

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

STUDY NUMBER NINETEEN - Hebrews 11:1-22

TEXT:

v. 1 Now faith is the realization of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

v. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

v. 3 By faith we are understanding that the worlds have been prepared by the word of God, so that which we are seeing has not come into being out of things which are visible.

v. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still is speaking.

v. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he had witness borne that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

v. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who is coming to God must believe that He is, and that He proves Himself a rewarder of those who are seeking Him.

v. 7 By faith Noah, being warned [by God] about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household by which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

v. 8 By faith Abraham, obeyed by going out to a place which he was about to be receiving for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

v. 9 By faith he lived as a stranger in the land of promise, as if it were foreign, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

v.10 for he was looking for the city having foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

v.11 By faith even Sarah herself received power to establish a posterity, even beyond the normal time of life, since she considered Him faithful who promised;

v.12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, [as many descendants] as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

v.13 All these died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

v.14 For those who are saying such things are making it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

v.15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

v.16 But as it is, they are longing for a better [home], that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He prepared a city for them.

v.17 By faith Abraham, while being put to the test, offered up Isaac; and he who received the promises was offering up his only begotten [son];

v.18 with reference to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called."

v.19 He considered that God is able to raise [men] even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

v.20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things about to be coming.

v.21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, [leaning] on the top of his staff.

v.22 By faith Joseph, when coming near to the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

INTRODUCTION:

Knowing you appreciate my fondness for country music, I got you a couple of one-liners I picked up from some country music and another little piece of cowboy poetry.

The first one-liner is:

“ALL MY EX’S LIVE IN TEXAS, THAT’S WHY I HANG MY HAT IN TENNESSEE.”

The second one I really love:

“IF I COULD MAKE A LIVIN’ OUT OF LOVIN’ YOU, I’D BE A MILLIONAIRE IN A WEEK OR TWO.”

The Rancher and the Banker

The rancher sat across the desk
 applying for a loan.
 He'd never borrowed cash before,
 he'd made it on his own.
 But times were hard, as he'd explained
 and if they only could,
 He'd like to borrow twenty grand.
 The Banker understood

"That doesn't sound unreasonable,
 although it's quite a lot
 Your cows can be collateral.
 How many cows you got?"
 "Two hundred head," the rancher said,
 "That's give or take a few."
 "Well, that's enough," the banker said
 Of course there's interest due."

In three months' time the rancher came
 and paid the loan in full.
 But in his poke he has some left
 that was expendable.
 "Why don't you leave that cash with me,"
 the banker said content.
 "You put your money in my bank,
 I'll pay you eight percent."

The rancher paused, "Now let me see"
 "You gave me twenty grand
 And I paid you extra back
 for lending me a hand.
 Now I give you this pile of cash
 and you pay me this time
 The extry that I done forked out
 at slightly over prime?"

The banker nodded helpfully
 and lit himself a smoke.
 The rancher seemed to cogitate
 and then he finally spoke,
 "I ain't too good at high finance . . .
 you've put me on the spot.
 But fair is fair, so tell me, sir,

how many cows you got?"

(All I Know About Animal Behavior I Learned in Loehmann's Dressing Room
by Erma Bombeck)

Since our children mothered every animal they could trap in a Mason jar, we attended a pet funeral nearly every week of our lives. There was a small lizard who lived in a terrarium on the back of the commode, whom I suspected died of "flush anxiety." We put to rest a pet beetle; had there been an autopsy, it would have revealed half of my hall carpet. There was a memorial service for a hamster who opted for the death penalty by biting our electric toaster wire in half.

But the most poignant of the services were the ones we conducted for deceased guppies at the toilet bowl, or what we affectionately called the Heavenly Aquarium.

We'd all stand around the rim staring into the water and I'd ask if the guppy had a name. (They always did.) Then I would ask each child to say something appropriate and nice about the fish. Sentiments come to mind like, "She didn't smell until last night." "She didn't bite anyone." "I'm sorry I fed you pizza, Ethel."

We all agreed Ethel had had a good life and one of the kids would unwrap her body from a nose tissue and drop it into the toilet. We commended her body to the plumbing and flushed. I told them Captain Ty-D-Bol would guide her personally to that big sewer in the sky.
p. 106

Many humans who have pets vehemently deny that they own animals who resemble them, but it's true. Never is this more evident than at a dog show competition, where there are a number of breeds running with their owners.

A woman who has already lost the battle of the gravity will have a basset hound on a leash. A crabby-looking, portly man will lead around a bulldog. And a woman who has bangs down to her nose and never shaves her legs will display a sheepdog.

I must admit, every time I see a rhino from the rear with those little short legs holding it up, I get a bit uncomfortable. If I don't stop with the root beer floats, that is my future.
pp. 190-91

I looked in the mirror the other day. The reflection showed a woman who looked like she had just walked into a wrecking ball.

Would I be stupid enough to marry someone who looked like me?
When the Pope wears plaids.
p. 161

The writer to the book of Hebrews finds himself writing to a group of folks who have come to know Christ as Savior but because of their Jewish heritage and the persecution they are facing as a result of this commitment to Christ, they are contemplating going back and living under Judiasm and escaping all of the troubles and trials that they are presently experiencing.

The writer is pleading with his readers to:

PERSEVERE AND TO PRESS ON.

He is building his argument upon the premise that:

ALL YOU WILL EVER NEED YOU HAVE IN JESUS.

He has argued that Christ is:

SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS, and

SUPERIOR TO MOSES.

He then takes them to Cadesh Barnea when the children of Israel refuse to enter the land and wanted to go back to Egypt and argues that if they go back they will never enter into His rest. The adequacy which could be theirs in Christ will never be theirs.

He argues:

THERE ARE NO REWIND BUTTONS ON THE VCR OF LIFE.

You cannot go back and undo what has been done in the relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

He then turns to the reality that every one of us has a day in court. The question of course is: WHO IS GOING TO BE OUR REPRESENTATIVE OR ATTORNEY BEFORE A HOLY GOD on that day.

We could say who is your:

ATTORNEY,

PRIEST,

GO-BETWEEN,

REPRESENTATIVE

before a holy God.

This leads us into seeing the **SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD** which is the order of Melchizedek as opposed to the Aaronic priesthood under the old Law.

His argument is, we have a new:

PRIEST,

COVENANT, and

SACRIFICE

in Christ that has taken away sins.

In our last study together in Hebrews 10 the writer basically is challenging the readers to keep going, to live by faith, to trust God and His sufficiency to get them through the tough times ahead.

Let me refresh your memories by reading the FINAL 5 VERSES of Hebrews 10:

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which is having a great reward. For you are having need of perseverance, in order that, having done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul is having no pleasure in him. But we are not of the shrinking back kind to destruction, but of those who are having faith to the preserving of the soul.

We are not surprised that when we open Hebrews 11 we are opening a chapter that is devoted to the SUBJECT OF FAITH.

You could title Hebrews 11:

THE LIFE OF FAITH.

IN MY SEMINARY NOTES the chapter is titled:

THE EVIDENCE OF THE LIFE OF FAITH.

The chapter illustrates PATIENT ENDURANCE, the validity and necessity of this endurance in faith.

Since the Old Testament saints exercised faith, to depart from faith is to depart from the saints not to them.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In concluding the previous warning section, the writer touched on the theme of living by faith (cf. 10:37-39). What this really means he then expounded in terms his readers could fully appreciate, because it is faith that underlies the experience of the heroes of Old Testament history. Since these people experienced faith, so could his readers.
p. 807

In outlining the verses that we are going to be considering in Hebrews 11: 1-22 in this particular study we are going to find that the author sets forth several important considerations about faith in the FIRST 3 VERSES.

Beginning at verse 4 he is going to be giving us the great CABELCADE OF STARS who are finding their names in the great hall of faith.

We will be considering 8 of those in this particular study.

HEBREWS 11--THE BIBLE'S WAR MEMORIAL

In January, 1983, a memorial to the American men and women who died in the Vietnam War was unveiled in Washington, D.C. The name of everyone on record who was killed in the fighting was etched in that huge black stone. Many thousands of parents, wives, brothers, sisters, and friends have traveled to the capital to find the name of their loved one on that monument. Most are grateful that the sacrifice of their beloved relative or friend has been memorialized.

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

I can remember Pearl and I walking down that stone sidewalk with the wall beside us looking for the name of our one friend who had died in the battle of Doc Tao, John Sigurdson. After consulting the directory we found his name on one of the panels and stood there and reflected on his life and his witness before he died on the battlefield. Thanking him in our hearts that he was willing to put his life on the line for freedom.

In essence that is what the author is doing in this powerful chapter. He is taking the principles and applying them to life and he is showing the readers that others were able to persevere with the promises through to ultimate victory. Why can they not follow in the steps of these past heroes in surmounting the difficulties they are facing to pursue the promises to the ultimate victory that will be theirs in Christ?

Bruce says:

Our author might well have proceeded from 10:39 to the exhortation to “run with steadfast endurance the race for which we are entered” (12:1); but first he encourages his readers further by reminding them of examples of faith in earlier days. In Old Testament times, he points out, there were many men and women who had nothing but the promises of God to rest upon, without any visible evidence that these promises would ever be fulfilled; yet so much did these promises mean to them that they regulated the whole course of their lives in their light. The promises related to a state of affairs belonging to the future; but these people acted as if that state of affairs were already present, so convinced were they that God could and would fulfill what he had promised. In other words, they were men and women of faith. Their faith consisted simply in taking God at his word and directing their lives accordingly; things yet future as far as their experiences went were thus present to faith, and things outwardly unseen were visible to the inward eye. p. 276

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

There is no real break between the end of the last and the beginning of this chapter. Chapter x is mostly taken up with an exhortation to steadfastness and a warning against apostasy. It concludes with a contrast between fearfulness and faith which forms an introduction from the theme of chapter xi.
pp. 185-6

Wiersbe says:

This chapter introduces the final section of the epistle (chaps. 11-13) which I have called "A Superior Principle --Faith." The fact that Christ is a superior Person (chaps. 1-6) and that He exercises a superior Priesthood (chaps. 7-10) ought to encourage us to put our trust in Him. The readers of this epistle were being tempted to go back into Judaism and put their faith in Moses. Their confidence was in the visible things of this world, not the invisible realities of God.
p. 120

Griffith Thomas says:

It is important to see this chapter in relation to the preceding context. In chapter 10:22-25 there were three exhortations, respectively to Faith, Hope, and Love. These are elaborated in turn: chapter 11 dealing with Faith; chapter 12 with Hope; chapter 13 with Love. But this chapter is also closely connected with the thought of faith in 10:38, 39, with its reference to endurance based on the promise, which has Hab. 2:4 as its key. The danger of these Christians was living by sight, not by faith.
p. 140

Hession in From Shadow to Substance says:

It is only after we have been introduced to this theme that we find ourselves moving into the famous chapter 11, which someone has called the “Westminster Abbey” of the Bible, because there lie buried the great Old Testament heroes of faith. But the chapter is not merely a dissertation on the subject of faith, as if dropped in from nowhere. It is introduced here only in pursuit of this main theme of endurance and to show that the only way we can endure to the end against all odds is by faith.
p. 185

A. T. Robertson says:

He has just said that “we are of faith” (10:39), not of apostasy. Now he proceeds in a chapter of great eloquence and passion to illustrate his point by a recital of the heroes of faith whose example should spur them to like loyalty now.
p. 418

Westcott points out:

The reference to Faith, as the characteristic of the true people of God, leads the writer of the Epistle to develop at length the lesson of Faith given in the records of the Old Covenant. From the first the divine revelation has called out Faith. The elementary presuppositions of religion, the existence and moral attributes of God and the creation of the world, rest on Faith. Hence it is to be expected that Faith should still find its appropriate trial. Thus the appeal to the past experience of the readers, and to the general law of God’s dealings, is confirmed in detail by the manifold experience of the saints.
p. 349

MacArthur observes:

First-century Jews saw everything as a matter of works. Even after being shown the basic truths of the New Covenant, the tendency was for them to try to fit these new principles into the mold of works righteousness.

By the time of Christ, Judaism was no longer the supernatural system God had originally given. It had been twisted into a works system, with all kinds of legalistic requirements. It was a system of self-effort, self-salvation, and self-glorification. It was far from the faith system that God had given. In many ways it was a religious cult built on ethics. (And even the divinely ordained Judaism was falsified without its fulfillment in Christ.)

