

HEROES OF FAITH

BIBLE TEXT : Hebrews 11:1-22

LESSON 442 Senior Course

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

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Hebrews 11:1-22

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs

Bible References:

Notes:

Faith Defined

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

Paul, after showing how the Jews had utterly failed because of their unbelief, starts out upon this famous 11th chapter showing that the basic principle of godliness must be faith -- faith in the heart. Faith is that grace in the soul that enables a man to see the unseen. That is what Paul had in mind when he said:

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:18).

Nothing but faith can enable a man to see the unseen; it brings the unseen into view and it makes the unknown known. Faith does more than just enable us to believe; it makes us know. That is why Paul calls it a demonstration of things not seen. It brings it so clearly before the eye and lays it so definitely in the soul that all questions are dissolved. That is where the assurance of the Christian comes in; by faith he has bedrock foundation. That is what Isaiah had reference to when he spoke of a sure foundation. That foundation is Christ; and when we are founded upon Him, an assurance comes into the heart that nothing can dispel. And from that basic faith within the soul flow all the virtues of the Christian life.

That is what enabled the patriarchs, the men of God, and the martyrs of old to endure through thick and thin, to face a frowning world and scoffing humanity and persecutors who hunted them like rats, and still hold to their belief -- they had assurance in their heart. They took their orientation from things that were not seen. Paul proceeds with a catalogue of men and women living back in the Old Testament age about which we have been studying, and shows how every one of them prevailed, ran their race, finished their course, and won the victory through faith. He starts at the beginning, but Adam is not mentioned -- he was expelled from the Garden. He had his golden opportunity, but he let it slip for less than a mess of pottage; therefore he is not chronicled with the great men. These men, compassed about by infirmities, with lesser advantages than Adam enjoyed, prevailed where Adam failed.

Abel and Cain

Adam had a chance to see within his own household what sin could do, what disobedience in the Garden could bring in the way of a harvest; and it started with his own sons. We will begin with Abel.

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4).

We might turn back to the account of Abel in Genesis 4:3-15.

with him of the same promise:

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

11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, *so many* as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

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

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that *country* from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

19 Accounting that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, *leaning*

These men brought offerings at this early date. That in itself would signify that they felt the necessity of a reconciliation to God. Whatever their perceptions of truth were, they certainly felt a separation from God; and there had to be something done to unite them with God. That characteristic has been found among all races irrespective of their religious beliefs. Even the heathen make offerings unto their gods. It is an acknowledgment of their sins. The convicting Spirit of the Lord is upon them.

The truth had come to the heart of Abel. Possibly it had come to Cain also, but Cain showed a very different disposition. I believe that Cain knew just as well what was necessary in order to conform to God's requirements as Abel did, but he refused to do it. He shows the very spirit that is manifested today -- knees that will not bend, a will that does not yield, a disposition that is set against God.

Abel offered a lamb, laid it upon the altar, and it was accepted of the Lord -- possibly by fire falling from Heaven -- while Cain's was rejected. Then Cain was wrath. He rose up against his brother and slew him, even after the Lord had warned him.

Abel brought an offering of blood, a slain lamb, without which there was no remission of sins. Thus he sought justification by faith. Cain on the other hand, following the promptings of a carnal mind, brought the fruits of the ground, the product of his labours, and thus he sought justification by works. That is why Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's was rejected. Thus at this early date we find revealed the two kinds of religions: the true religion of divine origin which demands a Blood Atonement for sin, and grants justification by faith and the false religion of human origin, the bloodless kind which seeks justification by works. It is what lies back of Modernism today: it is not necessary, they say, to have a sacrifice. The Blood Atonement is the chief object of attack by modernists. They are willing to accept Jesus as a teacher; they are willing to receive Him as a great Master; they are willing to point to Him as a great example: but when it comes to His laying down His life a sacrifice for sin, they halt there. These two religions have continued to the present day.

Enoch

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

We have a very meagre biography of Enoch, but what is given speaks volumes. In the first place it says that Enoch walked with God. We, therefore, know that he was a man of holiness and righteousness. He was one who, like Abel, had conformed to God's requirements and brought the sacrifices that were pleasing unto the Lord, and obtained this holiness through thus conforming.

