrative referenced in Hebrews 11:17-19 – *Jehovah-Jireh*, The Lord will Provide, - cannot be properly applied in the manner of another popular Christian chorus.

*Jehovah-jireh, my provider, His grace is sufficient for me...
My God shall supply all my needs, according to His riches in glory,
He shall give His angels charge over me, Jehovah-jireh cares for me...*

These stanzas contain biblical truths (although the third one is a prophetic word concerning the Messiah), but put together in this way they constitute a misinterpretation of the context within which God revealed Himself as *Jehovah-jireh*. Such a misapplication of the names of God is so commonplace today that hardly anyone notices, or even checks – it is as if the context of revelation by which the divine name is manifested in Scripture becomes of no account, and the name itself takes on an independent life, divorced from its biblical setting. This can never be a good hermeneutical practice, and with the particular context surrounding the divine self-disclosure as *Jehovah-jireh*, there is a great deal lost in mis-translation. As the author of Hebrews is providing his readers with an inspired commentary and interpretation upon so many passages in the Old

Testament, including that in which God reveals Himself as *Jehovah-jireh*, he furnishes us with an excellent opportunity to 're-hear' the ancient narrative, and to once again put the gem of a divine name back into the setting of its context.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," (11:17-18)

There is no greater or more frequent illustration of faith in the New Testament than that of Abraham with respect to his son, Isaac. Paul utilizes the ancient narrative as the centerpiece of his treatise on faith in Romans Chapter 4, and James proves the vitality of true faith through the same reference. Thus the author of Hebrews is in good company when he prefaces his allusion to the event with the common phrase, "*By faith Abraham...*" Exercising great faith, Abraham obeyed God when the divine command instructed him to take his son Isaac to a place he would be shown, and to offer the child as a burnt offering to the Lord. The whole scene, recorded in Genesis Chapter 22, is jarring to modern sensibilities and stands as a perennial challenge to the understanding of biblical faith.

In order to fully understand the breadth and scope of Abraham's faith, one must come to appreciate the nature of the struggle caused by God's command to the patriarch to sacrifice his son. At the very bottom, it presented Abraham with a crisis of understanding and belief, as it seemed to set before him the instantaneous annihilation of the covenant for which he had been separated from his kin and homeland to become a landless nomad the rest of his days. This crisis is revealed in the Genesis account within the dialogue between Abraham and God with reference to the patriarch's other son, and then embodied in the divine command referenced here in Hebrews 11:17. First, Ishmael. Upon receiving again the divine promise that Sarah would bear him a son, Abraham still pleaded with God to recognize his son by Hagar, "*And Abraham said to God,*

'Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!'" Ishmael was as much the fruit of Abraham's loins as any future son – and the patriarch was to have quite a number of future sons – but Abraham's firstborn did not find favor in God's sight. God's response,

Then God said: "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year." Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. (Genesis 17:19-22)

There is a poignancy in the closing statement of this quotation: *Then He finished talking...and went up from Abraham.* End of argument, Abraham. The covenant will transfer to the son whom Sarah would bear to Abraham, not Hagar, nor Keturah. So adamant was God upon this purpose that it was as if Abraham had no other sons; in spite of God's promise to take care of Ishmael, the lad did not figure into the Abrahamic Covenant.

The unique covenantal relationship of Isaac is underscored by God when He commands Abraham to commit the deed that would be the ultimate test and proof of the patriarch's faith. In Genesis 22:2 we read,

Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Notice God's words regarding Isaac: *your only son...whom you love.* Ishmael is out of the picture, and the sons of Keturah are yet in the future. Abraham has only one son, Isaac; and it is this son that is to be sacrificed to God in a burnt offering. With this command, we are faced once again with the whole issue of how it was that God's voice could be heard so infallibly by a man. There are many (too many) people today who flippantly say that God 'told them to do'

something. But what if God told you to do something that was not only contrary to His very nature (i.e., human sacrifice), but also went against all that He had promised you in the past? This was the predicament that Abraham was in; yet, to borrow Paul's words in Romans 4, the patriarch *"did not waver in unbelief."*



Chrysostom (347-407)
sculpture in St. Patrick's Cathedral

This is what is remarkable about Abraham's faith, that he was able to hold in one mind both the divine promise of covenantal continuity through Isaac on the one hand, and the divine command to sacrifice Isaac by fire on the other. The famous fourth century preacher, Chrysostom, considered it this way, "God appeared in all this to contradict God, faith to be opposed to faith, and commandment to commandment."⁶⁷ Such a challenge to the patriarch's faith deserves close analysis, even though the author of Hebrews sums

It up simply with the single Greek word, translated *"by faith..."*

The instrument of Abraham's obedience was faith, but what was that faith set upon? In a very broad sense we can see Abraham's growth in his own knowledge of the nature of God. Faced with two seemingly exclusive revelations of the divine will, the patriarch moved forward on the basis of what he had come to know concerning the character of God. First, God cannot lie. The author of Hebrews informs us of Abraham's experience on this score when he recounts the promise of the covenant,

*For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by **two immutable things, in***

⁶⁷ Quoted in Delitzsch, 250.

which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:13-18)

God's promise to Abraham with regard to the covenant, later confirmed through the promised son Isaac, was given with an oath. This oath was the vivid dream in which Abraham saw the smoking oven passing through the severed animals (Genesis 15), signifying the divine commitment to honor the covenant. Thus Abraham, when he received the command to sacrifice that same Isaac, rested his faith firmly on this pillar of truth: God cannot lie. What God had said He would perform would come to pass.

The second general principle of the divine nature upon which Abraham's faith rested is kin to the first: God cannot contradict Himself. Contradiction is tantamount to a lie, for a matter cannot be both 'yes' and 'no' in the same sense and at the same time, without being a falsehood. Standing upon the foundation of the inviolable truthfulness of God, Abraham could not see contradiction in the divine command to sacrifice his son. This is not to say that the patriarch's mind was free of turmoil, but rather to say that it was free of unbelief. It appears from the Genesis narrative, combined with what we read here in Hebrews 11, that the content of Abraham's faith lacked any certainty with regard to just *how* God would reconcile seemingly incoherent commands. But there was never any doubt that God would.

In the Genesis account we see that Abraham expressed no doubt of Isaac's ultimate safety; his return to take up the covenant inheritance according to the divine promise. It is in this episode of the event that we encounter *Jehovah-jireh* first as an object of Abraham's faith, and then as a realized fact of redemptive history.

Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." (Genesis 22:4-5)

If one were cynical, one might consider Abraham's words to his servants to be disingenuous, a disguise of the truth in order to either prevent their interference or to calm Isaac's nerves. But that would be reading of an act of faith through faithless eyes. There is nothing feigned about Abraham's assertion that both he and his son would return to the servants (and the verb translated *will come back* is most definitely in the plural). There can be no reasonable doubt that Abraham believed what he said, and the next exchange – between the patriarch and his son – indicates where his thoughts were heading on the matter.

So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. (Genesis 22:6-8)

Aside from manifesting Isaac's remarkable calmness – evidence of his own faith that will be further confirmed in the ensuing event of his near-sacrifice – this passage also shows Abraham's own understanding of the nature of God as *Jehovah-jireh* – "God will provide for Himself a lamb." That is the context and the meaning of the name; not merely that God takes care of His children (which He does, as well as taking care of those who are not His). *Jehovah-jireh* does not teach us that the divine provision will meet our every need, but rather that it will meet our direst need. Abraham's faith rested firmly upon this attribute of God's provision, and the author of Hebrews intends for his readers to do the same. Circumstances notwithstanding, God cannot go against His own promise and will always provide Himself with the 'way out' of the conundrum.

Yet we cannot simply assume that Abraham 'knew' God's way out of this situation. The patriarch believed that God would provide for Himself a lamb for the burnt offering, but he did not have the divine plan all worked out in his mind. This is another important feature of biblical faith: the conviction, founded

on the nature and faithfulness of God, that the divine purpose will come to pass, coupled with the humble restraint from trying to figure out God's ways beforehand.

What is meant here is that in spite of his own assurance that God would provide a lamb, Abraham did not hesitate to go through with the sacrifice of Isaac (nor did Isaac hesitate to cooperate). The binding, the arranging of the wood, and the tense arm muscles prepared to plunge the knife into his son's heart – all attest to Abraham's willingness to obey God fully in whatever God commanded. We cannot even imagine the patriarch thinking, in that last and almost fatal moment, 'Oh well, I guess I was wrong about that lamb...' No, the author of Hebrews provides us with the inspired insight into Abraham's thoughts: "*concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.*" (11:19) Keep in mind that this was to be a burnt offering, meaning that Abraham was convinced that God, if need be, would bring Isaac back not only from the dead, but also from the ashes.

Abraham knew that the promise of God could not and would not fail, and as he could not anticipate that God would interfere, as He did, so as to prevent the actual immolation of his son, there was really left for him no other alternative than simply to conclude that God would restore Isaac to life.⁶⁸

... concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (11:19)

When Abraham reached Mt. Moriah he was certain of two things, and perhaps only two things. First, that God had made a covenant with him and had confirmed that covenant in his son, Isaac. The Abrahamic Covenant entailed many things, not the least of which was an innumerable seed to Abraham. The second thing that Abraham knew for certain was that God had commanded him to kill Isaac and offer him up as a burnt offering to the Lord. At this late stage in

⁶⁸ Milligan, R., *The New Testament Commentary: Volume IX – Epistle to the Hebrews* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co.; 1953), 315.

the development of the patriarch's faith, it is reasonable to assume that Abraham waived not on either point, though they must have seemed as mutually exclusive to him as they do to us. It is for this reason – that Abraham 'waived not in unbelief' – that we are to take his comment to the servants at face value, *"Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."* Abraham's behavior becomes a timeless illustration of the faithful man's willingness to allow all conundrums resolve themselves in God. Indeed, this was a personal dilemma – it was Abraham's deep love for his son and for his God that were spit upon its two horns. But the personal conundrums are the hardest to leave unresolved.

The author of Hebrews utilizes this event from Abraham's life in order to strengthen the faith of his readers, the Hebrew Christians in Rome. As much as we much thoroughly analyze the event itself, set within its historic and redemptive context, we cannot lose sight of the instrumentality of the narrative toward the deepening of the faith of believers in all ages. Paul's admonition to the Corinthians, *"these things were written for your sake..."* most certainly applies to the author's use of the Mt. Moriah narrative. Sadly, the application of the illustration of Abraham offering up Isaac has not always been correct.

From a human point of view, or at least from the reasoning of human logic, it appears that the offering up of Isaac teaches believers to be ready to sacrifice any person or possession held most dear. While it is true that believers are to hold all earthly loves in fief to their love to the Lord – that greater love always taking precedent over those lesser loves, and displacing them as needed – that whole concept belongs to the paradigm of *love*, not of *faith*. What we are looking for in the Mt. Moriah narrative, especially as it is employed within the writings of Hebrews 11, is what the event has to teach us concerning the nature of persevering faith. Love is not independent of faith, to be sure, and the patriarch's subsuming his love of Isaac to his love of God is a valuable lesson of the narrative itself. *"The obedience of faith called for as allegiance to God that*

extended beyond even the most intimate of family ties.”⁶⁹ An important point, but not the main point being made by the author of Hebrews.

There is a danger, too, of reading Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac through the love paradigm. Too often believers have been taught, or at least strongly led to believe, that God will take from them anything that they love ‘too much.’ Believers have been prevented from truly enjoying, and being thankful for, blessings of love and happiness that come from God. We must be reminded that, while God can and does take from His children things and people held dear, that is not His normal Providence. The loss of loved ones in this life is more often a manifestation of the structural sin that pervades the world than it is evidence of God ridding our lives of competition for His love. On the one hand we must cultivate in our hearts a love toward God that flows from His primary love toward us – a love that will transcend all earthly loves. But on the other hand we may also love even as God loves – truly and deeply – those whom He puts in our lives as objects of our devotion.

Yet even if we keep the focus upon *faith*, we can still stop short of comprehending the significance of Abraham’s actions. Just as it is true that the patriarch placed his love for God ahead of his love for Isaac, it is also true that the timing of the event in Abraham’s life illustrates the progressive growth of faith in the life of any believer. We have had occasion to comment on the Pauline phrase, *obedience of faith*. The initial manifestation of this obedience is when a sinner, newly regenerate by the power of the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This, however, is as much the beginnings of faith as conception in the womb is the beginning of life. The journey of Abraham’s faith did not end with the journey from Ur to Haran to Canaan. It traveled down into

⁶⁹ Lane, 300.