As all works systems, it was despised by God--particularly because it was a corruption of the true system He had given. God has never redeemed man by works, but always by faith (cf. Hab. 2:4). As this chapter makes clear, from the time of Adam on, God has honored faith, not works. Works have always been commanded as a by-product of faith, never as a means of salvation. God does not tolerate any self-imposed ethical system as a means of reaching Him.

pp. 285-6

Lenski says:

This is one of the grand chapters of the Bible, a gallery of notable portraits of ancient great believers, each drawn with a master hand. They all believed the unseen, they all trusted a promise, things for which they had to wait and hope. One grand characteristic makes them all kin--faith. Things adverse, matters contradictory, painful, long, they refused to permit to quench their faith.

p. 372

G. Campbell Morgan titles this chapter:

“THE TRIUMPHS OF FAITH.”

He says:

So lastly, the letter to the Hebrews is pre-eminently the document of faith, and reveals the principle of triumph over all sorts of conditions as revealed in the eleventh chapter. But in every case it is the Gospel for the world. Faith is the principle of life. It is the emancipation from all tyranny. Faith is the principle of liberty. It is the secret of victory in all circumstances.

p. 15

Hughes observes:

This was important to the writer of Hebrews because of the rising storm of persecution that was about to fall on the church. He knew that the key to survival was a solid faith and an attendant hope. That is why in Hebrews 10:38 he quoted Habakkuk 2:4, “But my righteous one will live by faith.” There is a spiritual axiom implicit here: *faith* produces *hope*, and hope produces *perseverance*. Without faith one will inevitably shrink back.

p. 60

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

DeHaan says:

It is more than a chapter on faith, for it records the “victories” of faith. Following as it does the tenth chapter of Hebrews, it is of tremendous significance. The theme of Hebrews must not be lost sight of. It is a solemn warning against coming short of victory, an appeal to believers not to neglect their so great salvation, but to press on in spite of all difficulties. The danger of letting our opportunities of grace slip (2:1), of coming short of victory (4:1), of remaining spiritual babes (5:12) is constantly held before us, and the terrible consequences of disobedience are stated again and again.
p. 148

He says further:

The word “faith” occurs twenty-one times in Hebrews eleven. The expression “through faith” occurs five times, and the expression “by faith” is used thirteen times. It is the record of the overcoming, victorious faith of the heroes of the Old Testament. These heroes had more than simple saving faith by which they believed unto salvation. In addition they had faith which resulted in sacrifice, separation and service. It was a faith which did not stand still but “went on to perfection.” It was a growing, developing, increasing faith which resulted in victory at any cost. We must distinguish between saving faith and obedient faith. Thousands of believers have trusted Christ for their salvation, but are not obeying Him in service. It is a strange paradox that Christians will trust God for their souls’ eternal salvation, but dare not trust Him with their bodily needs. They have committed their eternal destiny into His hands by faith, but fail to yield and surrender their temporal things to Him, and trust Him for the things of this life.
p. 155

Actually the whole chapter is an expansion of:

Hebrews 6:12

In order that you may not become sluggish (lazy), but imitators of those who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary calls these FIRST 3 VERSES:

THE PROLOGUE

And they state:

In a brief Prologue the author set forth three fundamental considerations about faith: its basic nature, the honor associated with it, and its way of seeing things. In its essence **faith is being sure . . .**
p. 807

These verse are going to show us what faith will do.

v. 1 Now faith is the realization of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

This is not intended to be a definition of faith but rather characteristics of a functional faith.

The future and unseen can be made real for men by faith.

According to verse 1, faith is 2 THINGS:

1. "REALIZATION OF THINGS HOPED FOR"
2. "THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Faith is . . . [the] unseen hopes and realities.
p. 807

Wiersbe says:

Faith is confidence in God that leads to obedience to God. True faith is based on what God says and is demonstrated in what we do. People with faith *do* things for God, and God does things for them.

Faith is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It is for common people and not just great leaders. We need faith for worshiping (v. 4) as well as for working (v. 7), walking (vv. 8-9), waiting (vv. 10-12), and warring (vv. 30-34). In any area of life where you ignore faith, you will sin (Rom. 14:23).
p. 820

Faith is like a toothbrush. Every man should have one and use it regularly, but he shouldn't try to use someone else's.

J. G. Stipe

Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.

St. Augustine

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

DISCOVERING THE REALM OF FAITH

Excerpts from one of John Wesley's sermons. "God has appointed faith to supply the defect of sense, to take us up where sense lets us down, and to help us over the gulf." Faith grows from that of a servant, with obedience based in fear, to that of a son who obeys God out of love. The servant should be exhorted to "press on by all possible means, until he passes from faith to faith, from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son, from the spirit of fearful bondage to the spirit of childlike love, with Christ revealed in his heart." "Discovering the realm of faith" by John Wesley. Charisma & Christian Life, Dec. 1988. Pages 86-92.

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

MacArthur says:

Faith is not a wistful longing that something may come to pass in an uncertain tomorrow. True faith is an absolute certainty, often of things that the world considers unreal and impossible. Christian hope is belief in God against the world--not belief in the improbable against chance. If we follow a God whose audible voice we have never heard and believe in a Christ whose face we have never seen, we do so because our faith has a reality, a substance, an assurance that is unshakable.

p. 287

Westcott says:

The statement is perfectly general ('things hoped for,' 'objects not seen'), and not specific in regard to the contents of the revelation given by God. Faith deals with everything which comes under these two categories.
p. 350

Lane points out:

Faith is thus an effective power directed toward the future. It springs from a direct, personal encounter with the living God. The forward-looking capacity of faith enables an individual to venture courageously and serenely into an unseen future, supported only by the word of God. As a positive orientation of life toward God and his word, faith has the capacity to unveil the future so that the solid reality of events as yet unseen can be grasped by the believer.
p. 329

Barclay says:

To the writer to the Hebrews faith is a hope that is absolutely certain that what it believes is true, and that what it expects will come. It is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it is the hope which looks forward with utter certainty. It is not the hope which takes refuge in a perhaps; it is the hope which is founded on a conviction.
pp. 144-5

Pink points out:

The contents of v. 1 do not furnish so much a formal definition of faith, as they supply a terse description of how it operates and what it produces. Faith, whether natural or spiritual, is the belief of a testimony. Here, faith is believing the testimony of God. How it operates in reference to the subjects of this testimony, whether they be considered simply as future, or as both invisible and future, and the effects produced in and on the soul, the Holy Spirit here explains.
p. 153

Hughes points out:

The character of faith is spelled out with great care in the famous lines of verse 1: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Faith's character is, in a word, *certitude*--a dynamic certainty about what God has promised. It is not a feeling, like the line from *Oklahoma*:

*O what a beautiful morning,
O what a beautiful day.
I've got a wonderful feeling,
Everything's going my way!*

It is not optimism or bootstrap positive thinking either. It is not a hunch. It is not sentimentality. An old song says, "You gotta have faith"--the sentiment being that if you somehow have faith in faith, you will be okay. And faith is not brainless. The cynical Ambrose Bierce wrongly described faith in his *Devil's Dictionary* as "belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge of things without parallel."

True faith is neither brainless nor a sentimental feeling. It is a solid conviction resting on God's words that makes the future present and the invisible seen.
p. 60

Wiersbe in his little book Run With the Winners says:

The sphere of faith is the invisible and the impossible. Dr. J. Oswald Sanders has stated it perfectly: "Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."

p. 14

In other words, true Bible faith has to do with the inner person, not the outer circumstances. With the "eyes of the heart" we see the invisible. With the "ears of the heart" we hear God speak to us through His Word. We see the invisible, hear the inaudible, touch the intangible, and do the impossible!

p. 14

Macaulay says:

Observe the sphere in which this working principle of faith operates-- "things hoped for . . . things not seen." That is, the region in which faith works is beyond present experience. Once the thing hoped for is attained, once the invisible floats into sight, faith's task is done, to work on something else still unrealized, something else unseen. Such phrases as, "I'll believe it when it really happens," or, "I'll believe it when I see it with my own eyes," are the antithesis of faith.

p. 163

So on I go, not knowing--
 I would not if I might;
 I'd rather walk in the dark with God
 Than go alone in the light.
 I'd rather walk by faith with Him
 Than go alone by sight.

p. 165

G. Campbell Morgan in his little book The Triumphs of Faith says:

That is the sphere in which faith operates in the spiritual world in the midst of which we are always living, even in the dust of the city. The unseen things, the hidden forces that are everywhere, if we could see them. We cry out, "Master, what shall we do?" But the man who can see says, "Lord, open his eyes," and the Lord in the ancient story opened his eyes, those eyes that are more than human sight, and "Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about." The young man had not seen them, but they were there, unseen things. What a wonderful story that is, and how perfectly it illustrates this: the faith of Elisha, and the sight that came to his servants. Some of us may be thinking of those lines of Wesley, in his great hymn:

"Lo, to faith's enlightened sight,
All the mountain flamed with light.
Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,
Circling us with hosts of fire."

We cannot see these things, but they are there, and faith enters into that realm.

p. 22

2 Kings 6:15-17

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

1 Peter 1:8

and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

Stedman says:

This chapter centers on and focuses upon what faith is. There is need for clarity on this. I find this word, faith, is greatly misunderstood and there are many peculiar ideas of what it is. It might help to show, first of all, what faith is not. Faith, for instance, is not positive thinking; that is something quite different. Faith is not a hunch that is followed. Faith is not hoping for the best, hoping that everything will turn out all right. Faith is not a feeling of optimism. Faith is none of these things though all of them have been identified as faith.

p. 182

F. B. Meyer says:

Run through this roll call of heroes. You must admit that those whose names are mentioned stand in the first ranks of our race, shining as stars. But their claim to be thus regarded was certainly not natural genius. Enoch, for instance, and his line, being Sethites, may have been inferior to many of the family of Cain, so far as mere intellectual or artistic attainment went. But his faith lifted him out of the ranks of mediocrity to a species of primacy among men; and should faith become the master principle of your life and mine, it would similarly enlarge and enrich our whole being.

p. 42

Hession says:

The aspect of faith that is stressed here, however, is none of these. It is rather the faith that endures to the end, and does so in spite of all opposition and suffering, and all because it has “respect to the recompense of the reward.”

p. 185

(Knowing the Heart of God by George MacDonald)

It is one thing to believe in a god: it is quite another to believe in God! One of four gates stands open to us: to deny the existence of God; to acknowledge his existence but say he is not good; to say, "I wish there was a God," and be miserable because there is none; or to say, "There is a God, and he must be perfect in goodness or he could not be," and thus give ourselves to him heart and soul.

p. 21

(God Works the Night Shift by Ron Mehl)

I recently came across the journals of John Paton, a missionary from the last century. Paton and his wife were called to minister on an obscure island on which no missionaries had ever set foot. It was an island occupied by ruthless cannibals and headhunters.

As they were sailing to their destination, the ship's captain tried to dissuade them. He couldn't bear to leave the young couple on that deadly island. "You can't do this!" he told them. But since they were determined to go, he at last put them in a dinghy and sadly watched them row away toward the shore.

John wrote in his diary how, every night, he saw the natives in the bushes, staring at them, but they never attacked.

Some time later, Paton's wife and baby died in childbirth. He buried them on the beach, then slept on their graves so the cannibals wouldn't eat their bodies. Eventually, one cannibal was expelled from the tribe, and he and John struck up a friendship.

John didn't return home for over thirty years. He wrote, "I came to the sound of cannibal drums. I leave to the sound of church bells."

The day he was leaving, the chief said to him, "John, there is one thing I never asked you. Do you remember when you first came here and camped on the beach?"

"Yes."

"What was that army that encircled you and your wife every night?"
pp. 132-3

v. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

That this is honorable is seen in the fact that Old Testament worthies, **the ancients, were commended for it.**

p. 807

The supreme example of this faith is seen in Hebrews 12:2 in the Lord Jesus Christ.

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the originator and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Intense Moments with the Savior: Learning to Feel by Ken Gire)

The drama of the cross and the exercise of faith on the Savior's part is seen in the words of the thief hanging next to Him:

"Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Slowly Jesus turns his head to see the man who insulted him. He sees eyes that are lit with anger. Anger at life for bringing him there. Anger at Rome for putting him there. Anger at Jesus for leaving him there.

How simple it would be for Jesus to ease the burn in the soul that enflames this man's eyes. He has done it so many times before. He thinks of the Gerasene demoniac and the fire he extinguished when he expelled the demons from the desert of that man's soul. He thinks, too, of the woman at the well and how the living water he offered quenched the desperate thirst in her soul.