Adam walked with God before he fell, and he was created in true holiness and righteousness. No man can walk with the Lord without these graces. It means an upright life and a holy walk to have God's fellowship and upon no other condition will anyone have fellowship with God. That verb "walked" has a depth of meaning. It is in a certain Hebrew conjugation, which means this: Enoch set himself to walk with God. That expresses determination. He did not walk with God as a mere matter of

upon the top of his staff.
22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

pleasure because it was easy for him, but he set himself to the task, and determined to do it.

Mark the virtues of this man: holiness, righteousness, determination. He walked with God three hundred years. There is no account that he backslid during that period. That shows endurance. Then it says that he pleased God. That meant, for one thing, obedience. There is no use for a man to talk about his faith in God and then disobey Him. The devils believe and tremble. If a man has Scriptural belief he obeys God and walks in His commandments and precepts.

This all means that Enoch had a perfect heart, a heart which was set upon pleasing God in everything that he did. By faith Enoch walked with God. God no doubt was invisible, as He was to Moses, but Moses endured as seeing Him who is invisible. No doubt Enoch walked the same way. If we see God we shall see Him by faith; not with these natural eyes, but by the eye of faith. That is, no doubt, what caused Enoch to endure. It is what caused Moses to endure. By this same faith Enoch was also translated. That means instantaneous change -- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Enoch experienced this change without passing through the grave. He continued walking with God in communion and fellowship with Him until the time arrived when he just stepped off the earth and vanished, and his friends saw him no more. The inspired Word tells us that he was translated. That was in the antediluvian period.

Enoch lived at that early date when there was perhaps not one line of God's Word in writing, yet he walked so close to the Lord, measuring up to the standards that God required, that he attained to that goal which is the call of the Church of Christ: to be ready in that day when the Lord appears. Enoch's translation is a type of the translation of the Church. We have another type later on in the case of Elijah, in the time of the prophets.

Noah

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Noah did not live in a very encouraging age. There is quite a detailed description of the conditions on the earth during his time. It states that the wickedness of man was great and the earth was filled with violence and was corrupted under its inhabitants.

The world was not very old in Noah's time but God was about ready to call a halt. People wonder sometimes why God permits conditions to exist as they do in the earth. He will call a halt in His own time.

God saw all that existed in Noah's time. Another thing He said was that man also is flesh; that is, he was given over to the flesh. Living for the flesh and the things of the flesh marked his life. But in the midst of such a condition was this outstanding character, Noah.

It says of him that he was a "just" man. That means that he was righteous, that he had undergone a genuine experience of salvation, and perhaps sanctification. He walked with God the same as Enoch: he "set himself to walk with God". It says, too, of him that he was perfect in his generation. There you have three things said of Noah that are just the opposite of what it says of the world: He was righteous, he walked with God, and he was perfect in his generation.

We marvel at the spiritual heights to which the patriarchs of old reached with the little light they had. It is certainly a sad

commentary upon our present period of enlightenment and Christian standards where we have the entire Word of God before us and so little genuine spirituality in the midst of it all. That is why this chapter is such an encouragement to the Christian.

In Noah's day God determined the destruction of all flesh, even at that He gave them 120 years of grace in which they might repent and seek God if they chose to do it. But in those years there is not an intimation that one of them ever took advantage of it or made a step toward God.

Finally the time came when Noah entered into the ark. Everything was done, the last tap of work was finished, and he and the beasts that were to keep life remaining on the earth entered in. We are told that the Lord shut them in. The same door that shut him in shut the rest out. That spoke the doom of the world.

Just as that door was shut, so one of these days the door of grace will also be shut and that will speak doom on sinners of this age. The thing that brings this home to us is what Jesus said about this condition:

"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37).

Notice what a remarkable parallel there is between present conditions and that of Noah: violence filled the earth, the wickedness of man was great, and the earth was corrupted under its inhabitants. That is a perfect description of what exists right now in the world. These things make us know that we are right on the verge of the coming of the Son of God.