Egypt, struggled with the inhabitants of Canaan, lamented the waywardness of his nephew Lot and the wickedness of the cities of Man, substituted (or attempted to) a son of the flesh for the son of promise, and so on. Through it all we see the patriarch's faith growing through the acquisition of new revelation from God, manifested in obedience. Thus we find Abraham in Genesis 22 as a man full of years and full of faith – though the two do not always go together.

The maturing of Abraham's faith through more consistent acts of trust is a valuable lesson to every believer. But this is the lesson of James Chapter 2, not of Hebrews Chapter 11. James, in his use of the Mt. Moriah narrative, is reminding his readers that *"faith without works is dead."*

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?
(James 2:21-22)

The controversy that has often accompanied interpretations of James often stems from a failure to keep the writer's illustration within the confines of the point he is trying to make. That is a common error, frequently seen among politicians as they attack one another by taking their opponent's statement out of context and absolutizing it. Commentators throughout the ages, including no less than Martin Luther, have done this with James and have wrongly concluded that he is advocating a salvation of works. Yet it is clear from even a cursory reading of James Chapter 2 that the author is exhorting his readers to a true, active, compassionate and caring faith – faith that works, and faith that grows.

The writer of Hebrews, however, is emphasizing a faith that perseveres. Thus the maturing of Abraham's faith, important and illustrative in itself, is not the focus here. Rather it is the willingness of faith to resist all temptations to resolve the will and purpose of God into logical mental compartments. We may paraphrase the wonderful doxology, *"though He slay me, yet will I praise Him,"* to illustrate this point: *"though He confuse me, yet I will believe and trust Him."*

One of the most fundamental conundrum that faces every single believer is the dichotomy between 'abundant life' and 'persecution.' Jesus promised all who came to Him that He would give them *"life, and that even more abundantly."* Yet He also promises, to the very same sub-group of humanity, that *"in this world you will have persecution."* The reason these two promises seem at odds with one another is not because men have misunderstood the meaning of 'abundant life' – that abundant life really means being persecuted – but rather it is because *they are at odds* in our proper understanding of both terms. And it does no good to relegate the 'abundant life' to another world, for the context of the promise places the receipt of abundant life as following immediately upon believing. No, the real problem with the common handling of these facets of the Christian's walk in this age is the unwillingness to allow both to stand, without logical resolution except as is most assuredly resolved within the mind and will of God.

This concept applies as well to theological issues, such as the doctrine of the Trinity and the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. It is important in these doctrinal issues, as it is in personal issues, to resist the temptation to resolve matters that have equal biblical weight, in to neat, logical conclusions. The only result of such efforts will be error, as one truth is exalted over another and ultimate falsehood prevails. Yet this is not an endorsement of mindless, 'blind' faith – faith that refuses even to probe the depths of God's mind as it is revealed in His word and in His ways. The depths of God's wisdom is beyond finding out (Romans 11:33), but the path that leads there is very long and may be traveled steadfastly for an eternity of learning – without ever resolving the issues in their entirety. After a veritable litany of divine wonders, we read in Job 26 that we are still far from the bottom of bottomless wisdom,

*Behold, these are the fringes of His ways;
And how faint a word we hear of Him!
But His mighty thunder, who can understand?*

Week 8: Prophetic Faith – Living Beyond the Grave**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:20 - 22**

*“He refused to recognize in death
any threat to the fulfillment of the promise.”
(William Lane)*

We have had occasion to comment on the similarities between the ‘Epistle’ to the Hebrews and a sermon, contrasting the book as a literary piece with the same text as an oratorical work. Perhaps the most notable feature of an epistle, missing from Hebrews, is the introductory salutation. Hebrews begins in a very eloquent oratorical fashion and proceeds in the same vein throughout – a deep, theological sermon preached by a master craftsman in the trade. But every preacher knows that his audience has a limit as to their attention span. Many a sermon has been built upon the workshop of the study desk, only to be trimmed and truncated from the pulpit to better fit the mental and sedentary capacity of the audience. To be sure, the lengths of modern sermons have shrunk to (usually) just slightly longer than the average attention span of the modern congregation. Some homiletics experts say that no sermon should exceed thirty minutes, some say twenty. Rare is the congregation that can stay alert and focused beyond forty minutes. But there never was a Lord’s Day assembly (Jonathan Edwards’ not excluded) that possessed limitless attention.

In short (pun intended), the author of Hebrews needs to start wrapping up this section of his sermon. He admits as much in verse 32, *“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of...”* What immediately follows, in verses 20-22, is the beginning of the rapid slide to the end of the matter. The author/preacher begins Chapter 11 with a slow but increasing rise in tempo from Abel to Abraham, with whom he plateaus for awhile in order to emphasize the life of faith led by the father of the faithful. But with the mention of Isaac one can feel the tempo rise again, even faster than before, with a only slight lessening

of pace to deal with Moses (no Jew could pass over Moses quickly) and then it is off to the races again.

In this modulation of tempo the author does not intend to minimize the faith of other men – Gideon, Samson, David, etc. – compared to those who have gone before. “It is the purpose of the apostle to attribute to faith everything worth remembering that happened to his people, but since it would take too long to set down everything, he chooses a few examples out of many.”⁷⁰ While this phenomenon of speeding up the treatise, and summarizing many centuries of faith into a few verses, is not definitive proof of the sermonic nature of Hebrews, it does indeed fit well with the hypothesis. No speaker should ever rigidly stick to his text and time if it means losing the attention of the audience. To do so would be self-defeating, that is, if we give the preacher the benefit of the doubt that he desires the instruction of the audience more than to hear his own voice.

But even in the accelerated enumeration of faithful men from Israel’s past, the author of Hebrews shows himself a master orator. The three examples that follow rapid-fire after the long discussion of Abraham are of a piece: *prophetic faith* – the faith that looks beyond the grave and ‘wavers not in unbelief.’ The common denominator in verses 20, 21, and 22 is not hard to find: each of the patriarchs is mentioned performing his last act of faith before death. With the first two – Isaac and Jacob – advanced age had been accompanied by a severe if not total loss of physical sight. This affliction accentuates the strength of spiritual sight in each man, being able to see far off into the future though they could not see something a mere cubit in front of them. In Isaac’s case, of course, his lack of sight betrayed him – he did not bless the son he intended to bless. But Jacob saw with the eyes of faith exactly where his two grandsons stood, and purposely crossed over his hands to bless the younger over the elder. A fascinating mixture of human frailty and faith working under the omnipotent guidance of divine

⁷⁰ Calvin, John, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews*, 174; Calvin attributed the authorship of Hebrews to the Apostle Paul.

sovereignty, presents itself to us from the narratives of the patriarchal blessings so quickly touched upon here in these three verses.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. (11:20)

The men in whom God ordained and established the first truly salvific covenant – the Abrahamic – were examples of the biblical principle of Federal Headship. Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob were not only individual conduits of divine covenantal blessing, they were also men in whom their entire posterity was represented. This principle comes out most explicitly in the case of Abraham:

*I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And **in you** all the families of the earth shall be blessed.* (Genesis 12:3)

As representatives of a covenant nation the three premier patriarchs were granted prophetic status among their people and their posterity. Their individual walks with God produced in each man a stable, abiding faith that manifested itself at the end in acts (Abraham) and words (Isaac & Jacob) of prophetic faith. "Isaac's blessing [is] not only an act of faith, but a prophetic act of faith."⁷¹ It is remarkable to note the living context in which each of the three men mentioned here in Hebrews 11:20-22, for none of them had any material connection with that which they prophesied to their descendants. Isaac had no more land in Canaan than the family burial cave purchased by his father; Jacob was an exile from the promised land, as was Joseph, when he came to the end of his days. Yet each, as William Lane puts it, "refused to recognize in death any threat to the fulfillment of the promise."⁷²

The three examples of deathbed blessings (Joseph's was more of a 'final instructions concerning disposition of the body') are similar in their

⁷¹ Delitzsch, 253.

⁷² Lane, 366.

manifestation of a faith, the strength of which is undiminished by impending death. But at that point the similarities stop. The narrative of Isaac blessing his son could easily pass for an ancient Near Eastern soap opera, with parental favoritism, intrigue and deception ending in the blessed son fleeing for his life from the land of his blessing. It may seem incongruous to a modern Christian reader to hear the author of Hebrews speak so concisely about Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau, as though it were just another evening in the ibn Abraham household. Even a cursory reading of the biblical history, recorded in Genesis Chapter 27, proves Isaac's family to be as dysfunctional as any family one might encounter on television today. Yet a deeper reading of the narrative will reveal true faith operating alongside human frailty and self-will.

The blessing of Jacob by his father Isaac is a classic example of deception. But it is also an example of deeply rooted faith aggressively pursuing the divine covenantal promise. The bad actor of the story is usually seen to be the mother, Rebekah, who combined eavesdropping with conniving in order to forestall the intention of her husband to bestow the patriarchal blessing on his firstborn – a practice that was time-honored even in those early years of mankind's history. But what was it that Rebekah was doing? Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to justify her methodology, her intent was to honor the divine prophecy given to her when her sons were still in her womb,

*Two nations are in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.* (Genesis 25:23)

Presented with the possibility that Esau would receive the blessing of the firstborn – which entailed double inheritance over the other son – Rebekah intervened. It is hard to say whether her intervention was necessary, as it happened and there is no way of knowing what might have happened if she had not. But it is reasonable to conclude that the enmity between Esau and Jacob,

and Jacob's flight and exile for so many years were both a direct result of her machinations. Rebekah did not bring about God's will; God's will would have come to pass in any event. Yet we cannot entirely fault Rebekah without unjustly absolving her husband of his guilt. Both parents' hearts and minds were clouded by favoritism: *"And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."* It strains belief that Isaac was unaware of the prophetic word spoken to his wife when the twins struggled within her womb. Though conjecture, yet it is reasonable to assume that the father was as aware as the mother of the divine inversion of the dignity of the sons. Be that as it may, it is still true that Isaac was moved with regard to Esau's personality (and his ability to kill and cook the meat his father so greatly enjoyed) rather than his behavior. As Esau grew into manhood, he showed little interest in the covenantal structure of the family of Abraham.

When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.
(Genesis 26:34-35)

In the midst of all this drama, how is it that the author of Hebrews can attribute Isaac's blessing to faith? Isaac's blindness – both physical and emotional – aside, it is apparent in the aftermath of the deception that the patriarch was not merely speaking as the head of a household in the disposition of his worldly possessions. Had that been the case, he could have corrected the mistake as soon as he was made aware of the deception that had been perpetrated on him. No, Isaac knew *by faith* that he was speaking as the mediator of the Abrahamic Covenant, and perhaps even recognized his own folly in trying to prefer his eldest son over the one God had separated to be the conduit of blessing, Jacob. Thus it was when Esau revealed the truth of the identity switch (theft?) to his father, that Isaac confirmed the covenantal blessing upon Jacob rather than retracting it and giving it to Esau.

The faith of which the author of Hebrews speaks concerning Isaac, was the settled understanding that the blessing he was giving was not his own but God's. It was not the hopeful wishes of a dying father, but the covenantal orders of things to come, "being not merely *pia desideria* on Isaac's part, but the divinely ordained future revealed to him by God."⁷³ As such a blessing, there was only one to give. Hence the reply of Isaac to Esau after Jacob's deception became known,

Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him – and indeed he shall be blessed." When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me – me also, O my father!" But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing." And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?" (Genesis 27:33-37)

Underlying the lies and deceit we find the heart condition of the two sons of Isaac manifested in their behavior and in their response to the situation. Esau had long shown his disregard for the heritage of the Abrahamic Covenant, whereas Jacob had shown an inversely proportional regard for that heritage. Esau wanted the earthly blessing of his father – possessions, riches, power; Jacob wanted the lineage of Abraham through which the Seed of Woman would pass. To be sure, Jacob had a long way to go in his own pilgrimage of faith. But even at this stage the orientation of the two brothers had been made clear. In spite of this fact, Isaac persisted in attempting to favor his firstborn, a persistence overruled by the sovereignty of God in even the malicious actions of men (and women). Owen writes, "We may see herein the *infinite purity of the divine will*, effectually accomplishing its own purposes and designs through the failings and

⁷³ Delitzsch, 253.

miscarriages of men, without the least mixture with or approbation of their iniquities or miscarriages.”⁷⁴ Isaac’s faith was clouded by his mistake, but it was still strong in the sense that it looked beyond the grave at the ultimate fulfillment of that which truly mattered – the covenantal promise of God to Abraham. This Jacob understood, and Esau never did.