He can stop the fire in this man's soul too. And the fever in his wounds. And in the man next to him. . . .

If only Jesus would save himself.

And us.

But Jesus knows something the man hanging next to him doesn't. He knows he can choose one or the other. He can save himself. Or he can save us. But he can't do both.

In spite of how much pain he was in. In spite of how tired he was. How weak. And how alone. He had the strength to choose us.

It was the struggle of the wilderness that prepared Jesus for the sufferings of the cross. Giving him the strength not to give in . . . the courage not to come down . . . and the selflessness to save us instead of himself.

p. 112

Hebrews 12:3

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

John MacArthur says:

Men of old gained approval from God because of their faith, and because of nothing else. God has always approved and recognized the person of faith. This verse implies what other parts of the chapter make clear--that God makes his approval *known* to those who trust Him. How God shows His approval varies, but every saint, just as surely as Enoch (Heb. 11:5), has God's witness that his faith is pleasing to his Lord.

Faith is not simply one way to please God; it is the only way.
p. 289

Hughes tells us to:

Think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (alluded to in 11:34). They had nothing but God's word to rest on. They had no visible evidence that they would be delivered in this life. But they knew they would ultimately be delivered--they knew it so well that it was a present reality.
p. 63

Daniel 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

So much of faith today is defined as GOD COMING THROUGH FOR US. And if He does not, we have not exercised faith.

We notice here in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that their trust in God is a trust in God unconditionally, no matter what. Whether He does or

whether He doesn't they still are believing in God and His eternal purpose for their lives.

To my way of thinking it is when God does not come through because of some different program or greater purpose involved, that we have a true picture of faith. That we would go on continuing to believe in God and His goodness and His grace to get us through whatever circumstances He has designed for our individual lives.

v. 3 By faith we are understanding that the worlds have been prepared by the word of God, so that which we are seeing has not come into being out of things which are visible.

Creation imposes the responsibility of faith in the creation even though unseen.

In creation something came out of nothing.

Lane says:

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, which is celebrated as the essence of faith in v 1b.

p. 330

Hughes observes:

The nearest star in our very average galaxy, Alpha Centauri, is 25,000,000 miles away. Our glorious sun that fills our sky and lights our days is but a mere speck in our galaxy. The huge star Betelgeuse is 27,000,000 times larger than our sun. It would take fourteen 25,000,000-mile trips (the distance of Alpha Centauri) to travel the diameter of Betelgeuse. All that, and yet our galaxy is only one of a hundred thousand million other galaxies. The universe ought to cause us to praise God, as did the great astronomer Kepler, who constantly did so--especially when he discovered the third law of planetary motion and said, "I yield freely to the sacred frenzy; I dare frankly to confess that I have stolen the golden vessels of the Egyptians to build a tabernacle for my God far from the bounds of Egypt. If you pardon me, I shall rejoice; if you reproach me, I shall endure."

p. 64

(The Mature Man: Becoming a Man of Impact by David DeWitt)

I once heard someone say, "God created people because He likes stories."

p. 19

(The Good Samaritan Strikes Again by Patrick F. McManus)

I've always been fascinated by the protective colorations of various kinds of wildlife. How did it happen that certain creatures blend in so perfectly with their background? I've never been able to buy Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest. Let's say that a few eons ago a bunch of pretty, little, bright red bugs show up on a sandy desert, but a couple of these bugs are defective and turn out to be an ugly sandy color. All the pretty bugs make fun of the ugly bugs, but then one day a big flock of sparrows shows up and eats all the pretty red bugs. The sparrows don't even notice the little defective sand-colored bugs, who are sitting off on a dune laughing themselves silly. From then on, all this species of bug is sand colored. That's essentially the survival-of-the-fittest theory. One of the many flaws in the theory is that while the two little sand-colored bugs are sitting on the dune laughing, a camel walks by and squishes them. This, to me, is the more accurate view of life. Darwin was just too much of an optimist.

p. 34

CONFUSED

A man visiting a zoo was astounded to see an orangutan with a Bible in one hand and a copy of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in the other. The man asked, "Excuse me, but are you actually reading those books?"

"Of course," the ape replied.

"Well," said the man, "are you sure you understand what you are reading?"

"I'm not so sure," said the orangutan. "This book says I'm my brother's keeper and the other one says I'm my keeper's brother."

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

CREATION AND THANKSGIVING

The marvels of creation should fill our hearts with gratitude, but always to the Creator. In his devotional book *My Utmost For His Highest*, Oswald Chambers wrote, "Learn to associate ideas worthy of God with all that happens in nature--the sunrises and the sunsets, the sun and the stars, the changing seasons--and your imagination will never be at the mercy of your impulses but will always be at the service of God." And service is heartfelt thanksgiving to the One who brought everything into existence, and sustains our world by His mighty power.

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

THE HEAVEN'S SILENT WITNESS

During the French Revolution many leaders were determined to do away with Christianity forever. One lovely, clear night an atheist boastfully proclaimed his satanic doctrine to a poor countryman. "Everything," he ranted, "will be abolished--churches, Bibles, clergymen. Yes, even the word 'God' itself! We shall remove everything that speaks of religion." The listener gave a quiet chuckle. "Why do you laugh?" demanded the other. The peasant pointed to the stars and replied, "I was just wondering how you and your crew would manage to get them down!"

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

Parker says:

The practical lessons which come out of these reflections are clear and simple: for example, that the movement of life is from the less to the greater. We are moving towards something that is exaggerated by symbols, but towards something which is imperfectly expressed by them. "The half hath not been told us." "To die is gain." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." "Hereafter ye shall see." We are thus called upon to live a life of hope. We thank the flower for its beauty, and tell it how nearly it sets forth the better flowers not seen just now. We err vitally in supposing that the earth shows us the end of anything. What is the earth but as a board on which diagrams are drawn by an invisible hand, giving us some rude outline of things that are yet to be shown to us in all their sweep and grandeur?

p. 200

We come now to a TRANSITIONAL POINT in our study of the book of Hebrews.

We are going to move from:

PRINCIPLES to PEOPLE,

BELIEF to BIOGRAPHIES OF BELIEF.

We are going to see the EXAMPLES OF FAITH in the remainder of this chapter (verses 4-40).

We are going to be considering 8 BIOGRAPHIES in the remainder of this study.

These biographies are divided into 2 PARTS.

1. FAITH IN THE PRE-PATRIARCHIAL PERIOD (verses 4-7)
2. FAITH IN THE PATRIARCHIAL PERIOD (verses 8-22)

Lenski says:

On one golden cord all these names are strung together with the deeds that proved the faith in which they lived and died, the faith that God approved, his testimony being immortalized in Scripture. Always, always it was "this" faith as defined by the writer.

p. 378

We come now to a consideration of faith in THE PRE-PATRIARCHIAL period and there will be 3 BIOGRAPHIES that are mentioned:

1. ABEL
2. ENOCH
3. NOAH

v. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still is speaking.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In the first major movement of his exposition, the author stressed the theme suggested in verse 2. Faith wins acceptance and reward from God.

Abel represents the **righteous man** referred to in 10:38, whose acceptance before God was based on a superior sacrifice. Like Abel, the readers found acceptance before God on the basis of the better sacrifice of the New Covenant. Their unbelieving brethren, like **Cain**, found no such divine approbation. Even death does not extinguish the testimony of a man like Abel.

p. 807

Kistemaker says:

The writer of Hebrews begins his list of the heroes of faith with Abel and Enoch. For both of these illustrations, he uses the verb *to commend*. In verse 4 we read, "By faith [Abel] was commended as a righteous man," and in verse 5, "For before [Enoch] was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

p. 312

Westcott helps us with an overview when he says:

. . . then in Abel, Enoch, Noah, the writer considers three types of Faith under different circumstances, as answering to man's constitution, to the development of life, to special revelation. Abel recognised the natural obligations of man to God generally, and fulfilled them unto death, through which he still lives (v. 4). Enoch realised fellowship with God in action till it was crowned in an eternal fellowship (5 f.). Noah obeyed a specific direction of God and was saved through suffering (7).
pp. 351-2

The relationship of these biographies to creation in verse 3 is explained by Westcott:

The belief in creation--the belief in a divine will manifested in the existence of the world--is the necessary foundation for the life of faith in all its manifestations. Hence this primary action of faith is declared first.
p. 352

Wiersbe in his commentary says:

The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a summary of the lives and labors of great men and women of faith found in the Old Testament. In each instance, you will find the same elements of faith: (1) God spoke of them through His Word; (2) their inner selves were stirred in different ways; (3) they obeyed God; (4) He bore witness about them.
p. 122

Wiersbe says further:

God had revealed to Adam and his descendants the true way of worship, and Abel obeyed God by faith. In fact, his obedience cost him his life. Cain was not a child of God (1 John 3:12) because he did not have faith. He was religious but not righteous. Abel speaks to us today as the first martyr of the faith.

p. 122

Owen says:

The faith of Abel was fixed on God not only as a Creator, but as a Redeemer; as Him who in infinite wisdom and grace had appointed the way of redemption by sacrifice and atonement, intimated in the first promise.

Wherefore, his faith was accompanied with a sense of sin and guilt, with his lost condition by the fall, and a trust in the way of redemption and recovery which God had provided. And this he testified in the kind of his sacrifice, which was by death and blood; in the one owning the death which himself by reason of sin was liable unto; in the other the way of atonement, which was to be by blood, the blood of the promised Seed.

p. 218

Delitzsch says:

It is faith, and faith only, resting on the revealed creative word, which penetrates through the veil of phenomena to the divine super-sensual ground behind it. Creation itself is a postulate of faith. The very formation of the stage of human history, on which God's dealings with man have been displayed, is a fact disclosed only to faith.

Having laid down this position, the writer proceeds, with the clue of Scripture statements in his hand, to review the enterprises and accomplishments of faith throughout the course of sacred history.

p. 223

Phillip says:

The writer now turns his attention to what we can call “the primeval age.” The three witnesses he introduces from this age are Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Abel shows us faith worshiping; Enoch demonstrates faith walking; and Noah illustrates faith witnessing.
p. 162

Pink gives us an overview when he says:

The 11th chapter of Hebrews has three divisions. The first, which comprises vv. 1 to 3, is introductory, setting forth the *excellency* of faith. The second, which is covered by vv. 4 to 7, outlines the *life* of faith. The third, which begins at v. 8 and runs to the end of the chapter, fills in that outline, and, as well, describes the *achievements* of faith.
p. 161

J. Vernon McGee says:

We are given here the experience of three individuals who lived before the Flood--antediluvians we call them (one of them even lived through the Flood and after it). Abel is the first, and in him you have the *way* of faith. Then in Enoch we have the *walk* of faith. And in Noah we have the *witness* of faith. These men lived before the Flood, and faith was in operation at that time. These men walked by faith, lived by faith, and were saved by faith.
p. 583

Stedman proposes:

Now let us look at the three demonstrations the author gives here to illustrate faith. There are more than three in this chapter, of course, but these first three illustrate what faith is, the rest reveal how faith works.
p. 188

Genesis 4:1-7

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

“BY FAITH ABEL OFFERED TO GOD A BETTER SACRIFICE THAN CAIN”

Abel recognized his obligation to God to come in obedience. This is faith worshipping.

It was through this offering that **“HE OBTAINED THE TESTIMONY THAT HE WAS RIGHTEOUS, GOD TESTIFYING ABOUT HIS GIFTS AND THROUGH FAITH.”**

G. Campbell Morgan raises the question:

Why did God accept one and not the other? There is only one answer that can be full and final. The sacrifice that Abel brought was a confession of sin, demanding sacrifice. There is no suggestion of sin in Cain's offering, no demand for sacrifice. When Abel came into the presence of God, bringing a sacrifice, this was the sign and acknowledgment of sin, and the need for some mediation in drawing nigh to God.

p. 51

MacArthur says:

When Abel did what God said, he revealed his obedience and acknowledged his sinfulness. Cain, on the other hand, was disobedient and did not acknowledge his sin. **Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain** because God had prescribed a *blood* sacrifice. Somehow Abel, and Cain as well, knew what God wanted. The difference between the two was that Abel gave what God wanted, whereas Cain gave what he himself wanted. Abel was obedient and Cain was disobedient. Abel acknowledged his sin. Cain did not.

p. 299

Macaulay says:

Cain, on the other hand, had an inadequate conception of God's holiness, therefore an inadequate sense of sin; consequently he felt no need of a covering, an atonement. He came offering the worship of self-will and self-sufficiency and self-righteousness.