All that Noah did was done by faith. It said that he was "moved with fear." That was not the fear of his own destruction or that of his family; it was a reverential fear of God -- a fear such that he would never doubt God's Word for one second. He took God exactly at what He said and went to work preparing the ark when as yet there was no evidence of any flood. It was a preposterous thing, perhaps, in the minds of the rest of the inhabitants at that period; but it came to pass as the Lord had said.

Abraham

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8).

These men of God came along periodically, just like beacon lights. There is Noah in his period; then about four hundred years later you come to Abraham in his period; and so on down the line. There they stand as monuments to God's saving grace -- witnesses to what faith can do in the human heart.

It is remarkable that Abraham never questioned the call, never had a word to say. He made immediate preparations; and his only other kin that showed any inclination to come along was Lot. So Abraham took his wife and the souls that they had (servants, no doubt) and started out for that land that they knew nothing about. The Word says, "And into the land of Canaan they came" (Genesis 12:5). I like the swing of those words. It sounds as if Abraham meant business. He did it all by faith.

Abraham was surrounded on every hand by idolatry. He had had no surroundings whatever that could point him to the living God; and the Lord had to take him up by the roots, so to speak, that he might be transplanted. He demanded a radical move on the part of Abraham.

God always works radically. Some people complain that this is a radical Gospel. That is a statement of commendation for it,

because it is a radical Gospel. When God begins to move, things cut decisively; and He demands a radical obedience to His Word. The remarkable thing about these men of God is that they moved when God spoke, even if it meant the taking of their very lives. That is how much their service to God meant. They never halted whatever it might mean, whatever sacrifice it entailed.

I can picture this man Abraham cutting loose from all his surroundings, from all his associates, from all his family ties; and going out with what few people there were with him into this unknown land. It meant something for him, but he did it at the call of God. He came into this country that he knew not. We find him coming to the east of Bethel. There he pitched his tent and built an altar unto the Lord.

The first thing Abraham did was to establish an altar. You will notice as you follow Abraham in his moves that God always came first. Whatever move he made, wherever he went, you will find him establishing an altar unto the Lord. That meant that he was establishing worship with God wherever that altar appeared.

One man in remarking about this said, "How few people that build homes think also of building an altar unto the Lord!" Then he closed saying also, "How few truly religious people who serve the living Clod ever have their houses burned down."

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Hebrews 11:8).

The Lord had promised that this land should be his, but throughout Abraham's entire life the only possession that he gained in that land was a burying place, and he bought that with his own money. So he saw none of the promises fulfilled as far as he himself was concerned; but all this time he counted himself as nothing but a pilgrim and a stranger. That has become quite a familiar phrase to Christian followers of the Lord; but a great many use the phrase who, by their actions rather than by their words, indicate that they are much more at home in this world than they are with the Lord. It means something to be a pilgrim and a stranger here below.

While this land was to be given to Abraham's posterity -- and Abraham might well have gotten his eyes upon that land -- yet Paul tells us what his true outlook was.

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

Let me ask you: Was Abraham's outlook back there about 1900 B. C. any different from that which God intends it to be in this present period? Or that, which the Christians outlook should be? He was a man who was measuring up to the spiritual standard of the Christian era, the advanced light that we have today with the Word of God. As far as we know, there was not one line of this Word committed to writing in Abraham's period. Whatever he received the Lord spoke to him in the way of a commandment or a word. He never once had his eyes upon that possession. He knew then, just as well as we know today, that that land was simply a symbol of God's Better Land.

It was true that there were certain temporal promises given Abraham's posterity, and blessings that they were to have in this land. And they had them when they obeyed God, because in order for God to carry out His plan of redemption, and His purpose that Israel should be the channel through which that plan was to be revealed to the world, it was necessary that they be established as a race. Therefore He blessed them materially; but He never intended that the blessings that He gave the Israelites

should stop with the Promised Land, any more than He intends to let the material blessings which He gives us today be the finis of the whole thing. He expects us to look beyond these, as He expected Israel to look beyond what they received.