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. (11:21)

The author of Hebrews now fast-forward through most of the adult life of Jacob, to the corresponding point in his life as that just reviewed in the life of his father, Isaac. From Genesis 27 we move across scores of years to Genesis 48, where we read the narrative account of Jacob blessing the two sons of Joseph. The oratorical (or literary) style of the author of Hebrews is obvious: moving from the two sons of Isaac to the two sons of Joseph. This explains the omission of Jacob’s blessings over his own twelve sons, recorded in Genesis Chapter 49. The selection of this event highlights the similarities between Jacob and Isaac. Both were on the verge of death, and both were physically blind. Even the pat-



**Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph
(Rembrandt, 1656)**

riarchal favoritism was in evidence, for Joseph was the favorite of Jacob as Esau was of Isaac. But the similarities themselves highlight the differences. Isaac was deceived due to his physical blindness; Jacob knew what he was doing in spite of his. Isaac blessed the younger son ahead of the elder son in an accidental fulfillment of the divine order

prophesied before their birth. Jacob blessed the younger son of Joseph ahead of the elder son by virtue of divine revelation purposely obeyed. In studying the

⁷⁴ Owen, 122.

lives of the three great patriarchs, it is evident that Jacob's life was more tumultuous and unstable than that of his father Isaac. But perhaps it was this very instability and violence of life that strengthened Jacob's faith to a measure that exceeded his father. At the very least, it may be said that Jacob knew what he was doing as the representative of the Abrahamic Covenant when he came to the point of his own departure, and was the victim of no deception. Even this is ironic, considering the meaning of his name (supplanter or deceiver) and the nature of his earlier life.

In regard to the redemptive flow of the history of God's people, Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh is somewhat of a side stream. It is evident from the prophetic portions of the Books of Moses that the tribes of Levi and Judah were paramount from the perspective of the religious and civil life of the nation, with Judah selected as the line from which the Messiah would come. Yet Jacob's prophetic words over the sons of Joseph are pertinent to the theme being developed by the author of Hebrews – the orientation of persevering faith to the future.

Once again we must view Jacob – *Israel*, really – not as a kindly old grandfather praying for good things to come to the grandsons he never thought he would see (*cp.* Genesis 48:11), but as the mediator of the Abrahamic Covenant – the last of the three primary patriarchs of God's people. Though blind to the physical world, Jacob sees infallibly into the future of his posterity and sees the younger son, Ephraim, as the dominant of the two. Consideration of the whole issue of prophecy versus fulfillment is an interesting discussion here, though not directly related to the matter at hand in Hebrews 11. Did Jacob prophecy Ephraim's dominance because he foresaw it, or was Ephraim's dominance due to Jacob's prophecy? This ties in with the perennial debate with regard to the issues of Predestination and Fore-knowledge: did God foresee the faith of believers and therefore 'elect' them, or do believers have faith because they are of the 'elect'? It is worth considering, in its proper place, the nature of prophecy in the same light

– and realizing that the prophetic word was more than a mere seeing of the unseen, it was itself the divine ordination of what would be seen. Delitzsch comments concerning the earlier prophetic blessing of Jacob and Esau by Isaac,

The blessing of Isaac had in it the wondrous power of shaping and controlling the future of his posterity, because in virtue of his faith his mind and will had become one with the mind and will of God Himself.⁷⁵

In the case of the sons of Joseph we must consider the advantages that the ancient world granted to the firstborn – advantages that almost guaranteed supremacy over his siblings. This is evident in Joseph's presentation of his sons to his father,

And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him.
(Genesis 48:13)

When Israel crossed his hands over, *guiding his hands knowingly* as the passage informs us, Joseph's objection was strenuous, though he attributed the 'mistake' to his father's blindness. But for reasons not revealed in Scripture, the elder son Manasseh was put second and the younger son Ephraim elevated to the place of firstborn. This may have been Israel's commemoration of his own life, in that he was also the second born but was raised by God to be the heir of the covenant while his elder brother Esau was excluded. It may also have mirrored the elevated position of the boys' own father, Joseph, who in his sons was receiving the 'double portion' due the firstborn Reuben. Jacob's oldest son had forfeited his right in a manner similar to his Uncle Esau, but it remained to Jacob to decide who would inherit the firstborn's extra share. It was to be Joseph, the firstborn son of Jacob's beloved Rachel, who would take the place of the firstborn son of Leah.

⁷⁵ Delitzsch, 254; this concept also goes far toward a better understanding of the dominical promise to Peter and to the Church: "*Whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, etc.*"

Wrapped up in Jacob's prophetic blessing of Joseph's sons is the correlative fact that another tribe would be displaced from inheritance in the land, in order to make room for Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus the landless tribe of Levi is also implicitly foretold here, the 'portion' taken from him and given to Joseph's second son. Thus the one tribe of Joseph becomes the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh – a doubling of the inheritance, honoring Joseph as the firstborn in place of Reuben. The arrangement was, as far as the biblical record is concerned, never disputed: Ephraim and Manasseh take their places in the tribal alignments and Levi and Joseph yield. This historical phenomenon illustrates the authority with which patriarchal prophecy was held in the ancient Israelite nation, and the power of the prophetic word to bring about its own fulfillment.

The account of Israel blessing his sons and grandsons, recorded in Genesis 47-49, also serves as an example of faith as an act of worship. The author of Hebrews mentions Jacob's posture – *leaning upon his staff* – as he worships, simply because this is mentioned in the Genesis narratives. Actually, we find this reference in Genesis 47, *before* the blessing of Joseph's sons in Genesis 48. This inversion of order is simply meant to show that Israel worshiped God in the exercise of his prophetic faith through the pronouncement of blessings upon his posterity. But the most important feature of Jacob's actions, as far as the author of Hebrews is concerned in using the example, is to once again show how persevering faith is not diminished by the death of the one who has it. As with the illustration before (Isaac) and the one to follow (Joseph), the reminder of Jacob pronouncing over Ephraim and Manasseh things that were to pass long after the deaths of both boys serves as an exhortation to all believers to develop a temporal view of this life that is informed and controlled by the entire scope of God's redemptive timeline.

This concept is in large measure lost on the present generation due to the fact that modern man has divorced himself from both the past and the future. Ancient cultures, and many modern pagan cultures, maintain a strong sense of

connectivity with the past generations of their people, and have an equally strong consideration of the future prosperity of their culture. The religious practice of ancestor worship is but a perversion of the truth that the dead are not gone, but continue to live both in memory and reality. It was (and still is) a tremendously stabilizing force within any society for the living generation to see itself as but a link in the chain, one section of water in a long river of time. This vision of faith, and the power that it held over the minds of the patriarchs, is eminently displayed in Joseph's dying instructions regarding the future disposition of his mortal remains.

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. (11:22)

This reference to Joseph differs from the previous two due to the fact that Joseph was not a singular mediator of the covenant as were Isaac and Jacob. Joseph was the head of a tribe, albeit the foremost in honor. As it was the custom for the father to bless his sons before he died, it is quite reasonable to assume that Joseph performed this duty as did his father and grandfather before him. But his blessing was that of a father to his sons, and not as a representative to God's people. Thus the author of Hebrews focuses on the aspect of Joseph's dying thoughts which compares directly with those of Isaac and Jacob – the ongoing, inexorable flow of the divine covenantal promise.

By the time of his death Joseph was an exalted public official in the court of Pharaoh – he held rank and honor, and all the perquisites associated, as would Moses three or four generations later. And like Moses, Joseph did not consider those material evidences of worldly success to compare with the inestimable value of his membership within the covenant community of Jehovah. "His

longings followed the direction of the divine promises, of whose fulfillment faith assured him.”⁷⁶

It is interesting to consider divine providence in light of Joseph’s instructions to have his body conveyed to Canaan at a point in time which he knew to be quite distant. In the ancient world only the Egyptians practices a form of embalming that would essentially guarantee the physical preservation of Joseph’s body for so many years, and it was a practice that was only done on high court officials and royalty. Thus divine providence is displayed in that the man who was responsible for the physical salvation of Israel’s family by going ahead of his father into the land of Egypt, would accompany Israel’s descendants in their exodus from Egypt back into the Promised Land.

But why was it so important to Joseph that his mortal remains be transported back to Canaan along with his people? It would be a mistake to conclude that there was something special about being buried in Canaan versus being buried in Egypt – the resurrection knows no geographical limitations. In addition, had it been important to Joseph *where* his bones were laid to rest he could have had the funeral procession take him to Canaan immediately upon his decease, as was done for his father Israel. No, it was not so much the relocation of his remains to Canaan that mattered to Joseph, but rather the abiding witness his instructions would be to his posterity, to keep their focus on their true homeland.

When he ordered his bones to be carried away he was not thinking of himself as if he would prefer to have his grave in the land of Canaan rather than in Egypt, but wanted to sharpen the desire of his people so that they would look more earnestly for their redemption. He wanted also to strengthen their faith so that they could hope with certainty that they would at length be liberated.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Delitzsch, 257.

⁷⁷ Milligan, 175.

Week 9: A Little Bit About Moses**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:23 - 29**

*"There is a heroic frame of mind and spiritual fortitude
required unto the due discharge of our callings in times of danger,
and which faith in exercise will produce."
(John Owen)*

Considering the central place that Moses occupies in the Jewish religion, it is somewhat significant that the author of Hebrews devotes relatively few lines recounting so important a man. Even more startling than the paucity of verses regarding Moses is the aspect of his life that is left out – the Law. But we can be certain that the author of Hebrews meant no disrespect to Israel's first priest-king. Rather the selections made from Moses' life – and those left out – highlight the pastoral perspective of the writer to his troubled audience. In terms of where they were and the temptations they were facing, it is not hard to understand that Moses could be a stumbling-block.

It was a common complaint among non-believing Jews that Jewish converts to Christianity had abandoned Moses, and that their Jewish/Christian teachers 'speak against the Law and Moses.' Stephen, the church's first martyr, was arraigned before the Sanhedrin on just such a false charge,

Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. (Acts 6:11-12)

Paul was also beleaguered by the charge that he blasphemed Moses,

And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. (Acts 21:20-21)

Christianity *seemed* to contradict Moses, hence Moses himself (in the hands of the unbelieving Jews) became a stumbling-block to Hebrew converts. It was a return to Moses and to Mosaic Judaism to which the Hebrew Christians in Rome were tempted, and it was against this temptation that the author preached and penned this book. Wisely he does not pass over (pardon the pun) Moses, and with equal wisdom he does not dwell upon those aspects of Moses' life and teaching that were points of controversy among the Roman Jews. One can almost think the author's thoughts with him: anticipating unbelieving family members or members of the Jewish community on the periphery of the Church, hearing these words read aloud in the congregation. There was no need for unnecessary offense, as Moses' life presents a myriad of illustrations to persevering faith. Mt. Sinai and the tabernacle worship need not be mentioned, especially since the author has already indisputably shown that a 'better' ministry has come in Jesus Christ.

Thus, in addition to needing to 'move it along,' the writer of Hebrews briefly touches upon a handful of events in Moses' life. Starting with his birth, and the faith of his parents displayed in their brave defiance of Pharaoh's edict, he pulls events from the first and third 40-year periods. Moses' refusal to align himself with his adopted people, the Egyptians; his flight from Egypt under the wrath of Pharaoh; the horrible night of death throughout Egypt and the Passover blood that delivered the Jewish homes under it; and the exodus itself through the Red Sea – these are the 'talking points' the author of Hebrews brings to his panoramic view of persevering faith. Is there a theme, or are they random selections from the life of Moses? Consider the events at a glance:

Moses' parents hiding the newborn from Pharaoh's soldiers

Moses repudiating Pharaoh's largess and rejoining his Hebrew brethren

Moses fleeing Egypt after killing an Egyptian overseer

Moses guiding the Jewish people through a night of death for all firstborn

Moses leading the Hebrews through the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army in pursuit.