Indeed, it was the worship of self rather than the worship of God.
p. 169

English says:

Contrast Cain's offering. Intrinsically it was no less valuable than Abel's. It may have been of greater worth, and assuredly it was more beautiful to behold. It represented the labor of its offerer. But it was not in accord with the command of God and was an expression of Cain's trust in himself. By his offering Cain witnessed to the fact that he felt that his way was better than God's way. No acknowledgment of guilt seems to have been his, but only assurance of his acceptance before God. And this is the fashion that unbelieving men have followed through the ages unto this day, when they have approached God other than in His prescribed manner. Whether they have offered God morality, or works, or charity, or ritual, it matters not. These are the offerings of Cain and are unacceptable to God.

pp. 345-6

Hughes says:

Cain's offering was a monument to pride and self-righteousness--"the way of Cain." Abel, on the other hand, believed and obeyed God: "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did." He brought God what God wanted. This was acceptable worship.
p. 69

The Scriptures indicate that when God rejected Cain's offering, Cain became "very angry, and his face was downcast" (Genesis 4:5), thus revealing just how shallow his devotion was. And when God pleaded with Cain to desist and do what was right, warning him with powerful metaphorical language that sin was crouching like a monster at his door and desiring to have him (Genesis 4:6, 7), God's plea was met by ominous silence. whereas Cain's mother had been talked into sin, Cain would not be talked out of it.
p. 69

(The Hidden Price of Greatness by Ray Beeson & Ranelda Mack Hunsicker)

"God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves."
p. 135

Wiersbe in his book Run With the Winners says:

The basic difference between Cain and Abel was *faith*. Cain did not really have saving faith toward God, even though he was a "religious" man. Abel's faith made a martyr out of him. Cain's unbelief made a murderer out of him.

It seems strange that the writer would start his "Hall of Fame" with a martyr. It might discourage somebody from entering the race. Why not begin with a great leader like Moses, or a popular hero like David? But the choice is a wise one: let the reader know that faith in Jesus Christ is a faith worth dying for, that running the race costs something. That will separate the runners from the spectators! "Ministry that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing," said John Henry Jowett.
p. 26

He says further:

Abel brought the “firstlings of his flock,” the very best that he had. “Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce” (Proverbs 3:9). “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Too often we think first of ourselves, and we give to God whatever may be left over, if we give to Him at all. One Christian described this approach to life as “burning the candle to please ourselves and then blowing the smoke in God’s face.”
pp. 29-30

There are many who today are unwilling to come to God according to His prescribed approach through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. They are like little children determined to do things their own way.

(Worms In My Tea: And Other Mixed Blessings by Becky Freeman & Ruthie Arnold)

Fortunately, I came to realize that a tender-hearted sucker does not always a good mother make, nor any sleep receive, and I began to move from the Back to Nature literature to the Dare to Discipline genre.

Sooner or later, however, comes a day when our children echo back to us the words of discipline we have taught them. One evening some years back before Gabe joined us, and after a late bedtime fiasco on an evening with no relief from a late working, stressed for success daddy, I had come to the end of my patience. I ordered the boys to bed, plunked Rachel on the couch and sentenced her to lie there until I could get a grip on myself. I began furiously loading the dishes into the dishwasher, grumbling to myself all the while until, like a balloon out of air, I exhausted my anger. Rachel, noticing a quieting in the kitchen, bravely peeked over the back of the couch. She smiled knowingly and spoke in the most maternal tone of voice.

“Are you ready to behave now?”

pp. 9-10

I think it would be good for us to take a moment and focus on the LAST PHRASE in verse 4:

“AND THROUGH FAITH, THOUGH HE IS DEAD, HE STILL IS SPEAKING.”

This is the legacy of faith.

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

According to Gen. iv. II God said to Cain, 'The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground'. In Genesis this is probably a cry to God for vengeance; but in this Epistle the blood of martyred Abel neither cries to God for revenge nor intercedes with God for men: the meaning is rather that Abel's faith still speaks to men by way of illustrious example. His faith manifested in sacrificial offerings remains even now as a witness and encouragement to men; and **this is why, although he is dead, he still speaks.**
p. 190

Kistemaker says:

The author places Abel before the readers as a righteous man who lived by faith (Heb. 10:38) Abel is at the top of the list of the Old Testament heroes of faith. Even after his death, his example encourages people to seek the Lord, because he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Abel, then, is the father of the believers of the time before Abraham. His faith in God still speaks as a constant witness.
p. 316

MacArthur rightly observes:

The primary meaning of Hebrews 11:4, however, has to do with Abel's speaking to later generations of believers and potential believers. **He still speaks.** He says three things: man comes to God by faith, not works; man must accept and obey God's revelation above his own reason and self-will; and sin is severely punished. This is Abel's timeless three-point sermon to the world, which he has been preaching for thousands of years to those who will hear. It could be titled, "The Righteous Shall Live by Faith."
p. 303

G. Campbell Morgan says:

Then the story tells us, secondly, that "Through faith, he being dead yet speaketh." That simply means that his offering, as an action of faith never ends, but goes on. A true action of faith always runs on beyond the lifetime of the one who acts in faith. He is still speaking, and the story of the man is eloquent. "He being dead yet speaketh."
p. 53

Wuest says:

Cain followed his reason and ignored revelation. He argued that his own good works as manifested by the produce which he had grown, would please God rather than a blood sacrifice. Abel accepted revelation instead, and had faith in the divine acceptability of the offering prescribed by God. His own reason may have argued otherwise, but his faith in what God had said, won the day. Here was the example which this first-century Jew should follow in his appropriation of the salvation which Messiah procured for him on the Cross, not the way of Cain, which he had been taught by the first-century religious leaders in Israel.
p. 197

Pink says:

The first and most obvious signification of these words is that, by his faith's obedience, as recorded in Gen. 4 and Heb. 11, Abel preaches to us a most important sermon. His worship and the fruits thereof are registered in the everlasting records of Holy Scripture, and thereby he speaketh as evidently as though we heard him audibly. There comes to us a voice from the far distant past, from the other side of the flood, saying, "Fallen man can only approach unto God through the death of an innocent Substitute: yet none save God's elect will ever feel their need of such, set aside their own inclinations, bow to God's revealed will, and submit to His appointment; but they who do so, obtain witness that they are 'righteous' (cf. Matt. 23:38), and receive Divine assurance that they are accepted in the Beloved and that their obedience (imperfect in itself, yet proceeding from a heart which desires and seeks to *fully* please Him) is approved for His sake."

p. 169

Macaulay says:

Did you ever hear a dead man speak? The first man who ever died is speaking from his altar today, and he cries to us, and especially to every son of Cain, "It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11b); and again, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

p. 170

English says:

"By it [that is, *through faith*] he being dead yet speaketh." It was by faith that Abel offered the acceptable sacrifice for sin, and it is this message that comes down through the centuries and to us even in this day, saying: "It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." The faith of *all* the Old Testament saints of Hebrews 11 also continues to speak, with a voice that lives and calls men to repentance and faith in God and His Word, in the Son of His love, the perfect sacrifice for sin and the way of access unto God.

p. 347

Wiersbe in Run With the Winners says:

No words from Abel are recorded anywhere in the Bible, yet this man, the first martyr, still speaks to us today. His life speaks to us, as recorded in Genesis 4 and Hebrews 11. God wrote down that Abel's deeds were righteous (1 John 3:12). We speak with our lives as well as with our lips. In fact, the two must go together if our testimony is to be effective. We are certainly not saved by good works (Ephesians 2:8-10), but good works ought to be the evidence of our saving faith (James 2:14-26).

Abel's greatest witness was by his shed blood. Hebrews 12:18-24 contrasts Mt. Sinai on earth with Mt. Zion in heaven, and among the contrasts given is that of the blood of Jesus Christ and the blood of Abel (12:24). If the blood of Jesus Christ bears witness to "better things," then the blood of Abel must at least bear witness of "good things." This ties in with Genesis 4:10, where God said to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground."

p. 33

Hughes observes:

There is great power in example. St. Francis once called to one of his young monks, "Let's go down to the town to preach." The novice, delighted at being singled out to be the companion of Francis, quickly obeyed. They passed through the principal streets, turned down many of the byways and alleys, made their way out to some of the suburbs, and at length returned by a winding route to the monastery gate. As they approached it, the younger man reminded Francis of his original intention. "You have forgotten, Father," he said, "that we went down to the town to preach!" "My son," Francis replied, "we *have* preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen by many; our behaviour has been closely watched; it was thus that we preached our morning sermon. It is of no use, my son, to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk!"

pp. 71-72

v. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he had witness borne that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Whereas in Abel we see FAITH WORSHIPPING, in Enoch we see FAITH WALKING.

We come now to the SECOND OF 8 CHARACTERS in our passage.

2. ENOCH

Let us turn our attention to the Genesis account of his life.

Genesis 5:21-24

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Enoch, on the other hand, reflected the kind of life that pleases God since he walked with God by faith (as the readers also should). If Christ had come in their lifetimes (cf. 10:37) the readers also would **not** have experienced **death**. In any case they could only please God by continued confidence that **He exists and rewards those who earnestly seek Him**.
p. 807

The primary focus in our lives as believers ought to be upon our fellowship with the Father.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord's word, seated at His feet. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Stedman observes:

In the book of Genesis we are told that for sixty-five years this man lived like anyone else in his day, no different from the rest of his age. But at the age of sixty-five, something happened. It was not that he got his Social Security--he found a deeper security than that. The record says he began to walk with God; he began for the first time to enjoy the continuous presence of an unseen Person, and he related his life daily to that unseen Person who was with him. When he did that he discovered a great reality, just as you will if you try it. He found a fellowship that death could not interrupt. According to the record, he never died. He was one of two men in the Scripture of whom it is recorded that they never died. He was "not found," that is all. God took him, the record says, without death.

I love the way the little Sunday School girl told it. She said, "Enoch was a man who learned to walk with God, and they used to take long walks together. One day they walked so far that God said, 'Look, Enoch, it's too far for you to go back; just come on home with Me.' So he walked home with God."

pp. 190-91

2 Kings 2:11

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Corinthians 15:51, 52

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Delitzsch points out:

The Hebrew phrase . . . (to walk with God), expressive of the closest intimacy and uninterrupted communion, occurs here only (Gen. v. 22, 24), and at Gen. vi. 9 (where it is said of Noah). The Septuagint rendering in both places is [that] . . . which means not only “to be well-pleasing to God,” but also “to strive to please God,” to lead a life well-pleasing to Him.
pp. 229-30

John Owen says:

This is peculiar to these first two instances of faith; in the one it led him unto a bloody death; in the other it delivered him from death, that he did not die at all.
p. 220

Kistemaker says:

Enoch's faith was so strong and his relationship to God so close that he was kept from dying. The curse of death pronounced upon Adam and his descendants did not prevail against Enoch, for God transformed him.
p. 317

G. Campbell Morgan says:

Only once across the fifteen hundred years the bell did not toll. There was no booming of the bell of death. Once the recorder had to change his phrasing, and instead of telling the story of a man who lived and died, he told of a man who lived; but when he came to record the end of his life, he could not add "and he died." He had to say, "He was not, for God took him." Upon that piece of history from the Old Testament there flashes the light of the New Testament declaration, as we are told, "By faith he was translated," because he had pleased God. In that he was pleasing to God, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him."
p. 57

Morgan says further:

Enoch walked with God for 300 years. There was no controversy; and he was bound in all his life with the purpose, the passion, and the power of God. He walked with God.

That leads to mutual trust. To me that is a very arresting thought. Enoch trusted God about himself, as to all the ultimate issue of human history and human life. He trusted Him. That is why he walked with Him.
p. 62

English points out:

Abel worshipped God. Enoch not only worshipped Him but walked with Him. There are not many of whom this is said. What wonderful fellowship such a life must be! For to walk with another means that one must be following the same course, at the same pace, and toward the same destination, as it were. Two who walk together must be of one mind, for they cannot thus companion except they be agreed (Amos 3:3). So day by day, for three hundred years, Enoch walked with God. He did not get impatient and run ahead of the Lord. He did not lack faith or enthusiasm and lag behind Him. He was in step with God. No wonder that Enoch is said to have been well pleasing to God!

p. 349

Wiersbe in Run With the Winners says:

We face daily three possible motivations: we can please God, please ourselves, or please other people. If we live to please only ourselves, we will have a miserable life. (Read Romans 15:1-3). If we live only to please people, we will have an even more miserable life, because we can never please everybody! All of us need to follow the example of Jesus Christ: "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29).

p. 40

Hughes observes:

Enoch's great walk produced two wonderful things--fellowship and righteousness. When two walk toward the same *place* on the same *path* at the same *pace* for 300 years, they are in fellowship! And this is the primary meaning of *walk*: fellowship, sacred communion.