The spiritual men, the men who walked with God and talked with God, and who had the spiritual outlook, saw beyond the horizon of those temporal blessings. We do not want to get a misconception of what God's object for Israel was, and think that it was purely material, and those were the only blessings that they were to receive, while in this period we are to receive the spiritual blessings. They were capable of having the spiritual blessings as well as we are today -- under, of course, limited light and a more limited revelation; nevertheless the blessings were theirs. We find here catalogued the men who took advantage and received them. And if these men of God could receive them, all Israel could have done the same.

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

There is something heavenly about those words. They did not come into possession of the promises that God gave, but they saw them way down the line. Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day" (John 8:56). He saw the coming Messiah, he saw the Seed that God had promised; and that was what inspired him and caused him to rejoice.

The saints back in Paul's day believed the promises of the Lord's second coming. They did not see it as far off as Abraham saw his promises; they saw it fairly close. But it was not fulfilled in their day. What was the effect of their holding to those promises and cherishing them? It prompted a circumspect walk, a spiritual life and a close walk with the Lord. And it will do the same in our day. It did for Abraham in his day. If they had abandoned those promises they would never have attained to them.

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Hebrews 11:14).

He is referring back to the fact that Abraham looked for a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," and counted himself and his family as pilgrims and strangers.

"And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned" (Hebrews 11:15).

If Abraham had wanted to go back to his kindred and to his country God would have let him go. Although God gave the promise, it was Abraham's privilege to turn back at any time. In fact, he had no more than come into this large land that flowed with milk and honey, until a famine overtook him, and he had to leave Canaan until it subsided. He had plenty opportunity to question God's promise, but he did not.

Faith carried him through all the discouragement's and hard places: faith in God, and nothing else. When he could not see, he still believed and held on. If there is anything that will fortify you and me against discouragement, against those fiery darts of the enemy (and I do not believe there is anything that is more fiery and sharp and goes deeper than discouragement) it is the shield of faith. No wonder Paul said, "Above all, taking the shield of faith" (Ephesians 6:16).

Nothing much has happened to disturb our peace since God poured out His Spirit in 1906. This body of believers has grown;

God has blessed it; it has prospered. It is true there have been trials along the way, but they have been mostly individual trials. There have been no persecutions to speak of; but perhaps before this race is run our faith may be put to the test along some of those lines. One thing we do know is that the diabolical powers that are rising in this world are every day coming closer to our door. What we need in these days is to be fortified within with the same faith that fortified those saints of old; and that faith God plants in the heart of him who puts his trust in God.

"But now they desire a better country, . . ."

There is something even better than that Promised Land with its milk and honey, its grapes of Eschol, and all the blessings that it afforded.

". . . that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:16).

If He prepared it for them, He has prepared it for us.

There came a time when Abraham met the crisis of his life. And every one of us will come to the place sooner or later where we will face a clear-cut issue of going through with God, whatever the cost. Could we go through if it meant our head? or would we back up on the situation?

Abraham reached that place. Right out of a clear sky (after he had waited for twenty-five years for the fulfilment of God's promise that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed) God spoke: "Abraham." He answered, "Behold, here I am." God said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:1, 2). There was the command. What did Abraham do? He arose early the next morning, saddled his ass, craved the wood, took his son and his servants and started out for Moriah, a three days' journey. It was there that he went through with what God commanded him.

"And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

"And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:7, 8).

A great prophecy was made in those words because Abraham was enacting symbolically, in going up there to Mount Moriah, what was to be enacted centuries later through that Seed that should bless all the nations of the earth. He took Isaac and bound him and placed him upon the altar and lifted the knife. Then the Word of the Lord came to him, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hadst not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:12).

He had not let the thing that lay closest to his heart ever take precedence over the love that he had for God. If he had not kept Isaac upon the altar from the very start, he would not have been able to lay him on the altar when the crisis came. As far as Abraham was concerned, that child was slain. He had the confidence that he was serving a God who, should he fulfil the commandment God had given him, was able to raise his son from the dead.

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:19).

God has given us there just a little human enactment of what took place in Heaven when "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." That word "gave" means that He gave up His only begotten Son.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).