There is one obvious common denominator, and one that would resonate powerfully with the Hebrew believers living in Imperial Rome. All of the events listed have a relationship to Pharaoh – the ‘law-unto-himself’ ruler of ancient Egypt. With all due respect to Yul Brynner, it is hard for any modern actor to portray the absolute power possessed by ancient potentates such as the pharaohs of Egypt. Revered as living gods, their word was immediate action and often as capricious as their moods. One need only consider the nature of the edict that Moses’ parents defied,

So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.” (Exodus 1:22)

The actions of Pharaoh, and of Nebuchadnezzar, and of Herod – their total disregard for the lives of others, their lack of any moral foundation for their murderous edicts, and their ability to get away with it – casts the famous Psalm 2 in a deeper contextual hue,

*Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”
He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.* (Psalm 2:1-4)

The rulers of the ancient world – and some totalitarian regimes today – hold the power of life and death over their citizens (and slaves, of course). This was the power held over Jesus’ head by the Roman procurator, Pilate, and deftly thrust back at him by the Lord,

Then Pilate said to Him, “Are you not speaking to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?” Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”

This takes us to the heart of the matter with regard to how the author of Hebrews employs the life of Moses as an illustration of persevering faith. If our working hypothesis of the historical context of Hebrews is correct, the black cloud hovering over the Jewish community – both believing and unbelieving, it did not matter to the Romans – was the just-recently reversed Edict of Claudius that expelled all Jews from Rome. As the Roman historian Seutonius explains, the edict was in response to a conflict – probably riots – within the Jewish community instigated over one named ‘Chrestus.’⁷⁸ The new Emperor, Nero, was for a time a gracious and lenient ruler; but history knows all too well how that changed. Regardless of who wore the purple, his power over the lives of other men was absolute and final. This was the ‘real world’ of the Hebrew Christians in the first century, those who first heard and read this wonderful book of Hebrews. Theirs was a world in which one imperial bad mood could either completely upend their life, or end it altogether.

Such was Moses’ world, and by God’s providence he actually became a part of that ruling elite that possessed so much power. By faith, we are told, he then repudiated that wicked pedigree and chose instead the pedigree of the covenant of Abraham and life with his birth nation, the Jews. Everything associated with Moses’ life seemed almost designed to instigate the seething wrath of the one man in Egypt who could exterminate the whole Jewish race...or could he? He certainly tried, as he tried to kill Moses, too. And that is the point – the rulers of the world rage and plot their vain strategies, and He who sits in the heavens laughs. Persevering faith hears the divine laughter over the human threats, and in the midst of paralyzing fear, laughs along with God. To be sure, the laughter of believers is rarely a hearty guffaw – the fear is real, the threat is real – and so the laughter is more of an inward, relaxed humor that knows that “*you would have no authority over me unless it were given you from above.*” It is such

⁷⁸ Seutonius, *The Life of Claudius*, 25.4.

‘faith over fear’ that permeates the author’s examples of faith drawn from Moses’ eventful life.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command.
(11:23)

The account referred to here in verse 23 comes from the second chapter of Exodus, and the details given there are sparse indeed,

And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.

(Exodus 2:1-4)

What is most intriguing about this narrative is the absence of any direct divine command to the mother of Moses that this baby should be preserved from



Josephus (AD 37-100)

Pharaoh’s edict that all male Hebrews be cast into the river to die. There is no ancient prophecy that would cause this family of the tribe of Levi to suspect anything out of the ordinary at the child’s birth. No theophany was given to Amram, Moses’ father, or to Jochebed, his mother. So conspicuous is the lack of a divine word that the Jews invented visions and dreams to explain the actions of Moses’ mother. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, relates the traditional

Jewish belief that the Lord spoke to Amram in a dream concerning the fate of His people Israel and the destiny of the child Moses.

Know therefore that I shall provide for you all in common what is for your good, and particularly for thyself what shall make thee famous; for that child, out of dread of whose nativity the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to

destruction, shall be this child of thine, and shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him: and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians. His memory shall be famous while the world lasts; and this not only among the Hebrews, but foreigners also: - all which shall be the effect of my favor to thee, and to thy posterity. He shall also have such a brother, that he shall himself obtain my priesthood, and his posterity shall have it after him to the end of the world.⁷⁹

There is a glaring hole in Josephus' prophecy - the prediction that Moses 'would have a brother' who would become a priest. Aaron was indeed both Moses' brother and the High Priest; but he was Moses' *older* brother. It seems passing strange that the prophecy would invert the birth order of the children, especially when such an 'older serving the younger' motif was already common in Jewish prophetic history. The obvious embellishment of the history perpetrated by the Jews and propagated by Josephus, was surprisingly absent from the historical account given by the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo - a man usually given to extreme spiritualizing tendencies. Philo's account is succinct and to the point of the matter: Moses was a beautiful baby,

*Accordingly as the child Moses, as soon as he was born, **displayed a more beautiful and noble form than usual**, his parents resolved, as far as was in their power, to disregard the proclamations of the tyrant.*⁸⁰

This is what the Scripture tells us in Exodus Chapter 2, that Moses was 'beautiful.' This is what the author of Hebrews tells us in 11:23, that Moses was 'a beautiful child.' But in the eyes of a mother, what child is not beautiful? There must have been something else in the baby's countenance that stirred up faith in the hearts of Jochebed and Amram, enough to risk the wrath of Pharaoh. Stephen sheds a bit more light on the description,

⁷⁹ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II Chapter 3.

⁸⁰ Philo Judaeus, *The Life of Moses*, III.9.

It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. (Acts 7:20)

While we cannot know infallibly what passed through the minds of Moses' parents when they first beheld their son, we know that they defied the most powerful man in their world in order to keep that child alive. It would be nice to think that they were not alone in this, that there were other parents who refused to abide by such a wicked and ungodly edict. Perhaps Amram and Jochebed were the remnant of their generation, but hopefully they were rather the exemplar of the remnant - those like the Hebrew midwives who refused to disobey God in order to preserve their own lives before Pharaoh.

It is this kind of faith that the author of Hebrews is admonishing the believers in Rome to cultivate through meditation on the life of Moses. He is explicit with regard to Moses' parents, *"they were not afraid of the king's command."* It may not be significant, but the author uses a more generic term for 'king' than the actual title of the ruler of Egypt, 'pharaoh.' It is not uncommon for biblical writers to use a term more familiar to their readers rather than the specific title of the potentate, but undoubtedly the believers in Rome would have known who and what 'pharaoh' was. It may well be that the writer uses 'king' simply because it is a term that applies to 'pharaoh, 'or 'emperor,' or 'president.' Amram and Jochebed did not fear the ruler of the nation; the Hebrew believers should not fear the ruler of the empire. *"And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell."*

The writer of Hebrews states that Amram and Jochebed *"did not fear"* the wrath of Pharaoh. That is the theme of this section on persevering faith, and we will encounter a statement regarding Moses' fearlessness that seems to be a direct contradiction of the biblical record. Perhaps the phrase 'did not fear' does not mean that Amram and Jochabed, and later Moses and the children of Israel, *felt no fear*. Perhaps the point is rather that, by faith, these exemplars *overcame*

fear rather than giving in to it. Moses' parents, by surmounting fear with faith, beheld the glorious providence of God as He orchestrated the deliverance and elevation of their son into the household of the man who would have had him killed at birth (can you hear the laughter in heaven?). Fear presents a huge obstacle to walking by faith; but fear is real and ought not be denied in some 'name-it-and-claim-it/positive confession' mantra. Rather fear is to be overcome by faith, as John Owen eloquently puts it, "There is nothing insuperable unto faith, whilst it can keep a clear view of the power of God and his faithfulness in his promises."⁸¹

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. (11:24-26)

The background to this passage is the same as that of Moses' parents. One does not repudiate the king's grace with impunity. Moses' decision to abandon his adoptive mother and return to his ancestral people had to irk Pharaoh. It is probably that Moses was on the king's bad side long before he intervened on behalf of the Hebrew slave, killing the Egyptian taskmaster. It may be that Moses had begun to associate himself with his natural brethren for a time during his young adulthood. It is at least evident that his attitude was known to his countrymen, though they did not accept him as 'a prince and a judge' over them. He was caught between two worlds at that time: raised at Pharaoh's court, he had the demeanor and training of royalty; the son of Levites, he had the mind and heart of a Hebrew. In this aspect of Moses' life he represents the true nature of every believer in this world – a man between worlds.

The author of Hebrews describes this conflict using two parallel phrases – one pertinent directly to Moses' life in Egypt, the other speaking to the

⁸¹ Owen, 164.

underlying spiritual reality of which his life was but the visible manifestation. Consider what Moses *chose*, in contrast to what he *gave up*.

<u>What Moses Chose</u>	<u>What He Gave Up</u>
<i>"to suffer affliction with the people of God"</i>	<i>"to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin"</i>
<i>"to esteem the reproaches of Christ"</i>	<i>"to repudiate the treasures of Egypt"</i>

These are clearly parallel statements of contrast. What is remarkable is the conjunction between *"suffering affliction with the people of God"* and *"esteeming the reproaches of Christ."* There has been a great deal of pen spilled in commentaries over the meaning of that last phrase, and the knowledge possessed by Moses concerning Christ, the Anointed One. On the one hand, it would be too much to say that Moses had a clear understanding of the what, the when, and the who of the coming of the Son of God as the Son of Man. Yet on the other hand it would be equally erroneous to assume that Moses was ignorant of the promises of God regarding the Seed of Woman being the Anointed Savior of God's people. Jesus Himself alludes to a deeper understanding in Moses than many modern scholars give him credit for,

*Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for **he wrote about Me**. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"*

(John 5:45-47)

What is apparent is that Moses understood that association with the people of God was association with the lineage and promise of the Seed, and of ultimate redemption. It was the lineage of the Anointed, and to be outside that line was to be *"without hope and without God in the world."* But Moses also understood that to be associated with the people of God was to be at enmity with the world, and to suffer the reproaches and afflictions that must accompany that enmity.

Reproaches of Christ:

One of the problems with the phrase “*reproaches of Christ*” is the usage of the Greek genitive case, and the many ways that this versatile syntactic case can be translated and used in the English. The genitive case can indicate possession, a direct object, the object of a preposition, a subject, a relationship, parts of a whole, and a number of other possibilities. It is, of course, beyond the scope of a commentary on Hebrews to delve into the multitude of nuances for a single Greek case (not to mention the fact that it would be exceedingly boring for most!). But in the case of Hebrews 11:26 it becomes rather important to attempt to figure out just what that author meant by his use of the genitive ‘of Christ’ as it modifies or controls the noun ‘reproaches.’

There are as many interpretive schemes within the commentaries as there are possible syntactical uses for the Greek genitive, and probably even more. One commentator even goes so far as to suggest that Moses suffered reproaches ‘similar’ to those that Christ suffered over a thousand years later. It would be confusing and counterproductive to spend time in even a cursory summary of what the commentators have to say on this phrase. We are better served by considering the words in Hebrews 11:26 with some other similarly enigmatic phrases in the New Testament that share the same focus upon the sufferings of Christ.