Matching God stride for stride along the path of life while headed for the city of God also produced in Enoch a righteous walk.

pp. 77-78

WALKING WITH GOD

A little girl, hearing of Enoch in her Sunday school class, went home to repeat the story. Her version went something like this, “Mommy, today the teacher told us about a man who every day went out to walk with God. One day they walked and walked and walked till it was almost dark. And when this man started to go back, the Lord said to him, ‘Enoch, you’ve walked with Me so long, why don’t you just go Home with Me?’ And Mommie, that man went right on Home with God.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD?

“How can a simple mortal enjoy friendship with God? What possible common ground could bring us together in friendship?”

The thought of a human becoming friends with God boggles the mind. As small, weak creatures, what could we possibly have in common with the Almighty Creator of the universe? The common ground is faith. Faith is what connects us to God in friendship.

It’s what made Abraham God’s friend, David a man after God’s own heart, and Enoch a man who walked with God.

Today faith still turns enemies of God into His friends. God’s greatest act of friendship was sending Christ to die for us, but what does it mean to be friends with God? It means:

~Choosing Him over others: Even though it seems narrow-minded, you reject the false gods of other religions. You are careful that other people don’t take first place in your life.

~Spending time with Him: Realizing that God enjoys your company, you make time for the relationship.

~Identifying with Him: Just as you don’t mind being seen with your human friends, you are not ashamed to let everyone know that you are God’s friend.

~Supporting the same causes: You and your Friend share the same outlook on life and what’s important.

~Never tiring of His company: Unlike some friends who wear out their welcome, God is one friend you’re always glad to have around.

All of this grows out of just a little faith!

“Friendship with God?” by Jim Long. Campus Life, Jul/Aug 1992. Pages 19-21.

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

(When Heaven Is Silent by Ronald Dunn)

The God of Israel, the Savior, is sometimes a God that hides Himself but never a God that is absent; sometimes in the dark, but never at a distance.

Matthew Henry

p. 3

(The Finishing Touch: Becoming God's Masterpiece: A Daily Devotional by Charles R. Swindoll)

Jim Elliot, the martyred missionary, eloquently expressed his own discovery of such peace in this journal entry:

I walked out on the hill just now. It is exalting, delicious, to stand embraced by the shadows of a friendly tree with the wind tugging at your coattail and the heavens hailing your heart, to gaze and glory and give oneself again to God--what more could a man ask? Oh, the fullness, pleasure, sheer excitement of knowing God on earth! I care not if I never raise my voice again for Him, if only I may love Him, please Him. . . . if only I may see Him, touch His garments, and smile into His eyes.

p. 351

In the silences I make in the midst of the turmoil of life I have appointments with God. From these silences I come forth with spirit refreshed, and with a renewed sense of power. I hear a Voice in the silences, and become increasingly aware that it is the Voice of God.

O how comfortable is a little glimpse of God!

--David Brainerd

p. 200

(Holiness by J. C. Ryle)

These were the last words of Hugh Mackail on the scaffold, at Edinburgh, 1666: 'Now I begin my intercourse with God, which shall never be broken off. Farewell, father and mother, friends and relations; farewell, the world and all its delights; farewell, meat and drinks; farewell, sun, moon and stars. Welcome, God and Father; welcome, sweet Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; welcome, blessed Spirit of grace, and God of all consolation; welcome, glory; welcome, eternal life; welcome, death. O Lord, into Thy hands I commit my spirit; for Thou has redeemed my soul, O Lord God of truth!'

p. 121

“BY FAITH ENOCH WAS TAKEN UP SO THAT HE SHOULD NOT SEE DEATH; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; FOR HE HAD WITNESS BORNE THAT BEFORE HIS BEING TAKEN UP HE WAS PLEASING TO GOD.”

Let us meditate for just a moment on the REASON why God took him up in the last phrase of verse 5:

“FOR HE HAD WITNESS BORNE THAT BEFORE HIS BEING TAKEN UP HE WAS PLEASING TO GOD.”

WHY WAS HE PLEASING TO GOD?

“HE WAS PLEASING” because:

HE EXERCISED FAITH.

“HE WAS PLEASING TO GOD” because:

HE WALKED BY FAITH.

Hebrews 10:38

But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul is having no pleasure in him.

ENOCH'S WITNESS is seen in the FINAL WORDS:

“HE WAS PLEASING TO GOD.”

HOW DID HE DO THIS?

He walked with God and therefore he was:

1. TEACHABLE
2. OBEDIENT
3. TRANSPARENT

It was Chisolm who wrote:

I want my heart Christ's throne to be,
 so that a watching world may see
 His likeness shining forth in me;
 I want to be like Jesus.

v. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who is coming to God must believe that He is, and that He proves Himself a rewarder of those who are seeking Him.

Now our author goes a step further.

“[Enoch] was pleasing to God” and to help us understand that the author is FOCUSING ON ENOCH’S FAITH, he says:

“AND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM.”

He then gives us the REASON for his previous statement:

“FOR HE WHO IS [pleasing to God] MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS,
 AND THAT HE PROVES HIMSELF A REWARDER OF THOSE WHO
 ARE SEEKING HIM.”

Kistemaker observes:

This text teaches a spiritual truth that touches the spiritual life of every believer. It is one of the most eloquent expressions of faith and prayer in the Epistle to the Hebrews. By comparison, Paul's declaration that "everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23) is short. In one beautifully constructed verse, the writer of Hebrews communicates the method of pleasing God, the necessity of believing his existence, and the certainty of answered prayer.
p. 317

Owen says:

All men in their worship profess a desire to please God, but most of them seek it "not by faith," and therefore God rejects them and their worship. The secret apprehension that God is to be pleased with outward works and duties, is the foundation of all superstition in divine worship.
p. 220

"Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." God Himself is the reward of them that seek Him; which eternally excludes all thoughts of merit in them that are so rewarded.
p. 221

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

Since it is axiomatic that **without faith it is impossible to please** God, and since it has been testified that Enoch did please God before he was removed to heaven, therefore Enoch must have had faith. Indeed faith is a prerequisite not merely for satisfying God, but for approaching him at all.
p. 191

Wiersbe sites John Calvin:

Steady in the Faith

The great theologian John Calvin defined faith as “a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.” Note that faith is founded on divine truth (God’s promise) and is witnessed to by the Spirit in the heart. It has both objective and subjective aspects, and both are essential.

p. 820

Lenski says:

Since Gen. 5:22-24 does not employ the word “faith” but only the expression “to be well-pleasing” (LXX), the writer expounds: “Now without faith (it is) impossible to be well-pleasing” (actually well-pleasing, [is an] effective aorist). In other words, what makes any man well-pleasing to God is faith; without it there is no possibility of pleasing God.

p. 386

Bruce says:

Apart from faith neither Enoch nor anyone else could ever have been pleasing to God. The faith which our author has in mind embraces belief in the invisible spiritual order, and belief in the promises of God which have not yet been fulfilled.

p. 286

No doubt our author states the basic principle, as revealed by the record of Enoch, for the benefit and encouragement of his readers. Of their desire to please God he has no doubt; he insists, however, that they cannot please him apart from faith--the faith which not only believes that he exists but waits patiently and confidently for the reward promised to those who seek him.

p. 287

I saw a cartoon in a 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul, A: 101 More Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit by Jack Canfield & Mark Victor that had a picture of a man with a backpack high up on a mountain ledge speaking to the bearded guru and he is saying:

“You mean I do the Hokie Pokie and I turn myself around, and that’s what it’s all about?”

p. 300

We laugh at this but this is often the explanation of what is needed to be made right with God or what we have to do discover wisdom or truth.

(The Christian in Complete Armour by William Gurnall)

If he still haunts you with fears of your spiritual condition, then apply to the throne of grace and ask for a new copy of the old evidence, which you have misplaced. The original is in the pardon office in heaven, of which Christ is the Master. And if you are a saint, your name is on record in that court. Appeal to God, and hear the news from heaven, rather than listen to the tales your enemy brings from hell. If you would argue less with Satan and pray more to God about your fears, they would soon be resolved. Can you expect truth from a liar, or comfort from an adversary? Turn your back on him and go to God. Try not to worry. Sooner or later you will receive your certificate of assurance.

(February 16)

(Holiness by J. C. Ryle)

Too many among those who believe begin doubting and go on doubting, live doubting and die doubting, and go to heaven in a kind of mist.

p. 107

(When God Whispers Your Name by Max Lucado)

I sit a few feet from a man on death row. Jewish by birth. Tentmaker by trade. Apostle by calling. His days are marked. I'm curious about what bolsters this man as he nears his execution. So I ask some questions.

Do you have family, Paul? I have none.

What about your health? My body is beaten and tired.

What do you own? I have my parchments. My pen. A cloak.

And your reputation? Well, it's not much. I'm a heretic to some, a maverick to others.

Do you have friends? I do, but even some of them have turned back.

Any awards? Not on earth.

Then what do you have, Paul? No belongings. No family. Criticized by some. Mocked by others. What do you have, Paul? What do you have that matters?

I sit back quietly and watch. Paul rolls his hand into a fist. He looks at it. I look at it. What is he holding? What does he have?

He extends his hand so I can see. As I lean forward, he opens his fingers. I peer at his palm. It's empty.

I have my faith. It's all I have. But it's all I need. I have kept the faith.

Paul leans back against the wall of his cell and smiles. And I lean back against another and stare into the face of a man who has learned that there is more to life than meets the eye.

For that's what faith is. Faith is trusting what the eye can't see.

Eyes see the prowling lion. Faith sees Daniel's angel.

Eyes see storms. Faith sees Noah's rainbow.

Eyes see giants. Faith sees Canaan.

Your eyes see your faults. Your faith sees your Savior.

Your eyes see your guilt. Your faith sees his blood.

Your eyes see your grave. Your faith sees a city whose builder and maker is God.

Your eyes look in the mirror and see a sinner, a failure, a promise-breaker. But by faith you look in the mirror and see a robed prodigal bearing the ring of grace on your finger and the kiss of your Father on your face.

pp. 100-1

v. 7 By faith Noah, being warned [by God] about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household by which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Whereas we see in

ABEL--FAITH WORSHIPPING,

ENOC--FAITH WALKING, and

NOAH--FAITH WORKING.

This is:

BIOGRAPHY #3: NOAH

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

That God does reward those who seek Him is suggested by the career of **Noah** who became an heir of righteousness by faith. What he inherited was, in fact, the new world after the Flood as the readers might inherit "the world to come" (cf. 2.5).
p. 808

Noah magnifies the obedience of faith as he is warned by God. He is immediately obedient:

“IN REVERENCE [he] PREPARED AN ARK [the reason he did is] FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS HOUSEHOLD [which was his mission field] BY WHICH HE CONDEMNED THE WORLD AND BECAME AN HEIR OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS ACCORDING TO FAITH.”

Genesis 6:9

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

Just like Enoch walked with God, so Noah walked with God.

Bruce observes:

The next example of faith illustrates this willingness to believe that what God has promised he will certainly perform. Noah was a righteous man, like Abel; he walked with God, as did Enoch; but what is emphasized here is that when God announced that he would do something unprecedented in the experience of Noah and his contemporaries, Noah took him at his word, and showed that he did so by making practical preparations against the day when that word would come true.
p. 287

Kistemaker points out:

The heroes of faith who preceded Abraham were true pioneers: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. These men stood virtually alone in their contest of faith; unbelief and disobedience surrounded them and a believing community to support them did not exist.
p. 319

Genesis 6:5

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

The times of Noah are so similar to the times of today.