One of these parallel passages is found in Acts 9 within the narrative of that fateful encounter experienced by Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus:

*Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder **against the disciples of the Lord**, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, **why are you persecuting Me?**”* (Acts 9:1-4)

The actual recipients of Saul's wrath and legislative fury were the 'disciples of the Lord'; these were the ones who suffered reproach at the hands of Saul and his associates. But the ultimate target of such reproaches, Saul is told in no uncertain terms, is Jesus himself. The 'disciples of the Lord' stands in unmistakable parallel with 'Me.' From this passage we see that the 'reproaches of Christ' are directed ostensibly against those who choose to follow the path of the Messiah rather than the way of the world, but are in reality targeted at Christ himself. Furthermore, this and other passages teach us that Christ continues to suffer reproach (as He did even before His incarnation) *in* and *through* His people vicariously. The Messiah speaks through the psalmist to this very point,

*I have become a stranger to my brothers,
And an alien to my mother's children;
Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up,
And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.
When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting,
That became my reproach.* (Psalm 69:8-10)

This speaks to the unity and solidarity of the people of God with their Redeemer throughout all the ages. New Testament believers are accustomed to the terminology of Paul – "*in Christ*," "*in Him*," *etc.* – as applying to those who have believed in Jesus Christ since His death, resurrection, and ascension. But the author of Hebrews assigns the same solidarity and union to Moses who lived twelve or more centuries before the Second Person of the Godhead came in the flesh. It might not be too much to say that the visible manifestation of the 'reproaches of Christ' began when Cain initiated his homicidal persecution of his brother, Abel. Christ therefore endured reproach before His incarnation, during His earthly sojourn, and since His ascension to the right hand of majesty in heaven – and only in one of those time periods did that suffering involve physical persecution of Jesus. The 'reproaches of Christ' represent "reproach

such as Christ Himself endured in His own person, and had, or has still, to endure in His members.”⁸²

That the ‘reproaches of Christ’ continue is evident in a second enigmatic phrase from the New Testament, this time from the pen of the apostle Paul:

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God... (Colossians 1:24-25)

Paul’s words are truly remarkable, that he could “*fill up in his flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.*” One might well wonder what is ‘lacking’ in the afflictions of the One who paid the full price for the sins of His people through His death on the cross. And it would be a complete contradiction of what Paul writes in all of his epistles, to interpret these words as saying that the apostle’s sufferings in any way complemented those of Christ toward the atonement of God’s people. Paul did view his own trials as sacrificial for the edification of the Church, but not as atoning for its sins. Rather what the apostle intends with these words to the Colossians is of the same nature as what the author of Hebrews writes concerning Moses’ sufferings so many generations before: that there is in every age a ‘fullness’ of reproach that sinful man expels toward God. Just as the iniquity of the Amorites was not ‘full’ in the days of Abraham, so also the reproaches of Christ were not yet full while Moses lived at Pharaoh’s court, nor were the sufferings of Christ meted out in fullest measure while Paul lived.

In spurning the praise and acceptance of the world, each generation of God’s people experiences, “in virtue of His vital mystical connection” with the members of His body, the “reproaches of Christ.” The people of God are sustained in this, as was Moses, through a faith that continually looks ahead to the ‘reward’ that is reserved for those who “*love not their life unto death.*”

⁸² Delitzsch, 262.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (11:27)

This is a tough verse to exegete. Not so much for what it says, but for how it represents the emotional state of Moses when he departed from Egypt. The author of Hebrews states plainly that Moses did not fear the wrath of Pharaoh, the king. But the historical account of Moses' departure seems to indicate otherwise.

Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?" Then he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" So Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!" When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. (Exodus 2:11-15)

Commentators recognize the problem, and have attempted to solve it in interesting ways. John Calvin simply reassigned the reference in Hebrews to the Exodus itself, when Moses boldly led the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. But such an interpretation fails the tests of context and chronology. First, Moses' departure is tied with his abandonment of the riches of Egypt for the 'reproaches of Christ.' This was what Moses did during the first part of his life, not the third. Second, the writer of Hebrews places this abandonment of Egypt prior to the observance of the Passover, whereas the Exodus came afterward. No, we are forced to see the allusion between the author's reference in Hebrews 11:27 and Moses' flight from Egypt to the land of Midian.

Either we are faced with a gross contradiction in Scripture, or there is a sense in which fear both did and did not play a part in Moses' actions when he was discovered as being the one who had killed the Egyptian taskmaster. As a side note, it is apparent that there is no recourse to 'textual variants' or copyist

errors; the verses in both Exodus 2 and Hebrews 11 are of the highest integrity. The key to a proper interpretation, one that accepts the inner consistency of God's Word, lies in the nature of 'fear' within the heart of the believer.

Just as we saw with respect to Moses' parents, the pursuit of righteousness and obedience in the face of man's wrath and opposition does not preclude the presence of the emotion of fear within the heart of the believer. It is unnatural and unbiblical to say that the believer never feels fear; that his adrenaline is not stimulated by dangerous circumstances and his mind threatened with the paralysis of fright. Scripture constantly admonishes the believer "*Do not fear,*" not as a denial of the emotion as being appropriate to the circumstance, but rather as an exhortation to faith that it rise to the occasion and overcome fear. What the author of Hebrews is doing in verse 27 is neatly tying up the threads of Moses' early life. It began with his parents hiding him from 'the wrath of Pharaoh,' and closed with Moses himself fleeing from 'the wrath of Pharaoh.' "Both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the unit on Moses as a young man, the writer emphasizes the role of faith in overcoming fear of the king."⁸³

If we read the passages carefully, we can coordinate them without doing violence to either one. In the Exodus passage we do not read that Moses fled Egypt *because* he feared the wrath of Pharaoh. While that is a reasonable interpretation of what Moses actually did, what the text says is that Moses feared that the matter of his having killed the Egyptian had become known. Such a discovery would, and did, put Moses' life in jeopardy – and was cause for a natural fear of death within Moses. But overcoming a fear of death does not necessarily mean waltzing into Pharaoh's presence and submitting to his homicidal wrath. Moses' had by that time in his life come to the realization that God had a purpose for him that was intimately associated with the well-being of the nation of Israel. It was a misguided attempt to force that purpose into

⁸³ Lane, 375.

fruition that led to the death of the Egyptian in the first place. Discovery did not eradicate God's purpose: Moses chose to leave Egypt, *"enduring as seeing Him who is invisible."*

This last phrase is an implicit comparison between the God who sits in heaven and laughs, and the kings of the earth who rail against that God and against His people. The latter are painfully (and fearfully) visible, while the former is invisible. But faith recognizes which one has the real power, and acts appropriately. "Moses' departure was an act of faith motivated by the vision of God, which faith invested with a substantial reality."⁸⁴ The writer of Hebrews does not say that Moses fled from Egypt, but rather that he 'departed' Egypt. The word does mean that Moses 'left' Egypt, of course. But it implies more than just physical departure; it means a complete abandonment, a turning away from without intention of returning. Moses' departure from Egypt was the exclamation point upon his *"refusal to be call the son of Pharaoh's daughter,"* thus bringing to a close the first forty year segment of his life. The word is used positively, as in Luke 5:28 and Acts 6:2, and negatively, as in II Peter 2:15. In all cases it implies a full and final departure, a breaking off of relationship without intention of renewal. That is what Moses did when he departed from Egypt the first time. His faith overcame his fear, his love for God overcame his love for the *"temporary pleasures"* of Egypt, and the next chapter of his life opened in Midian.

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. (11:28)

The night of the Passover is an event in Scripture that has been sanitized by centuries of memorial and decades of silly Sunday School material. Like the Deluge before it, the Passover was a manifestation of intense divine wrath against sin, resulting in the permeation of death throughout the land. Thousands of first born sons, and perhaps tens of thousands of first born animals, perished

⁸⁴ Lane, 376.

during the night. Cecil B. deMille attempted to capture the horror of that night in *The Ten Commandments* and arguably did a far better job than most writers of modern Sunday School curriculum for young people. The Hebrews, protected by faith in the blood over their doorposts, spent the night hearing the cries of agony and loss. They had every reason to expect the new day to arrive flush with the murderous wrath of Pharaoh, whose firstborn was not spared from the avenging angel. Again, fear is the topic here; and faith the victory.

For Moses it was a reprise of that earlier time when, in an effort to rally his countrymen to his leadership, he killed the Egyptian taskmaster. Only this time he had learned his lesson and stood behind the will of God, not taking the lives of the Egyptian firstborn himself but standing guard over God's people while the angel of death roamed the land. Still, every death suffered in every Egyptian home that night would be laid at Moses' feet, and in the morning the wrath of Pharaoh would burn uncontrollably against the one through whom God spoke. Once again faith overcame fear in Moses' heart, and he faithfully observed the Passover – putting visible markers on every Hebrew home, markers that would target those homes for Egyptian retribution just as the yellow Star of David did in Nazi Germany. That the wrath did not come should not diminish in our minds the expectation that it would, lest we fail to appreciate fully how powerful faith was to overcome fear in the lives of the Egyptian Hebrews.

The wrath of the Emperor was equally to be expected if the Hebrew Christians in Rome continued faithfully to their proclamation of Christ as the Jewish Messiah and their Savior. That wrath might not come; but then again, it might. The expectation was real, however, and therefore the author of Hebrews right in drawing the parallel between his readers' situation and that of the Israelites during the horrific night of the Passover. Faith must persevere, too, for the wrath of the kings of the earth may only be delayed rather than completely subdued. This is what happened in the case of Pharaoh – he was humbled into

submission by the carnage of the Passover night, but his wrath did not take long to rekindle.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. (11:29)

It is time now for Moses, and the people of God, to say a final goodbye to the king of the earth who had so dominated their lives for four generations. Faith must and will have its triumph over the fear of man.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (I John 5:4-5)

At first glance it would appear that Moses is the key figure in this pericope of Hebrews – verses 23–29. But really the primary character is Pharaoh – the representative at that time of the kings of the earth who vainly plot their schemes against God and against His Anointed. Through Moses' parents and then through Moses, He who sits enthroned in heaven laughed. The divine laughter is heard by the ears of faith in every generation, as the people of God act faithfully in spite of fear, *looking to the reward and seeing Him who is invisible.*

Week 10: Faith Conquers Jericho**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:30 - 31**

*"There is nothing insuperable unto faith,
whilst it can keep a clear view of the power of God
and his faithfulness in his promises."
(John Owen)*

There is little wonder that the author of Hebrews makes a forty year leap in time between the crossing of the Red Sea under the guidance of Moses and the conquest of Jericho under the leadership of Joshua. Those years in the wilderness hardly serve as an exemplar of faith, as the writer has already reminded us in an earlier chapter,

For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:16-19)

Indeed, those who wandered those four decades serve as illustrations of the exact opposite of what the author of Hebrews is trying to inculcate within the hearts of his readers,

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. (Hebrews 4:2)

The time of warning has passed, now it the time of encouragement and exhortation to faith. The threat of failure has served its purpose, this is the place for the promise of success. Too often modern sermons are heavy on either one emphasis or the other: too much threat of doom and damnation, or too much pie-in-the-sky promise of health and prosperity. The pendulum has swung between these two points throughout the history of Christian preaching, nearing the extreme of hellfire and brimstone during the latter stages of the Puritan era.

Today, however, all is sunshine and happiness in the churches – ‘God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.’ The preacher to the Hebrew Christians was more balanced than either group, and true, biblical preaching in any age will mimic the same equilibrium between proper warning and meaningful hope. The fulcrum upon which the scale balances is, of course, *faith*.

So the author skips the faithless generation in the wilderness and moves us through time and space to just outside the walls of the ancient city of Jericho.



From the heights of Ammon, particularly the peak of Mt. Nebo, Moses was permitted to view the land he was not allowed to enter. *“Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.”* It was an excellent vantage point, lying in the middle of the north-south axis of the

Promised Land. But guarding the entrance to the land was the small but heavily fortified city of Jericho.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. (11:30)

Israel had by this time fought several successful battles and defeated several kings on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The time in the wilderness had not been wasted, and Moses had apparently worked with Joshua to train the

rising generation of Israelites to be men of war. But the army had not had occasion to lay siege to a fortified city, nor did it possess the machinery necessary to do so. And this particular city was unique among all the cities that the Israelites would encounter and subdue. Jericho is believed by many archaeologists to be the oldest continually inhabited city in the world. In other words, considering the violent nature of the ancient world, Jericho was a city that had probably already withstood many attacks before the Israelites showed up.

All this to say that God's strategy for bringing Jericho to its knees before His people displays His jealousy for His own glory. It is evident from the historical narrative surrounding the harlot Rahab (more on that in verse 31) that the people of Canaan had been receiving reports of the mighty works of Jehovah on behalf of Israel spanning the previous forty years – from the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea to the conquest of Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites to the east of Jordan. Apparently, however, the king of Jericho and his advisors felt entirely secure within the fortifications of their already ancient city and saw no reason to fear. That fear had already gripped the citizens of Jericho is evident on the testimony of Rahab,

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

(Joshua 2:8-11)

But there must have been a special reason why the Lord chose to unleash His power upon Jericho in such a unique – and seemingly ridiculous – manner. On the one hand, the plan devised of circling the city once each day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day was wonderfully suited to test the faith

of the people under Joshua – both their faith in Joshua and in the Lord whom Joshua served. But to settle upon this as the exhaustive explanation of the events might lead to an erroneous conclusion that God always asks His people to do ridiculous things in order to show their faith and His might. As Owen notes, “this act was so far from furthering them in their design, that it was suited to expose them to the scorn and contempt of their adversaries.”⁸⁵ For the most part, however, the means God employs through the instrumentation of His people are such as are at least nominally suited to the ends desired. Gideon, for instance, equipped his army with swords and attacked the enemy camps fully armed for battle in the usual way. Even David’s sling was an instrument designed to do harm – for David to use his harp to defeat Goliath might have been a closer analogy to the perambulatory conquest of Jericho.

John Owen sees an interesting, though perhaps a bit far-fetched, correspondence between the six days of circling and the seventh day victory at Jericho and the six days of Creation with the seventh day of rest. “And the compassing of the city once every day for the space of six days, and the entrance into it on the seventh, had respect unto the work of the creation.”⁸⁶ Owen is one of the least spiritualizing theologians ever to grace the church, so anything he has to say bears consideration. Indeed, the ‘six days/seventh day’ pattern does seem to force one’s mind back to the first chapter of Genesis. Yet it is hard to see a correlation between the wholesale slaughter and destruction of Jericho on the seventh day and the holy day of rest that was the first Sabbath.

It is interesting to note, however, that the Israelites performed their walk around the city on each of seven days, including the Sabbath. And it is not unreasonable to assume – based on the ‘six days/seventh day’ pattern – that the walls of Jericho did indeed fall on the Sabbath. One might surmise that the coincidence of these things shows us that the obedience of the Israelites and their

⁸⁵ Owen, 176.

⁸⁶ *Idem.*

God-given victory over Jericho represented acts of worship as well as warfare, and perhaps more of the former than the latter. Something to think about, anyway.

On the opposite side of the analytical spectrum from Owen's connection to Creation, is the harmonic frequency theory popular among some modern commentators. Although it may sound like just another attempt to explain away a miracle in terms of natural phenomenon, there is still something to consider in the fact that it was noise – regular and harmonic – that caused the walls of Jericho to 'come tumbling down.' One does not find this explanation of the demise of Jericho's walls within the better commentaries, ancient or modern. But that may be because most commentators are theologians and not engineers or physicists. Here is a comment from an engineer,

Could the walls of Jericho have fallen from mechanical resonance? In the book of Joshua in the Bible, God told Joshua to have his soldiers march around Jericho once a day for six days. In addition, 7 priests were to walk each carrying a ram's horn (shofar) and to continually blow them. A number of things are happening here. Marching soldiers in lock step set up a harmonic. If it is the correct resonance for the town's walls, they would start to vibrate. The shofar has a rich tone. 7 of them blown continually would certainly produce a series of vibrations. If they were blown together with the same pitch, then a powerful vibration could have been set up. And the men were to keep quiet. This is important. Just as a crystal glass will not shatter if the high pitched soprano varies her tone, neither would the wall vibrate if there are interruptions to the waves. This was done for 6 days, weakening the walls with the vibrations. On the 7th day, the soldiers marched in lockstep around the city 7 times with the priests blowing their horns. Then there was the sound of one long blast of the shofars and a great shout from the men. The wall collapsed.⁸⁷

Some would consider such a mechanical explanation to diminish the faith content of the event. This is not necessary, however, for two reasons. First, and obvious, is the fact that Joshua and his army knew nothing about harmonic frequency. They could not justify their actions on any other basis than that they

⁸⁷ <http://verytrulyblessed.com/?p=137>

were told to do so by the Lord. Their expectation of success did not rest on physics, but firmly upon faith that the God who commanded them to harmonize instrumentally about the city of Jericho would bring about the city's demise. Second, there is also the realization that God is the Maker of sound, of harmonic frequency, and of the rocks that tumbled down. To say that God utilized harmonic frequency to collapse the walls of ancient Jericho is not the same as saying that God used evolution to populate the earth with animals and mankind. Sometimes Science does indeed obscure faith; sometimes it illuminates it.

The biblical narrative does not provide definitive answers to the questions of 'why' and 'how' regarding the collapse of Jericho's walls. It suffices to believers, who may indeed ponder the connections alluded to here, to settle upon the fact that obedience to God's commands often is required without the full (or even partial) understanding of their logic. "Faith will embrace and make use of means divinely prescribed, though it be not able to discern the effective influence of them unto the end aimed at."⁸⁸

If this is the conclusion of the matter – and it seems a quite reasonable one – then it is readily apparent how this historical event is applied by the author of Hebrews to the situation at hand. Modern charismatic prophets and prophetesses might have had the Hebrew Christians in Rome march around the Coliseum once each day for six days, blowing trumpets, etc., etc. But it is more to the point of Hebrews, and especially Hebrews 11, to conclude that the faith that transcends and perseveres over barrenness, great expanses of time, blindness, and death also transcends and perseveres over understanding. Faith is not irrational (hence the possibility that Jericho's walls *did* fall because of harmonic frequency); but faith is often *suprarational* – beyond the capacity of man's finite understanding to comprehend.

Yet it is once again imperative that faith be founded upon a clear directive from God. Joshua did not gather his generals together and say 'let's try this

⁸⁸ Owen, 177.

strategy out and see if it works.’ No, he was instructed in what to do by God himself, and his lieutenants and the people as a whole gave truth to the words they had pledged to Joshua after Moses had died,

So they answered Joshua, saying, “All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage.” (Joshua 1:16-18)

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. (11:31)

No recitation of the story of Jericho can be told, or should be told, without a mention of Rahab. Her name appears with remarkable frequency in both the Old and New Testaments, remarkable on two accounts. First, she is a Gentile; second, a harlot. Often, as here in Hebrews 11, the latter distinction is appended to her name almost as a badge of honor: “the *harlot* Rahab.” It is indeed a badge of grace, which is an unwarranted honor to any and every sinner. Every thought of the *harlot* Rahab is a reminder to a believer that “nothing, no person, no sin, is to be despaired of, in whose cure sovereign, almighty grace is engaged.”⁸⁹

Rahab’s former profession was a bit of an embarrassment to the rabbis, in whose theology there was little room for divine grace. Traditionally, therefore, Rahab is depicted in rabbinic literature as the owner of a hostel, an inn, and as the purveyor of meals for weary travelers. Unfortunately for the rabbis, the Hebrew word translated ‘harlot’ everywhere means, as Owen so tactfully defines it, “one who for advantage exposed her person in fornication.”⁹⁰ And while it is inconceivable that she continued in her harlotry beyond her conversion, the depth of depravity from which she was drawn remains a perpetual testimony to the condescending grace and mercy of God.

⁸⁹ Owen, 178.

⁹⁰ *Idem.*

There may be no other reason for Rahab's inclusion in the lists of the faithful than the historical fact that she, alone among the inhabitants of Jericho, possessed that fear of Jehovah that led to repentance. This would be reason enough as a example of saving faith, but it fails to explain Rahab's significance to persevering faith, or to the general condition of the Hebrew Christians in Rome of the mid first century. This is not to say that everything a preacher mentions in a sermon has to bear directly upon the main theme; that would be an almost inhuman bondage of natural speech. It could very well be that the author of Hebrews mentions Rahab simply because Rahab comes to mind whenever one considers the destruction of Jericho. And the frequency with which Rahab is mentioned in Scripture indicates that it is the intention of the Holy Spirit that Rahab come to mind whenever one considers the destruction of Jericho.

But in throwing her lot in with the people of Israel, Rahab was also repudiating her own people, much as Ruth did when she left Moab and emigrated to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi. This fact of separation, and the persecution incumbent upon separation, would ring true in the hearts of the Hebrew Christians in Rome. Rahab "*separated herself from the cause and interest of her own people among whom she lived, and joined herself unto the cause and interest of the people of God.*"⁹¹ The subsequent history of Rahab's life – wife to Salmon, mother of Boaz, ancestress of David and of Jesus Christ – stands as a timeless reminder to believers, both Jewish and Gentile, that "*He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.*"⁹²

⁹¹ Owen, 180; italics original.

⁹² Ephesians 2:14

Week 11: Of Whom the World was not Worthy**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:32 - 38**

*"Wherever God's servants come
they bring His benediction with them like the fragrance
of a sweet scent."
(John Calvin)*

What will become of the world when you die? It will continue to rotate upon its axis and revolve about the Sun, to be sure. The great expanse of history shrinks the lifespan of a single human into microscopic insignificance. Qohelet opens his treatise with a very dour prospect upon the significance of a man's life,

*Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher;
"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."*

*What profit has a man from all his labor
In which he toils under the sun?
One generation passes away, and another generation
comes;
But the earth abides forever.
The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,
And hastens to the place where it arose.
The wind goes toward the south,
And turns around to the north;
The wind whirls about continually,
And comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into
the sea,
Yet the sea is not full;*

*To the place from which the rivers come,
There they return again.
All things are full of labor;
Man cannot express it.
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
Nor the ear filled with hearing.*

*That which has been is what will be,
That which is done is what will be done,
And there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there anything of which it may be said,
"See, this is new"?
It has already been in ancient times before us.
There is no remembrance of former things,
Nor will there be any remembrance of things that
are to come
By those who will come after.*

But can it be that man, the image bearer of God and crown jewel of His Creation, can pass his life upon the earth with no more impression left behind than that of a raindrop in the ocean? Or is it only those few who attain fame or notoriety who leave the residue of their heritage behind? Granted, these are the musings of philosophers and poets and not the thoughts that occupy the workaday minds of most of us. But in the midst of such a litany of men's lives as we have before us in Hebrews 11, and especially in light of what is said of those

faithful lives in the section immediately to view, the question of lasting significance to one's life bears considering. One of the English-speaking world's



John Donne (1572-1631)

most renowned poet philosophers famously did just this, and concluded that Qohelet was wrong. John Donne wrote, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." But like a good poet, Donne failed to explain just how it is that another man's death diminished him, or me, or anyone else not immediately associated with the deceased. Framed in nebulous verse, the diminution of Mankind by

one man's death is profound; but in reality it is no more felt by the majority of mankind than when a grain of sand is carried off by the tide. Using a similar metaphor Donne rejects the fatalistic individuality of a single man: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent." But the continent of humanity spans the continents of the world, and once again the puny individual shrinks into insignificance at the vastness of it.

Donne was right, however, and Qohelet was wrong. Mankind is a unity, all derived from one blood, as the apostle Paul puts it in his speech to the Areopagites. The body of humanity has, furthermore, been infected and corrupted by the cancer of death, something foreign to Man's original nature and repugnant to both his physical and his moral sense. The believer, understanding these anthropological facts, ought to be more sensitive to the death of any man, and to the whole spectre of death, than the unbeliever. When a believer becomes aware of a death, or deaths, or even the abstract concept of Death, a tremor runs through his soul – the dark rider that stalks the community of Man casts a long

shadow. But there is also a sense in which the departure of a man affects the world – the created order – in a way that cannot be immediately perceived. There are men ‘of whom the world is not worthy,’ and their demise has an intangible spiritual impact upon the moral equilibrium of humanity as a whole.

This concept is not original, nor is it considered outlandish by the world itself. Men lament the passing of a great statesman, or a brilliant scientist, an erudite scholar or historian, even an award-winning actor or record-breaking athlete. The world considers itself diminished by the loss of a Gandhi or a Martin Luther King, though it usually fails to appreciate its loss when a Winston Churchill or a Theodore Roosevelt passes. Still, each of these examples, and countless more that are raised in almost every eulogy proclaimed at every funeral, bears the wisdom of John Donne – only for the most part both misunderstood and misapplied. Who is the man whose death *really* diminishes the world? The righteous man who walked this soil *by faith*. His is the life that the world was not worthy of, and his is the death the world can least afford.

The men and women of whom the author of Hebrews speaks in chapter 11 were, indeed, unique and special in their generations. But it would be a complete perversion of the author’s thoughts and intentions if his readers were to set them up on a pedestal as being somehow different in nature and degree from themselves. The writer speaks of those ‘of whom the world is not worthy’ with the purpose of admonishing his readers to imitation. The world encourages and praises those who live lives to be *remembered*; the Holy Spirit calls upon Christ’s disciples to live lives that are *despised*, but of which the world in its ignorance cannot be without. Israel’s long history reflected the effects of a steady decrease in the population of righteous and faithful men in her midst; the Church has seen the same in her history. But in any generation the man who walks by faith carries the divine benediction with him through life, whether those around him perceive or appreciate it or not.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me...