Hughes says:

The world is still very much as it was in the early 1960s when the Kingston Trio used to sing:

*They're rioting in Africa
They're starving in Spain.
There are hurricanes in Florida
And Texas needs rain.*

*The whole world is seething
With unhappy souls.
The French hate the Germans.
The Germans hate the Poles.*

*The Poles hate the Yugoslavs,
South Africans hate the Dutch,
And I don't like anybody very much.*

p. 92

Wiersbe observes:

There is a frightening contrast between Noah and Lot (Genesis 19) when it comes to their influence on their family. Because Noah trusted God and walked with God, he was able to win his own loved ones to the Lord. Lot was a believer, but he didn't walk with God. When he tried to warn his family of the coming judgment, they only laughed at him (Genesis 19:14). Lot's wife disobeyed God and was judged instantly. Lot's daughters involved their drunken father in incest and gave birth to the two great enemies of the nation of Israel, the Ammonites and the Moabites. Lot's compromise destroyed his family; Noah's conviction and consecration saved his family.

p. 51

English says:

The record of Abel tells us of his worship of God; that of Enoch reveals his worship of and walk with God; in Noah we see one who worshipped God, walked with Him, and witnessed to or worked for, Him. These are progressive steps in our relationship to the Lord; the second is dependent upon the first, and the third upon the second. There must be worship before there can be a worthy walk; and there must be worship and fellowship before there can be witness that is pleasing to God.
p. 353

G. Campbell Morgan says:

Noah and his three sons could never have built that ark with their own hands. What became of the workmen who helped them: those who prepared the gopher wood, fastened it together, and carried out the instructions? As Jesus said, they were swept away. They went on building the ark, and they were eating, drinking, marrying, and carrying on their occupations. I have no doubt they were laughed at for building the ark. What a stupid thing! What a ridiculous idea! For one hundred and twenty years Noah was preaching righteousness. They had not listened. They had not noticed. They had turned a deaf ear to the preaching, because they believed a madman was building the ark. When the flood came, the builders of the ark were swept away because of what they were in themselves, in spite of the fact that they had been workmen preparing that which was to be God's vantage ground for His movement in history.

That is a terrible thought. It reacts upon us. It may be possible today that we are helping to build the ark, and we are so busy here and there, doing all sorts of things that are contributory to the divine purpose, and yet ourselves are corrupt, evil, every imagination of the thoughts of the heart only evil continually.
p. 73

Morgan says further:

That is what He is wanting us to do: to witness by faith, when all things seem contradictory; when all the circumstances of the hour seem to show that the things we are doing are supremely futile. Believing in God, hearing His voice, believing His word, we march on; and by our obedience condemn the world; and carry on the great march of righteousness toward its consummation.

p. 75

Macaulay says:

“In Abel we see how faith makes death the path to life. In Enoch, how faith conquers death. In Noah, how faith saves others from death by the work it does for them.” Thus excellently does Andrew Murray sum up the relation between these men of faith. The worship of faith blossoms into the walk of faith, and fructifies in the work of faith.

p. 177

Set us afire, Lord,
 Stir us, we pray!
 While the world perishes,
 We go our way,
 Purposeless, passionless,
 Day after day.
 Set us afire, Lord,
 Stir us, we pray!

p. 179

DeHaan summarizes it in a similar way when he says:

These three men illustrate the three steps or stages in the growth of faith. They are in their order:

1. Abel--Worshipping by faith.
2. Enoch--Walking by faith.
3. Noah--Working by faith.

Abel worshiped God at the appointed altar. It was a picture of Christ as the Lamb of God, dying upon the altar of the Cross. Here all faith must begin. The next man mentioned is Enoch, who walked with God for three hundred years. In addition to the worship of Abel, and as a result of it, we now walk and fellowship with God, living a life of separation with God, and prove to the world that it is possible to walk with God in the most wicked age of the world's history. And then the last of the antediluvian heroes is a man who "worked" for God. He was Noah who built the Ark, and who put his faith in action.

pp. 157-8

(The Book of Virtues by William J. Bennett)

Mr. Meant-To

Hear the famous words of Benjamin Franklin: "Work while it is called today, for you know not how much you may be hindered tomorrow. One today is worth two tomorrows; never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today."

Mr. Meant-To has a comrade,
And his name is Didn't-Do;
Have you ever chanced to meet them?
Did they ever call on you?

These two fellows live together
In the house of Never-Win,
And I'm told that it is haunted
By the ghost of Might-Have-Been.

p. 364

v. 8 By faith Abraham, obeyed by going out to a place which he was about to be receiving for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Whereas:

“Abel offered to God a better sacrifice” and

“Noah prepared an ark”

we read here that

“ABRAHAM OBEYED.”

We are coming now to:

BIOGRAPHY #4: ABRAHAM

In the remaining 5 BIOGRAPHIES we are focusing on FAITH IN THE PATRIARCHIAL TIMES.

In

Abel,

Enoch, and

Noah

we have been focusing on:

FAITH IN THE PRE-PATRIARCHIAL PERIOD OF TIME.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

That the readers should look forward to "the world to come" and treat their present experience as a pilgrimage is a lesson enforced by the life of Abraham.

p. 808

In Abraham we see FAITH WAITING.

It was 25 years between the PROMISE and the BIRTH OF THE PROMISE SEED.

God maybe slow but He is never late.

In John 11:17-44 in the story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus Jesus came to Bethany four days after Lazarus had died and both of the girls said, "If You had been here my brother would not have died." In other words, You are late. However, God had a greater purpose in mind which is revealed in the cemetery shortly thereafter as He gives that command, "Lazarus come forth!" Lazarus is restored to life.

Morgan, in addressing the biography of Abraham, says:

In the story there are three great movements referred to, and they are indicated in the texts. They reveal a widening experience, or rather, a deepening experience in the life of Abraham. First, faith obeying: "By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed." Faith, onlooking, sojourning in the land of promise," by faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise." Faith offering: "By faith, Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac." We may thus gather the whole story and consider the revelation of the force of faith in the life of this man Abraham.
p. 77

English points out:

There are five illustrations in this chapter of Abraham's faith and his exercise of that faith: (1) by faith Abraham, called of God to go out, obeyed; (2) by faith he went out to an unknown destination; (3) by faith, arriving there, he became a sojourner; (4) by faith he looked for a celestial city; and (5) by faith, when he was tested, Abraham offered his son, Isaac, to God. The first four events, mentioned in verses 8-10, come before us now; the last, referred to in verses 17-19, will be discussed in its proper place.
p. 360

Bruce says:

The faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah might have to be inferred from what is recorded of them (although for all three of them it is a certain inference); but Abraham's faith is explicitly attested in the Genesis narrative: "he believed Yahweh; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Our author has already referred to Abraham's faith in the promise of God and his patient waiting for its fulfilment; here he enlarges on the same theme. Repeatedly throughout his career Abraham acted as a man who walked by faith and not by sight, and made good his claim to be recognized by all subsequent ages as the father of the faithful.
p. 290

Westcott says:

The Faith of self-surrender.

The beginning of the Messianic nation was a call, a separation. The founder had a promise of an inheritance. This promise he could trust though he knew not how it would be fulfilled.
p. 358

Delitzsch challenges us:

Now follow (vers. 8-22) the examples of faith among the postdiluvian patriarchs, the ancestors of Israel.
p. 233

Lane says:

The writer devotes more space to Abraham as an exemplar of faith than to any other OT figure (vv 8-12, 17-19). The insertion of his own commentary on the biblical account in v 10 and in vv 13-16 makes it more difficult to discern the structure of the unit, . . .
p. 347

(The Mature Man: Becoming a Man of Impact by David DeWitt)

A patriarch is irreplaceable. I've always enjoyed the cartoon "Winnie the Pooh." My favorite character is Tigger. He has a song about how wonderful Tiggers are and everything Tiggers can do, what Tiggers like, and what Tiggers don't like. The last phrase of the song goes: "The most wonderful thing about Tiggers is, I'm the only one."

That's also the most wonderful thing about patriarchs. A patriarch cannot be replaced. No one can succeed him. When he dies, that's it. It's over. An era has come to an end. Close the book. Now a new book must begin with a new patriarch--a different man who decides to go beyond order, rules, and balance for the love of excellence.
p. 196

Indecision

We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run over.

Aneurin Bevan (1897-1960), British Labour politician. Quoted in: *Observer* (London, 9 Dec. 1935).

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(From Parson's Bible Illustrator 1.0)

(The Message: Proverbs by Eugene H. Peterson)

Proverb 20

The very steps we take come from God;
otherwise how would we know where we're
going?

p. 69

BARNYARD DUCKS

Does the following anonymous poem describe how you feel?

My soul is like a barnyard duck
Muddling in the barnyard muck,
Fat and lazy with useless wings;
But sometimes, when the northwind sings
And wild ducks fly overhead,
It ponders something lost and dead,
Then cocks a wary, bewildered eye
And makes a feeble attempt to fly.
It's quite content with the state it's in,
But it's not the duck it might have been.

Are you haunted by the fear that you'll never be what God meant you to be? That you're preoccupied with the trinkets of this passing world? Are you "living in the barnyard" when you should be soaring?

Do you really want to fly? Do you long to soar above the pettiness and insignificance of the barnyard muck?

You can! Put aside the sin and worldly weights that are holding you down (Heb. 12:1) and get busy with the tasks the Lord has for you. Only in Christ do we find the fulfillment He longs for each of us to enjoy.

Remember that Jesus came to set you free and let you soar as you look for His coming (Ti. 2:11-13). Isn't it time you got out of the mud and did some flying?--HWR

*In this world but never of it,
Help me, Lord, to live this day
Free from all that would entangle,
Of the dazzle and array. --Graves*

**IF YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A DRAG,
WORLDLY WEIGHTS ARE PROBABLY TO BLAME.**

(From *Our Daily Bread*, Friday, August 25, 1995)

v. 9 By faith he lived as a stranger in the land of promise, as if it were foreign, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

Bruce points out:

Even when he received the promise of the inheritance, it was the promise that he received, not the visible possession of the land; but to Abraham the promise of God was as substantial as its realization. He lived thereafter in the good of that promise.
p. 292

It is good to remember that the Abrahamic covenant involved:

a LAND and

a SEED.

The writer here in verse 9 is making a reference to both of these when he speaks of being:

“A STRANGER IN THE LAND OF PROMISE” and then

“DWELLING IN TENTS WITH ISAAC AND JACOB, FELLOW HEIRS OF THE SAME PROMISE.”

He is making reference to the Seed as it passes on through his heirs, Isaac and Jacob.

v.10 for he was looking for the city having foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Wiersbe in Run With the Winners says:

You can always tell one of God's pilgrims by his or her eyes. They are not fixed on the artificial glory of the world around them, but on the heavenly glory of the world before them. Their attention, affection, and ambition are fixed on the things of God in the heavenly realm, not the things of man here on earth (see Colossians 3:1ff). As we have seen from Abraham's example, this kind of posture didn't make them so "heavenly minded they were no earthly good." Abraham and Sarah were not distracted from life by their heavenly vision; they were directed in life.

p. 62

He says further:

As George Morrison said, "The important thing is not what we live in but what we look for."

p. 65

According The Bible Knowledge Commentary, "THE CITY" referred to here in verse 10 is:

. . . a reference to the heavenly and eternal Jerusalem.

p. 808

Revelation 21:2

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

v.11 By faith even Sarah herself received power to establish a posterity, even beyond the normal time of life, since she considered Him faithful who promised;

We looked together at FOUR BIOGRAPHIES:

1. ABEL,
2. ENOCH,
3. NOAH, and
4. ABRAHAM.

And now the focus is upon:

5. SARAH.

With Sarah involved in this study we now have our FOCUS AWAY FROM THE LAND and UPON THE SEED.

The reminds us of:

Hebrews 10:23

Let us constantly be holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

J. Vernon McGee says:

When God told Sarah at ninety years of age that she was to have a child, she laughed because it was ridiculous--it seemed utterly preposterous. She couldn't accept it, but God gave her the strength and power to believe Him. Many of us need such strength. Do you remember the man who brought the demon-possessed boy to the Lord Jesus? The Lord Jesus told the man that He could help him if he would believe. The man said, "I believe. Help thou mine unbelief." The man recognized that he had a weak faith, but the Lord Jesus must have given him the faith because He healed the boy (see Mark 9:17-27). Sarah had a little boy named Isaac. Why? She "received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." Sarah represented the *power* (or strength) of faith.
p. 588

(Mountain of Spices by Hannah Hurnard)

"Why," she said to herself with a start of surprise, "just see what the King has done. He has made that which seemed the greatest torment and weakness and despair of my life, the thing I most dreaded and suffered from, into the best thing of all. I was always afraid that I must be Craven Fear because of the Fear which so tormented me. He, by his wonderful grace, has changed me into something I could never have hoped to be, a fearless witness. Oh, how wonderful the King is! Oh, what lovely plans and purposes he has, that our greatest torments and failures should become the strongest and best things in our lives. 'Out of weakness he makes us strong to wax valiant in fight and overcome.'"
p. 247

v.12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, [as many descendants] as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

“Descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore” comes from:

Genesis 22:17

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,

Delitzsch says:

It is a consequence of Abraham's faith, and Sarah's, that their long fruitless marriage was crowned with such a reward. Faith brought them the thing hoped for.

p. 242

v.13 All these died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In an impressive summary of his discussion thus far, the writer pointed out that people can be still living by faith when they die, even if by that time they do not receive the things promised. By faith the old saints saw the promised realities from a distance and persisted in their pilgrim character, looking for a country of their own and refusing to return to the land they had left. So too the readers should renounce the opportunity to go back to any form of their ancestral religion and should persist in longing for a better country, a heavenly one.

p. 808

“ALL THESE” is a reference to the previous FIVE BIOGRAPHIES that we have looked at.

They “DIED IN FAITH” and there is a NEGATIVE and POSITIVE STATEMENT.

[NEGATIVELY] “NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES, BUT [in contrast, POSITIVELY]”:

1. “HAVING SEEN THEM”
2. “HAVING WELCOMED THEM FROM A DISTANCE”
3. “HAVING CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS AND EXILES ON THE EARTH.”

This reminds us of Hebrews 11:39 that we will look in our next study.

Hebrews 11:39

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Bruce titles this section:

4. *The City of God the Homeland of the Faithful (11:13-16)*
p. 297

Richards says:

Faith enabled all (11:13-16). Sometimes we have a difficult time identifying with great men of faith like Abraham. How good then to know that countless unnamed men and women looked ahead, and lived, and died, assured that the promises would yet be theirs. These may remain unknown --but not to God.
p. 119

Griffith Thomas says:

These verses sum up the present section, and point out that all the Patriarchs died full of faith, though they never actually received the promises, but having seen them “afar off” were persuaded that God would be true to His Word, and they welcomed the blessed assurance of certitude by, as it were, “embracing” the divine word of promise, meanwhile confessing that they themselves were “strangers and pilgrims” because their hopes were fixed on something infinitely greater than an earthly inheritance (v. 14).
p. 146

Pink says:

Having described some of the eminent acts of faith put forth by the earliest members of God’s family, the apostle now pauses to insert a general commendation of the faith of those he had already named, and (as is clear from vv. 39, 40) of others yet to follow. This commendation is set forth in v. 13 and is amplified in the next three verses. The evident design of the Holy Spirit in this was to press upon the Hebrews, and upon us, the imperative need of such a faith as would last, wear, overcome obstacles, and endure unto the end. Even the natural man is capable of “making good resolutions” and has flashes of endeavour to please God, but he is entirely lacking in that principle which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7).
p. 221

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

Death, as the end of human life, marks the point beyond which human faith can no longer operate. Death is faith's final test; and a life of faith is crowned and completed by faith's acceptance of death, especially when, as in the case of the patriarchs, the fulfilment of God's promises has not yet taken place. They had not yet witnessed the universal blessing that God was to accomplish through them.
p. 195

Westcott says:

The life of the patriarchs was a life of faith to the last, supported by trust in the invisible which they had realised, resting on complete surrender, directed beyond earth (13). They shewed that the true satisfaction of human powers, the 'city' which answers to man's social instincts, must be 'heavenly' (14-16).
p. 361

Lane says:

In vv 13-16 the writer suddenly interrupts his recital of Abraham's acts of faith in order to analyze the strands of the tradition he has woven together. The insertion of his own comments at this point is surprising. A retrospective glance over the patriarchal period at the conclusion of the unit in order to summarize the significance of the development might have been expected.
p. 355

English says:

They lived in the sphere of faith.

"Not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off." It would not have been faith otherwise, for "faith is the substance of things *hoped for*, the evidence of things *not seen*." They looked ahead, far into the realm of time, and heavenward in hope, and counted that which they had not yet received as their own by faith.
p. 376

CAN YOU DRINK THE CUP?

“No man is fit to preach the gospel, seeing the whole world is set against it, save only he who is armed to suffer.”

--John Calvin
(quoted in Leadership, Fall 1993)

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

DEATH BENEFITS

The 18th-century English pastor Rowland Hill lived to a ripe old age. In fact, he outlived most of his friends. Missing them very much and anxious to join them on the other side, he grew more homesick for heaven with each passing day. It seemed so long since some of them had gone to glory that he would often jokingly say with a wink, “Do you think they’ll remember me?” It was not unusual for him to go to some other believer well along in years with this request: “If you should go before I do, give my love to everyone. Be sure to tell them that old Rowley, although staying behind a little while, is coming on as fast as he can.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

LAST CHANCE

The preacher was dangerously ill and couldn’t have visitors. But when an agnostic called to pay his respects, the preacher asked that he be sent in anyway.

“I sure appreciate this,” said the agnostic. “But why did you ask to see me, when you denied admission to your close friends and church members?”

“That’s easy to explain,” gasped the dying preacher. “I’m confident of seeing them in Heaven. But this is probably the last chance I’ll ever have to see you.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

GETTING WORRIED

After a funeral a minister posted this notice on the church bulletin board:
 “Brother Peterson departed for heaven at 3:30 a.m.”

The next day he found the following written below his announcement:
 “Heaven--8:00 p.m.: Mr. Peterson has not yet arrived. Great anxiety.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

(Just As Long As I'm Riding Up Front: More Stories I Couldn't Tell While I
 Was a Pastor by Bruce McIver)

What you gonna do when the river overflows?
 I'm gonna sit on the porch and watch her go.
 What you gonna do when the hogs all drown?
 I'm gonna wish I lived on higher ground.
 What you gonna do when the cow floats away?
 I'm gonna throw in after her a bale of hay.
 What you gonna do with the water in the room?
 I'm gonna sweep it out with a sedge--a broom.
 What you gonna do when the cabin leaves?
 I'm gonna climb the roof and straddle the eaves.
 What you gonna do when your hold gives way?
 I'm gonna say, “Howdy, Lord! It's Judgment Day!”

p. 149

SHOULD WE GO FIRST

Should you go first and I remain to walk the road alone.
 I'll live in memories' garden, dear, with happy days we've known.
 In spring, I'll watch for roses red when fades the lilac blue.
 In early fall when brown leaves call, I'll catch a glimpse of you.

Should you go first and I remain for battles to be fought,
 Each thing you've touched along the way will be a hallowed spot.
 I'll hear your voice, I'll see your smile. Though blindly I may grope,
 The memory of your helping hand, will buoy me on with hope.

Should you go first and I remain to finish with the scroll,
 No lengthening shadows shall creep in to make this life seem droll.
 We've known so much of happiness. We've had our cup of joy.
 But memory is one gift of God that death cannot destroy.

Should you go first and I remain, one thing I'd have you do
 Walk slowly down that long, long path, for soon I'll follow you.
 I want to know each step you take, that I may walk the same;
 For some day down that lonely road, you'll hear me call your name.

(From Parson's Bible Illustrator 1.0)

Jon Cody Waters, the son of Charlie and Rosie Waters, died unexpectedly on December 4, 1995 at the age of 17 years. Cody wrote the following words on September 23:

“Don’t be anxious about anything or scared because He loves you, (me) and will protect you (me). You just have to have faith and trust and love Him with all your heart. He loves you, so just relax and hang on tight. It’s awesome!”

Cody Waters, Leadership Retreat, September 23, 1995

v.14 For those who are saying such things are making it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Westcott says of verses 14-16:

These verses develop the last clause of v. 13, and define the grounds of the statement which has been made that the patriarchs ‘died in Faith.’ Their language shewed that they continued to the last to look for that which they had not attained.
p. 363

Draper says:

The Old Testament saints also sought a country (11:14). They knew they did not belong, so they looked ahead. They looked to a better country, a heavenly one (11:16). Their eyes were set to the future. They saw what was ahead with the perceptiveness of faith: . . .
p. 312

Hewitt observes:

Within the hearts of these patriarchs there was a deep longing for a permanent settlement. Had their longing been for Mesopotamia they could at any time have returned to their native home. Their longing was higher and greater, reaching out to that unseen city 'whose builder and maker is God'.

p. 176

“NOW HE’S WAITING FOR ME”

Pastor Maynard Belt told of an elderly Christian couple who were parted after more than 50 years of marriage when the husband finally succumbed to a fatal disease. When their pastor went to call on the bereaved wife, he found her sorrowing, yet triumphant. “I’m pleased to see you doing so well,” he commented. “But I’m sure you miss your husband.” “Oh, yes,” she replied. “I miss him more than I could ever say. But I think of it this way: For years and years I would wait all day for Bill to come home from his job. I’d work busily around the house, and I’d look forward eagerly to the time he’d come through the door. I’d have his dinner ready, and we would enjoy being together. All these years I waited for him to come home, and now he’s waiting for me to come home!”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

“WHEN I AM GONE”

Barbara C. Ryberg has written a beautiful and consoling poem in which she pictures a soul in Glory voicing these words of comfort to the grieving relatives here on earth:

“When I am gone, remember I’m with Jesus;
 then do not mourn because I’ve passed away.
 Life holds so many griefs and disappointments,
 and will you cry because I did not stay?
 ‘Tis only for a spell we must be parted;
 not many years on earth to us are given.
 And when my Savior tells me you are coming,
 I’ll go with Him and welcome you to Heaven.
 Grieve not because the eyes that looked upon you
 shall never see your face on earth again;
 Rejoice, because they look upon the Savior
 who gave His life to ransom sinful men.
 Weep not because I walk no longer with you;
 remember, I am walking streets of gold.
 Weep for yourselves that you awhile must tarry,
 before the blessed Lord you may behold.”

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

v.15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Kistemaker says:

Had the patriarchs indeed contemplated returning to their native country, they would have broken faith with God and would have lost the promise God had given them. Abraham had been called away from the land of his father and forefathers, who “worshiped other gods” (Josh. 24:2). He could not return because he had responded in faith to God. Therefore, for Abraham and his son and grandson to retrace their steps to the land of Abraham’s origin was unthinkable. In obedience to God’s call, the patriarch had entered Canaan, and in full reliance upon his God, he stayed in the Promised Land. Isaac and Jacob showed the same obedience, for Jacob, after spending a number of years in Paddan Aram, returned to the southern part of Canaan. Also, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were buried in the land of the promise.

The other side of the proverbial coin is that the patriarchs sought not an earthly heritage but a heavenly one. Says the writer of Hebrews, “They were longing for a better country.” They had their sight set, in faith, on a heavenly country. They looked for life eternal with God who had given them the promises.
p. 326

Owen says:

That they had no desire to return is proved by the possibility and facility of such a return. They had opportunity of returning. From the call of Abraham to the death of Jacob was two hundred years, so they had time enough for a return; beside, it was no great distance; Abraham sent his servant thither, and Jacob went the same journey with his staff. It is evident that no opportunity could draw them to think of a return to their own country, and therefore it could not be that with respect whereunto they professed themselves to be strangers and pilgrims.
p. 226

“KEEP ME FROM TURNING BACK!”

A missionary to Thailand named Miss Hammer faced many obstacles in her work, and she saw few visible results despite her earnest endeavors. Her confidence was in the Lord, however, so she refused to yield to despair. Her only desire was to “plow out her furrow for God,” no matter how stony the field or how difficult it might be to sow the seed. In 1962 this gallant servant of Christ suffered a cruel death at the hands of a heroin addict. In her last letter to a friend she quoted a poem which not only told of the great trial of her faith, but revealed her holy determination to go on serving God without flinching or retreating in the face of overwhelming odds. This bit of verse, which so aptly expressed her feelings, is a touching commentary on a life completely dedicated to the Lord:

My hand is on the plow, my falt’ring hand;
 But all in front of me is untilled land.
 The wilderness and solitary place,
 The lonely desert with its interspace.
 The handles of my plow with tears are wet;
 The shares with rust are spoiled, and yet,
 Out in the field, ne’er let the reins be slack;
 My God! my God! keep me from turning back!

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

v.16 But as it is, they are longing for a better [home], that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He prepared a city for them.

“BUT” forms the CONTRAST.