(11:32a)

Once again we have some evidence here of the 'epistle' to the Hebrews having perhaps originally delivered as a sermon and later written down for circulation. The phrase with which the author begins his closing remarks has "an elegant, genuinely oratorical word order" to it, and employs several features that are common features of oratory, but not so common in literature.⁹³ The author, or preacher as the case may be, recognizes that although this historical journey through the lives of faithful men in Israel's past may be both stimulating and beneficial to the persevering faith of his audience, there is the danger of having too much of a good thing. So with a flare he draws the whole discussion to a close, "...for time would fail me..." The word picture here is vivid and humorous, as the particular verb choice "describes time as going off and leaving the writer engaged in an animated discourse about Gideon and other exemplars of faith."⁹⁴ One wonders with regard to some sermons if the departure of both time and the congregation would bring an end to the discourse, or whether it would continue on unabated.

The author of Hebrews will not risk losing the effect of his discourse by pressing it beyond the endurance (pun intended) of his audience. It is remarkable to discover how few commentators on this passage follow the good example. The author mentions Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, Samson, and David, Samuel, and the prophets. But "the random character of the list is evident from the fact that the order of the names as given is not chronological."⁹⁵ The author/speaker is employing a rhetorical device known as 'paraleipsis,' "in which an orator pretends to pass over something which he in fact mentions."⁹⁶ But it is clear that the author intends an effect that flows from the whole, one that

⁹³ Lane, 383.

⁹⁴ *Idem.*

⁹⁵ *Idem.*

⁹⁶ *Idem.*

would be diluted by an analysis of the parts. Nonetheless this is exactly what many commentators do: devoting paragraphs and pages to a rehearsal of the history of Gideon and his miraculous victory over the Midianites; analyzing the dynamics of the relationship between Barak and Deborah; trying to figure out just how it is that Samson qualifies as a 'man of faith' to be admired and imitated. It is a classic case of losing the forest for the trees.

In modern conversation the author might have said "...not to mention Gideon, *et al*" even though when one says 'not to mention ____' he is, in fact, mentioning it. This is because there is a reason to mention whatever it is that is not to be mentioned, but there is also a reason not to go into great detail about it. The key to this oratorical device is in knowing that the audience can fill in the blanks. The functional and historical illiteracy of much of the modern world, along with the pronounced biblical illiteracy of the modern church, makes it harder to utilize the 'paraleipsis' without losing the audience altogether. There was a time in our not-to-distant past when a preacher could allude to almost any character or event either from world or biblical history, without concern that his hearers would fail to connect with both the allusion and its significance. Gone are the days when references like Damocles Sword and the Gordian Knot could be sprinkled into a sermon or lecture without being met with blank stares.

It has not always been the case throughout history that mankind was literate and well-read. Literacy in the Western world is something that was rejuvenated by the Protestant Reformation. Societies tend to rise and fall in literacy somewhat parallel to their rise and fall in influence and grandeur. It can be said, however, that whatever else may have been true concerning the social standing of the Hebrew Christians, they were at least *biblically* literate. Indeed, several of the allusions made in this passage are not even from the canonical books of the Old Testament, but from a corpus of writings known as 'pseudepigrapha' – writings falsely attributed to a famous person from the past.

The writer of Hebrews also draws historical referents from the ‘apocrypha,’ books written in a biblical style and theme but never accepted as canonical. Thus *The Ascension of Isaiah* (pseudepigraphal) and *Maccabees* (apocryphal) are, among other writings, represented in the rapid-fire statements in Hebrews 11:32-38. This shows us that the author was himself well read, and that he assumed his audience was also versed in the literature of the Jewish people.

In light of the overall nature of the passage – a ‘not to mention ____’ type section – Hebrews 11:32-38 is not to be subjected to a verse-by-verse exegesis. Rather it should be read in its entirety and the mind allowed to wander over the historical referents listed quickly and passed over as quickly. But because some of these allusions are from extra-biblical Jewish literature, it is probably worth the effort to illuminate the more obscure ones. Therefore, rather than the usual procedure of going verse-by-verse, we will summarize *briefly* the story behind the more elusive references. It must be admitted that in some cases the connections are ‘best guesses,’ for it is apparent that the author draws from a vast resource of previous history and literature, some of which may be lost forever.

Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah:

This is, of course, a very brief list of some of the Judges who guided and defended the tribes of Israel in the period between the death of Joshua and the ascent of Saul as king. The short list is somewhat hard to justify, however, on the basis of a reading of the Book of Judges and, again, it is not even in order. But there is evidence in the rabbinic writings that this list, and in this order, was frequently used in the liturgy of the synagogue from an early time. The Septuagint (LXX), for instance, has an almost identical listing in I Samuel 12:11, “*And the LORD sent Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side*” In several manuscripts of the LXX Samuel is replaced with Samson, which makes sense considering that it was Samuel

himself who was speaking these words. There may be no greater significance to the ordering, and to the actual judges listed, than a euphonic rhythm in either the Hebrew or Aramaic language. But to the point of Hebrews 11, these and all of the Judges were raised up by God to deliver and judge Israel, and did so 'by faith.'

... stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire:

This segment is not hard to connect with its historical counterpart. What is significant here, however, is that the two parts – 'stopping the mouths of lions' and 'quenching the violence of fire' – were commonly connected in the pseudepigrapha and apocrypha, as they are here by the author of Hebrews. It is no wonder, for the first has reference to Daniel and the second to his three associates in Babylon: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In an era supposedly governed by 'the works of the law' (as many modern believers mistakenly view the Old Testament) these four young Jewish exiles were paragons of faith whose examples lived on the liturgy of the synagogue and the lives of faithful Jews.

... turned to flight the armies of the aliens:

The Greek word here for 'alien' is different from the usual *xenoi* usually used in the Old Testament sense of a stranger in the land. The word is perhaps better translated 'foreigners' and seems to be an allusion to the defeat and

expulsion of the Greek armies by the Maccabean forces in the second century before Christ. The apocryphal books of I and II Maccabees recounts the Jewish rebellion against the Greek Antiochus Epiphanes, led by the sons of the Jewish priest Mattathias. Their victory over the Greek forces, recapturing the city of Jerusalem and purging the



Hanukkah Menorah

Temple for resumption of ritual Mosaic worship, earned the Maccabees a place in Jewish history and folklore on par with the exploits of Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and Samson. The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah is a commemoration of the purification of the Temple during which, according to legend, a small jug of oil used in the lampstands continued to burn without being depleted for eight days. The Hanukkah menorah was uniquely designed to signify the miraculous preservation of the oil throughout the eight days of purification of the Temple.

Women received their dead raised to life again:

This verse probably has reference to the associated miracles of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. The widow of Zarephath received back her son from the dead through the intercession of Elijah (I Kings 17:17-24), and the Shunemite woman received back her son from the dead through the intercession of Elisha (II Kings 4:32-37). In the second passage the very same terminology is used in the Septuagint, "...and she received her son and went out," indicating that the author of Hebrews had this event, at least, in mind.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

There are probably many candidates from history that would answer to this description. The sentence itself marks a shift in the author's thought from those who were delivered from trials and dangers by their faith, to those whose faith endured when deliverance was withheld. The first list, so to speak, represents outward, visible triumph over the forces of wickedness whereas the second list seems to show the victory of the world over the faithful. But appearances are deceiving. The tormentors of the righteous claim victory, but so did Satan over Christ on the cross. "*Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.*" That is what is on display here, in both sections of the list. Faith teaches the believer to "*love not his life even to death.*" Deliverance is cause for great rejoicing

(i.e., Hanukkah), but a deliverance purchased with the loss of faith is a Pyrrhic victory that is, in reality, utter defeat.

One commentator sees a reference again to the Maccabees here in verse 35, and in particular the story of a mother and her seven sons who were all martyred by Antiochus Epiphanes during the revolt. The narrative is recorded in II Maccabees 7, where we read the dying words of the fourth brother: "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life."⁹⁷ This same attitude of defiance toward cruel treatment of a believer has been manifested throughout the history of the church in such periods of intense persecution as the Roman purges of the first three centuries, and the Marian persecutions under Mary I in 16th Century England. "Faith proves to be the source of endurance in suffering and of moral courage in the face of death."⁹⁸

... they were sawn in two:

Jewish tradition from an early time attributed the death of the prophet Isaiah to the hands of the wicked king Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah and one of the worst kings Judah ever had. Scripture does not record the death of Isaiah, though it must be significant that the prophet himself limits the term of his ministry to between the reigns of Uzziah and Hezekiah, leaving Manasseh's reign unmentioned. We are told, however, that "*Manasseh shed much innocent blood in Jerusalem*" and that he drew the heart of Israel away from Jehovah, a sin for which he was to be severely chastised. Tradition, as is often the case, fills in the blanks with regard to Isaiah's demise. In *The Ascension of Isaiah* the great prophet is pursued by Manasseh through the instrumentality of a false prophet and priest of Baal. When Isaiah hid in a tree trunk, Manasseh ordered the trunk,

⁹⁷ II Maccabees 7:14.

⁹⁸ Lane, 389.

with the prophet inside, sawn in two. The reliability of the tradition is indeterminate, as most traditions are. But it is evident that the story itself had worked its way into the folklore of Second Temple Judaism and was accepted as true, in much the same way that the martyrdom of Peter has become an accepted 'history' within Christianity.

It is possible that the author of Hebrews is not referring to Isaiah – he does not mention the prophet explicitly – but rather refers to a form of execution that may have been employed by the enemies of Israel. The Romans did execute by this means, but the records indicate that the practice did not develop until later in the first century. The Romans, however, tended to adopt methods of torture and execution used by others, so it is quite possible that death by being sawn in two was already used by some powers in the ancient Near East, the Romans simply incorporating it into their already expansive repertoire of human degradation.

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

It is a common characteristic of the biblical prophet to live apart from human society, subsisting on wild herbs and honey and wearing the crudest of clothing. Elijah and Elisha, so to speak, popularized the lifestyle; but it was borne not of a desire to deprive the body of physical enjoyments. Rather it was a matter of necessity, caused by the rejection of the godly man by the rest of human society. As the history of a religion develops, such behavior shifts from being a unwanted necessity to becoming a chosen discipline. Within Christianity the hermits and anchorites deprived themselves of both human society and worldly comforts as a badge of honor, mimicking the prophets of old. But this is not what the writer of Hebrews is advocating. Those of whom he speaks in verses 37 & 38 were forced to wander and scavenge by a world that considered

them unworthy of it. It was, however, the world that was unworthy of these children of God.

The Hebrew Christians in Rome faced possible expulsion again if they stood firm in their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. They faced the loss of reputation, of possessions, and even of life itself. But in this they stood with the godly men and women of old, rejected by the world but accepted by God. Such reminders were intended to strengthen their faith, and ours, to endure ridicule and persecution and rejection, keeping always in mind that it is the world that is perishing, and unbelievers who are moving toward a fate worse than physical death.

Verse 38 contains what is perhaps the key thought in the whole section, if not in the whole chapter: *"of whom the world was not worthy."* We are reminded of what John writes concerning the advent of the Lord himself, *"And the light came into the world, but the world received it not."* So it is with the children of light – coming into the world, and the world receiving them not. Yet it is not light that is unworthy, it is darkness. Darkness does not deserve to be dispelled, but the grace of God sheds light into the darkness nonetheless. The exhortation remains clear and strong twenty centuries after it was written: Walk by faith, living a life of which the world is not worthy.

Week 12: One Nation Under God in Christ**Text Reading: Hebrews 11:39 - 40**

*"Christ himself is the essential bond of union
which binds together the saints of all ages."
(R. Milligan)*

The end of Chapter 11 of Hebrews is an excellent place to again pause and consider the nature of salvation relative to the two major covenants – the Abrahamic and the New. The closing verses of this chapter once again indicate a substantive difference between the saints who lived *by faith* under the Old Covenant and those who are living *by faith* under the New Covenant. In spite of the earthly blessings and fulfilled promises meted out to the likes of Abraham, Moses, and David, the author here declares that these exemplars of faith *"did not receive the promise."* Furthermore, the scope of their relationship with God was not complete without the addition of New Covenant saints. It is evident that something was missing from the 'salvation' revealed to the antediluvian, patriarchal, and Mosaic saints. Yet it is also evident that these men and women, who walked by faith according to the light given them, were 'saved.' We are again reminded of the extremes of interpretation here: the 'covenantalist' tendency to erase the distinction between salvation under the Old Covenant and that under the New, and the 'dispensational' tendency to make a total break between the two. The full counsel of Scripture will support neither view.