And these, instead of thinking about going back “ARE LONGING FOR A BETTER [HOME], THAT IS A HEAVENLY ONE.”

1 Peter 2:11

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.

Philippians 3:20

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Colossians 3:2

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

“THEREFORE GOD IS NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED THEIR GOD; FOR HE PREPARED A CITY FOR THEM.”

John 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Bruce says:

This ideal has proved too high for many Christians throughout the centuries of our era; yet there has never failed a distinguished succession of men and women possessed of this pilgrim attitude who have sung with Henry Francis Lyte:

It is not for me to be seeking my bliss
And building my hopes in a region like this;
I look for a city which hands have not piled,
I pant for a country by sin undefiled.

p. 300

Wiersbe reminds us once again of that statement:

Dr. George Morrison, a great Scottish preacher, once said, "The important thing is not what we live in, but what we look for."

p. 124

Lange quotes Heubner who says:

Never has the pious man completely realized on earth the longing of his heart; he is always hoping for something better.--The crown of all hopes is the city of God, where God in the most glorious manner will dwell among His saints.--Faith makes us strong to offer up that which is dearest to us.

p. 189

Hughes quotes that little chorus that we often sang:

*This world is not my home
I'm just a passing through
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore.*

p. 101

v.17 By faith Abraham, while being put to the test, offered up Isaac; and he who received the promises was offering up his only begotten [son];

The word “OFFERED UP” takes us back to the word “obeyed” in verse 8.

We now return to Abraham to see this test of his faith.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The theme of testing emerges here as the writer returned to Abraham. The readers can learn from that supreme test in which the patriarch was called on to sacrifice his . . . son.

p. 808

Isaiah 48:10, 11

See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

1 Peter 1:6, 7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Kistemaker observes:

Genesis 22 contains the story of Abraham’s greatest test of faith. This story reveals Abraham’s readiness to obey God at the expense of Isaac, to cling to God’s promises even though obedience to God’s command would nullify it, and to believe that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

p. 327

Westcott says:

The trial of Abraham was not so much in the conflict of his natural affection with his obedience to God, as in the apparent inconsistency of the revelations of the will of God which were made to him.

Thus the greatness of Abraham's Faith was shewn by the fact that he was ready to sacrifice his only son, though it had been before declared that the fulfilment of the promise which he had received was to come through him. His obedience therefore included the conviction of some signal and incomprehensible work of God whose promise could not fail. At the same time the nature of the trial left an opportunity for the right exercise of Faith. p. 365

(Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance by Bob Buford)

I remember walking along a limestone bluff perhaps two hundred feet above the muddy and treacherous river, as frightened as I've ever felt. *Here's something you can't dream your way out of*, I told myself. *Here's something you can't think your way out of, buy your way out of, or work your way out of.*

It was all too clear in this maddening solitude on the river bluff. *This is*, I thought to myself, *something you can only trust your way out of.*

The incomprehensible was breaking out all around me, and there was no way I could understand it apart from an eternal perspective. Albert Einstein once said that "what is incomprehensible is beyond the realm of science. It is in the realm of God." This was truly in the realm of God. p. 56

(The Hidden Price of Greatness by Ray Beeson & Ranelda Mack Hunsicker)

p. 116

p. 126

(The Christian in Complete Armour by William Gurnall)

Once a Christian experiences God's precious love he does not dread suffering or affliction; he knows the Father will not hurt His own child. I have often wondered about Isaac's peace and patience in submitting to be bound for a sacrifice when he saw the knife so near his throat. We know he was not a mere child because Abraham asked him to carry the load of wood. Some say he may have been more than twenty years old, certainly mature enough to be apprehensive of death. Yet the son had such complete confidence in the authority of his father that he did not struggle, but put his life into his hands. If anyone else had held the weapon he could not have trusted as he did. We must remember whoever may be the instrument of trouble to a saint, the sword is always in God's control. Because Christ saw the cup in His Father's hand He took it willingly.
(September 26)

(The Power of Suffering: Strengthening Your Faith in the Refiner's Fire by John MacArthur, Jr.)

Puritan Thomas Manton once said, "While all things are quiet and comfortable, we live by sense rather than faith. But the worth of a soldier is never known in times of peace."
p. 39

(When God Has Put You On Hold by Bill Austin)

The words of Bismarck are especially appropriate here: "Life is like being at the dentist. You always think that the worst is still to come, and yet it is over already."

To this can be added the realistic, and encouraging, words of Nietzsche: "That which does not kill me, makes me stronger."
p. 27

Ah, suffering my painful friend;
you take the bubble of comfort
I have so carefully built around
 myself
and in a seemingly cruel fashion
snatch it from my clinging
 hands
and dash it to the ground;
where it breaks into a hundred
 pieces
and leaves me exposed and
 trembling.
Again, I must make the choice:

Do I retreat or do I move on.

Pearl Anderson

v.18 with reference to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called."

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

Abraham's decision was so difficult because God seemed to be contradicting himself by giving an order which appeared to nullify a previous promise. In our author's view Abraham realised that God could not lie about a promise nor could God's command be disobeyed.
p. 199

v.19 He considered that God is able to raise [men] even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

Genesis 22:5

He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Ester 4:14

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Psalm 119:140

Your promises have been thoroughly tested,
and your servant loves them.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains this as:

Abraham . . . [rising above the trial and trusting] the resurrecting power of God. So also the Christian readers must sometimes look beyond the experiences of life, in which God's promises do not seem to be fulfilled, and realize that their resurrections will bring those promises to fruition.
p. 808

v.20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things about to be coming.

BIOGRAPHY #6:

ISAAC

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The patriarchs mentioned here likewise looked to the future in faith.
p. 808

Campbell Morgan says:

It is arresting that these three illustrations are drawn from that period in life when a man is approaching the end and is looking on. The writer of this letter says that in that hour, approaching the end of the earthly pilgrimage, by faith Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph demonstrated their faith.
p. 86

Kistemaker says:

In this verse and the next two verses, the author unfolds an interesting description of the patriarchal blessings. Note that in the case of Abraham's sons, not Ishmael but Isaac received the blessing. Isaac was the son of the promise. In the next generation, not Esau, the first-born, but Jacob received the covenant blessing that God had given to Abraham and his descendants. Next, not Reuben, Jacob's first-born, but Joseph received the blessings in his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. And last, not Manasseh, Joseph's first-born, but Ephraim received the choice blessing. God's electing love is independent of the rules and regulations concerning the right of the first-born (Deut. 21:15-17). The reason that the names of the patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph appear in the list of the heroes of faith is that they exhibited their faith in God.
p. 332

v.21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, [leaning] on the top of his staff.

BIOGRAPHY #7:

JACOB

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The readers too were to maintain their worship right to the end of life, persevering in faith in the future that God had foretold.
p. 808

They are being challenged to finish strong.

G. Campbell Morgan says:

I know there is an old saying that God helps those who help themselves; but God help anybody who is imagining that he can, in the last analysis, help the fulfilment of divine purpose in his life.

p. 93

v.22 By faith Joseph, when coming near to the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

BIOGRAPHY #8:

JOSEPH

Genesis 50:25

And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

Exodus 13:19

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In similar fashion all believers should, in genuine faith, have confidence in the future of God's people.

p. 808

Griffith Thomas says:

In these three instances the men were at the close of their days, and yet their hearts were full of expectation, their faith was indeed the “substance of things hope for.”

pp. 148-9

Bruce says:

Joseph also, at the end of his days, showed the same firm faith in the fulfillment of God’s promises. Joseph’s career certainly presents instances of faith in abundance, such as his steadfastness under temptation and his patience under unjust treatment: . . .

p. 306

Wiersbe in his little commentary, Be Confident, says:

We have to admire the faith of the patriarchs. They did not have a complete Bible, and yet their faith was strong. They handed God’s promises down from one generation to another. In spite of their failures and testings, these men and women believed God and He bore witness to their faith. How much more faith you and I should have!

p. 125

G. Campbell Morgan says:

Faith, and already you see gleaming through the story the fact that we have been looking at the natural outlook, and faith always looks beyond that; and if it does not, it is not faith at all.

p. 103

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Faith involves things hoped for and not yet seen.

LESSON #2: Abel illustrates for us the proper approach to God by means of the sacrifice.

LESSON #3: Cain was rejected because he refused to approach God in the proper way.

LESSON #4: Enoch walked with God in intimate fellowship. Are you in fellowship with the Lord today?

LESSON #5: The rapture of the church can take place at any moment and like Enoch and Elijah, we will be snatched home in the twinkling of an eye.

LESSON #6: Enoch was pleasing to God because he exercised faith.

LESSON #7: His walk by faith involved being teachable, obedient, and transparent.

LESSON #8: Noah walked with God and he “prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.”

LESSON #9: Abraham illustrates for us the obedience of faith.

LESSON #10: God may be slow but He is never late.

LESSON #11: God tested the faith of Abraham with the command to offer up Isaac.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

(Turn Toward the Wind by Dale Hanson Bourke)

A newspaper article that appeared eight months after his diagnosis was titled "Religion Changes 'Bad Boy' of Politics" and included this summary:

Republican National Committee chairman Lee Atwater, once branded the "pit bull of American politics," is a changed man.

"I have found Jesus Christ. It's that simple," he said in an interview this week. "He's made a difference, and I'm glad I've found him while there's still time."¹

1. Lee Bandy, "Religion Changes 'Bad Boy' of Politics," *Orange County Register* (November 5, 1990).
p. 77

(The Seven Laws of the Harvest: Understanding the Realities of Sowing and Reaping by John W. Lawrence)

The contrast is not seen anywhere more vividly than that which exists between two poems which Dr. Alva J. McClain, former President of Grace Theological Seminary, gave in his theology class notes. The one is entitled, "Invictus" written by William H. Henley, who, by the way, died of suicide. The other is written by a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, Dorothea Day, and her poem is entitled, "My Captain." Observe, if you will, the difference in them.

INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
 Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the horror of the shade,
 And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishments the scroll,
 I am the master of my fate:
 I am the captain of my soul.

MY CAPTAIN

Out of the light that dazzles me,
 Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
 I thank the God I know to be
 For Christ the conqueror of my soul.

Since His the sway of circumstance,
 I would not wince nor cry aloud.
 Under that rule which men call chance
 My head with joy is humbly bowed.

Beyond this place of sin and tears
 That life with Him! And His the aid,
 Despite the menace of the years,
 Keeps, and shall keep me, unafraid.

I have no fear, though strait the gate,
 He cleared from punishment the scroll.
 Christ is the Master of my fate,
 Christ is the Captain of my soul.

(Heaven Help Us! Truths About Eternity That Will Help You Live Today by Steven J. Lawson)

Many people will miss Heaven by eighteen inches--the distance between their heads and their hearts. Make certain that Christ is in your heart by faith.
p. 117

(Broken in the Right Place by Alan E. Nelson)

A sort of reckless abandon comes over the attitude of the person with a tamed soul. This is not a thrill-seeking irresponsibility found in the world. It is more of a sense that "I don't have to survive. I don't have to control my own destiny; He does. I don't have to call the shots; He does. I am not able to accomplish all I need to accomplish; He is." We are more apt to respond as Esther did when God's people needed a clutch play to save the game: "And if I perish, I perish" (Es. 4:16). Our recklessness is a growing desire to do whatever God wants us to do, because we are not consumed with other tasks, like ego enhancement, reputation preservation, and making something of ourselves. Count Zinzendorf said, "I have one passion; it is He, He alone." We are like the bondservant in Exodus 21, who when freed to leave declares, "I love my master and do not want to go free."
p. 170-71

The River
by Garth Brooks

You know a dream is like a river
Ever changin' as it flows
And a dreamer's just a vessel
That must follow where it goes
Trying to learn from what's behind you
And never knowing what's in store
Makes each day a constant battle
Just to stay between the shores . . . and

Chorus:

I will sail my vessel
'Til the river runs dry
Like a bird upon the wind
These waters are my sky
I'll never reach my destination
If I never try
So I will sail my vessel
'Til the river runs dry

Too many times we stand aside
And let the waters slip away
'Til what we put off 'til tomorrow
Has now become today
So don't you sit upon the shoreline
And say you're satisfied
Choose to chance the rapids
And dare to dance the tide . . . yes

And there's bound to be rough waters
And I know I'll take some falls
But with the good Lord as my captain
I can make it through them all . . . yes

Yes, I will sail my vessel
'Til the river runs dry
'Til the river runs dry.