It is beyond the scope, and perhaps beyond possibility, to exhaustively analyze the issue and dogmatically set forth the distinctions and similarities between the two great dispensations of divine grace. It is sufficient to lay out the main lines of contrast and comparison in order to shed as much light as possible – and glean as much in return – from Hebrews 11. There are many relatively minor differences between the Old Covenant and the New: animal sacrifice, for instance. But there are three focal points of fundamental importance:

1. The Progressive Nature of Divine Revelation
2. The Coming of Christ in the Flesh with the Promised Atonement
3. The Giving and Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

As to the first of these, we need only quote the opening lines of the book of Hebrews to be reminded of the fact that God has not always spoken to man in the same manner, or to the same depth. But divine revelation was never haphazard or arbitrary; rather it followed a recognizable development centered around the theme of the Promised Seed. Later revelation augmented and did not abrogate prior revelation, as the apostle Paul declares with respect to the Law in relation to the Abrahamic promises,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.
(Galatians 3:16-18)

It is clear from several passages in the New Testament that the Old Testament saints knew that they did not know everything, and that all things had not yet been made clear through revelation. Jesus Christ pronounced a benediction upon His own disciples who, along with all who followed them, are members of the generation to which the fullness of revelation had come.

Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."
(Luke 10: 16-17)

Peter also speaks of the murkiness of revelation under previous dispensations, compared to the clarity of the revelation of redemption now given in Jesus Christ. Indeed, the apostle includes the angelic host within the company of those who peered into the dimness of revelation in ages past,

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into. (I Peter 2:10-12)

In both of these passages we read of the earnest desire of the saints (and angels) to know and understand the things that were only partially revealed to them in their own day, but have now been fully brought to light in ours. This phenomenon was a constant among the saints of old, not just the scholars and theologians – and the same should be true of believers in any and every age. But it also indicates something about God's will with regard to man's knowledge of Him. It is fair and true to say that the saints of old were, in their own lifetimes, only held to the standard that reflected the level of revelation given. Sometimes, as in the case of Abel and Enoch, we are not told just how much revelation was given – but it is evident that the faithful man of every dispensation walked by faith according to the light he was given. This is a biblical maxim: faith rests upon revelation, as Milligan says, "Where there is no revelation from God, there can be no faith...for faith always rests ultimately on the word of God, and nothing else."⁹⁹ Yet the forward looking attitude and diligent searching done by both saints and angels tells us that God never intended for any generation of His people to lack, ultimately, the fullness of revelation.

We may sum it up this way: wherever the saints of old went when they died, they continued in that place acquiring knowledge and understanding regarding the unfolding plan of divine redemption. Abraham did not receive in his day the full account of God's plan in Christ, and consequently he 'longed to see Christ's day.' But by the grace of God the patriarch *did* see it, and rejoiced. So there is both discontinuity and continuity. The discontinuity is the obvious

⁹⁹ Milligan, 335.

deficit of revelation on the part of the saints of the Old Covenant relative to the fullness of revelation now given in Christ Jesus. The continuity, on the other hand, lies in the organic unity of the people of God across time and the fact that all will progressively come to a full knowledge of God their Savior.

The second fundamental point of comparison and contrast between the dispensations is the coming of the Second Person of the Godhead in the flesh. One cannot properly value the glory of the incarnation and yet diminish its significance relative to those who lived before it as opposed to those who live after it. The coming of Christ, and His perfect obedience of and sinless self-sacrifice to the Law, is the light to the shadow and the fulfillment to the type. Without diminishing for one moment the efficacy of their salvation, we must acknowledge that the faith of the Old Covenant saint could not be equal in degree, and maybe not even in nature, to the faith of one living on this side of Christ's Advent. To blur this most important of contrasts between the Old and New Covenants is to make Christ's atoning work of no account.

Perhaps we may put the matter this way: the expiation of sin under the various periods of revelation in the Old Testament was *efficient* but *temporary*. God accepted the blood of bulls and goats which, as the writer of Hebrews has already reminded us, could not possibly take away sin (10:4), but He did not thereby lower His holy requirement of absolute and full payment of sin. At all times since the Fall of Adam the penalty of rebellion remained unpaid – a debt incurred by Man, a debt to be paid by Man. The substitutionary blood of animals granted the faithful a parole, but could not possibly blot out the “*certificate of debt*” against man.¹⁰⁰ Again, any thought that the blood of the Old Testament altar was enough to ultimately satisfy the just wrath of a holy God is derogatory of the glory of *the blood of a Lamb unblemished, the precious blood of Christ*.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Colossians 2:14 (NASB)

¹⁰¹ I Peter 1:19

It should not surprise us that the third fundamental point of contrast and comparison between the covenants is to be found in the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. *"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."* (John 3:8) The revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is certainly made easier to see by the light of the New Testament. He was there, to be sure, but the most prominent display of His work was found more associated with the *office* than with the *man*. Saul was not a godly man, but David recognized him as 'the Lord's Anointed' and consequently refused to lift his hand in violence against the king. David's plea that the Lord *"take not Thy Spirit from me"* is most likely his reflection on what happened to his predecessor when the Lord took away His Spirit from Saul. The Spirit of the Lord came upon men at different time in 'the spirit of prophecy,' but it was no infallible indication of their salvation. The nature of the Holy Spirit's work through *indwelling* is, in any clear sense of the concept, wholly absent from the Old Testament except as a future promise,

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

The redemptive corollary to indwelling – regeneration – is also a work of the Holy Spirit that is not clearly manifested under the revelation of the Old Covenant. We need only consider the ignorance of Nicodemus, a 'teacher of Israel,' with regard to the matter to understand that while it was present in vague and shadowy forms in the Old Testament, it nowhere had the stunning clarity of Christ's *"You must be born again!"* Thus we have three critical points upon which the salvation of the Old Covenant saint and that of the New Covenant saint stood on different elevations: the progressive nature of divine

revelation, the incarnation of the Son of God, and regeneration with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We cannot claim that the saint in any of the older dispensations either possessed or understood these things without denigrating their importance and glory in the fullness of time.

And so the author of Hebrews encourages his audience with the knowledge that the Old Covenant saints could not make it without the New Covenant saints. The 'giants' of faith could not be made perfect without us (Hebrews 11:40). Yet although the author does not say it, we must also realize that New Covenant saints cannot be made perfect without the Old Covenant saints. The thought is not directly pertinent to the author's argument, for it was persevering faith displayed by the saints of old that is being illuminated in these passages. And it was a persevering faith that realized the incompleteness of the revelation and salvation thus far revealed, yet continued on *without wavering in unbelief*. But from our perspective these saints who walked before us are indispensable to our own faith, for the progressive revelation that leads us to Christ was mediated from God through their lives, their mouths, and their pens. Their journey carries on with ours, and it is probably that now that Christ has come – "*and led captivity captive*" – they are no longer behind in knowledge. "The saints, then, of the Old Testament march henceforth at equal pace with ourselves in the perfect way of salvation, now finally made known."¹⁰²

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, (11:39)

One of the saddest miscomprehensions of divine revelation is the thought that the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament era are somehow still longing for a return to the promised land of Canaan as the ultimate blessing – the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. It should be clear by now, having read and studied the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, that these men of faith set their

¹⁰² Delitzsch, 294.

sights farther and higher: toward a holy city and not toward 'the Holy Land.' We have every reason to believe that they retained their sensory perception of the world and the progression of redemption even after their deaths – for how else could Abraham have told Dives that the rich man's brothers "*have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them.*" Revelation and the redemption it promised rolled on through time until the blessed advent of the Son of God as the Son of Man, the Seed of Woman and of Abraham come to crush the serpent's head and deliver the children of God from captivity. Theirs was a patient, waiting faith finally rewarded with the appearance of the Deliverer,

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us^[e] to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. (I Peter 3:18-20)

These saints of old walked by faith, *believing that God was a rewarder of those who seek Him*, and thus received the testimony from God that they had walked faithfully according to the light given them. But the 'promise' they had to wait for. That promise has now come in the fullness of revelation and salvation and adoption. "The final, universal blessing made known by the gospel has become the joy of all the patriarchs in the heavenly world, where they are now among the number of the blessed."¹⁰³

There is a challenge in these words of verse 39, implicit but no less powerful for that. The preceding list of men and women of faith contains many whose faith and faithfulness is dauntingly consistent and convicting. Who considers themselves the equal of Enoch? Of Noah? Or even of David? Others among them wobbled early, but once they found the straight and narrow road they did not waver from it. They walked through life resolutely toward a promise that was far beyond the horizon of their own time, and they did so in

¹⁰³ Delitzsch, 291.

relative darkness as far as revelation is concerned. So even though it is not the main point of the closing verses of Chapter 11, it is proper to consider with John Calvin the challenge these Old Testament saint's presents to us, "A tiny spark of light led them to heaven, but now that the sun of righteousness shines on us what excuse shall we offer if we still hold to the earth?"¹⁰⁴

God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (11:40)

The 'something better' provided by God for us has received a great deal of treatment among the commentators. The author is purposefully vague, not giving out in any detail what exactly the 'something better' is. Some commentators believe it to be the advent of Jesus Christ, others the pronouncement of the gospel, and still others the hope of the resurrection. Milligan considers the New Covenant to be the referent in verse 40, "The 'better thing' here spoken of is evidently the new and better covenant which was established on new and better promises."¹⁰⁵ In a sense they are all correct, and in a sense all incorrect. The revelation of these things, and their appearance in time, are indeed 'better things' than were known by the saints of old. In this regard those who live under the New Covenant have indeed had 'better things' provided for them. But an attempt to pinpoint exactly which 'better thing,' or things, the writer alludes to in this verse is to miss the whole point he is trying to make.

The issue here is not to develop in detail the differences between the covenantal eras, nor to show once again the superiority of the new to the old. That the author has already accomplished. The matter at hand is to show the continuing unity within the people of God through both covenant ages and continuing on until the consummation of all things, yet future. The preceding

¹⁰⁴ Calvin, 186.

¹⁰⁵ Milligan, 332.

list of faithful men and women were not meant merely as historical examples that the Hebrew believers were to follow. It is a family roster, so to speak, a rehearsal of some of the multitude of the congregation that will ultimately gather at the true and holy Mt. Zion,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

The author does not want to leave his readers with a detached, even awestruck, view of the faithful saints of years gone by. Rather, as will be apparent in the very next section, he wants to instill within the Hebrew believers a familial association between themselves and the saints of previous eras. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, and the rest are brethren – older brethren in the same family of God. For the Hebrew Christians, despised and shunned by their ancestral race, the loss of heritage must have been acute. But, the writer assures them, there has been no such loss. In fact, believers are the true heirs of the glory of the patriarchs, the kings, and the prophets of old. “God has so arranged matters, that the complete accomplishment of the promise, both to the Old Testament and New Testament believers, shall take place together; they shall be made perfect, but not without us; we and they shall attain perfection together.”¹⁰⁶

Thus faith continues to persevere, for even now the full work of redemption has not yet been made known. Faith

Thus faith continues to persevere, for even now the full work of redemption has not yet been made known. There remains the calling of all the Gentiles, and the salvation of Israel. There remains the consummation of the age and the summing up of all things in Christ. There remains the resurrection unto eternal life, the reuniting of soul to body. There remains the New Heaven and

¹⁰⁶ Brown, 597.

New Earth wherein righteousness dwells. “We, as well as our elder brethren, must die in faith as well as live in faith. We must live believing, and die believing.”¹⁰⁷ Faith, however, is up to the task; as it was for the saints of the Old Covenant, it is for us.

Reaching as it does, far beyond the narrow limits of time and sense, it enables the soul to appropriate to itself, in a good degree, the riches, honors, glories, and blessings of the invisible world; and so qualifies it for the great trials, achievements, and conflicts of life. It makes a man feel confident that God is with him and for him; and that nothing can therefore successfully resist or oppose him, in his works of faith and service of love.¹⁰⁸

Amen.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, 597.

¹⁰⁸ Milligan, 335.