

"BY FAITH" PART TWO (HEBREWS 11:20-40)

Last Sunday we covered the first half of Hebrews Ch 11. This morning we'll be looking at the second half. We've discussed so far the faith of Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Abraham's wife Sarah. All were remarkable people whose lives demonstrated faith. They believed God. They took Him at His word. That's really all they had to go on! Each one proved they had faith by their obedience to God.

So, what's the context of Hebrews Ch 11? Why do we have the Hall of Faith? The writer of Hebrews is addressing a largely Jewish audience and for 10 chapters he argues for why Jesus is better than all that O.T. stuff and tells them to "consider Jesus." You can understand the Jews' reluctance to embrace Christ and reject the Law. It's not an easy thing to believe something new, something completely different from what you were taught growing up. The Gospel message is a relatively new thing. To give some historical perspective here – when this letter was written the Jews had been practicing the old Levitical system for over 1500 years. Their whole culture was built around it. So the writer of Hebrews in Ch 11 refers them back to many of their heroes from the O.T. He basically tells them, "These men and women did exactly what I'm asking you to do – to believe what God is telling you even though it's new; even though it's something you've never seen or experienced before. That's what they did!" They believed God. They acted by faith. That's his whole point.

We're going to pick back up in v 20. Here he continues his discussion of the Patriarchs. The term "Patriarchs" commonly refers to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Three quarters of the Book of Genesis tells their stories. Last week we talked about Abraham and his faith. Immediately after God called Abraham and told him to go to a foreign land that God would give him as an inheritance, he went. When God tested Abraham and told him to offer up Isaac, he obeyed. Abraham is a great study in faith.

READ Hebrews 11:20-22

There are many stories about the lives of these guys that someone could point to as good examples of faith. But the writer of Hebrews focuses on what they did at the end of their lives, as they approached death. The blessings given by Isaac and Jacob and the instructions passed on by Joseph all centered on "The Promise," the unconditional covenant promise that God made with Abraham. It was a three-fold promise and it's huge in Genesis. Let me remind you of it.

READ Genesis 12:1-3 [*Abram here = Abraham*]

Part 1 of the promise is that Abraham will become a GREAT nation.

READ Genesis 13:14-17

Part 2 of the promise emphasizes that God will give Abraham and his many descendants ("as the dust of the earth") LAND. God promises to give them real estate, a specific geographical location in which to live – later this land became known as the Promised Land or as we know it, Israel.

READ Genesis 15:1, 4-6

Part 3 of the promise is that God will give Abraham an heir, a son. It is thru this son that God will provide numerous descendants as many as the stars in the heavens. Of course we know the story. Twenty-five years later when Abraham is 100 his son Isaac, the child of promise is born.

God repeats the covenant promise to Isaac, Gen 26 & Jacob, Gen 28.

V 20 mentions that Isaac's act of faith was in the blessings of his sons Jacob and Esau, Gen 27 and 28. The covenant promise is passed down thru Jacob. The words Isaac uses in blessing Jacob closely parallel the words God told Abraham in Gen 12. OK, so we all know the story about how Rebekah and Jacob tricked Isaac into blessing Jacob. The blessing that Jacob received from Isaac was originally intended for Esau. It's hard to understand what Isaac could have been thinking. After all, Isaac knew that God had ordained Jacob as the heir of the promise. Isaac was well aware of what God had told Rebekah when her twin boys were born, that "the

older shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). Isaac had been deeply saddened when Esau married two pagan Hittite women (Gen 27:34-35). Isaac knew that Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob. Isaac knew all of this and still planned to bless Esau (thereby passing along God's covenant promise to Esau rather than to Jacob). Isaac was tricked into giving Jacob the blessing. How then is Isaac an example of faith? It seems as though Isaac favored Esau over Jacob. Why then is Isaac considered a man of faith? There is a reason for this and it is seen in the last part of that story involving Jacob's deception of Isaac. After Jacob basically steals his father's blessing from Esau, Esau is extremely angry and threatens to kill Jacob. At that point Isaac calls Jacob back in and this is what Isaac tells Jacob...

READ Genesis 28:2-4.

Isaac directs Jacob to go live with his father in law, which saves Jacob's life. This also allows Jacob an opportunity to flourish and to learn to depend upon God. Isaac recognizes Jacob as the true heir of the Promise. It is a wild story but it's a great example of how the sovereignty of God works itself out in the end despite the sin, the forgetfulness and deceitfulness of everyone involved. So that's Isaac.

V 21 talks about the faith of Jacob. While Jacob is fleeing away from the wrath of Esau, he stops at a place to rest. That night he has a dream (Jacob's ladder). In that dream God reiterates the Promise He made to Abraham and to Isaac. In response the next morning Jacob builds an altar to God and calls the place Bethel ("house of God"). Fast-forward some 70 years thru the events of Jacob's life to the end of Genesis. Jacob is living in Egypt thanks to Joseph. Remember the famine that forced Jacob's sons to go down to Egypt and buy grain and how they reunited with Joseph – that whole story. On his deathbed Jacob passes along the covenant promise that God had given to Abraham, Isaac and to him. Gen 47 and 48 record Jacob conveying this blessing upon Joseph and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Gen 49 records that Jacob also blessed his other sons. It was actually thru his son Judah that the promised Messiah would come.

So then by the time we get to the end of the Book of Genesis this so-called "great nation" is only a large family of several generations, 70-100 people, living in a foreign country, Egypt. They still did not possess the Promised Land. The fact is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's sons spent their entire lives as nomads, foreigners in the land of Canaan. The only land Abraham ever owned was a burial cave at Machpelah and he purchased that himself. Joseph spent the majority of his life in Egypt.

The covenant promises were still unfulfilled. This is what verse 39 of Hebrews 11 indicates – they "did not receive what was promised." Think about it. These Patriarchs lived their entire lives by faith never fully realizing what God had promised to them.

In v 22 Joseph demonstrated his faith in God's covenant promise by giving "directions concerning his bones." His father Jacob had issued similar instructions just before he died. Joseph and his brothers had taken Jacob's body from Egypt back to his burial cave at Machpelah. There they buried Jacob with Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob's first wife Leah. Now as Joseph nears death he gives instructions to take his remains back to the Promised Land. Here are the final words of Genesis...

READ Genesis 50:24-26.

Joseph's body eventually IS carried out of Egypt – 360 years later! In Exodus 13 as the children of Israel leave Egypt it says, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him..." (13:19). But it would be another 40-50 years after that before he would be buried in the Promised Land. Joshua buried Joseph's bones at Shechem (Joshua 24:32).

OK, so let's move on to the next person of faith, Moses.

READ Hebrews 11:23

This indicates the faith of Moses's parents. "They saw that the child was beautiful" does not mean they had a cute baby. What it indicates is that Moses' parents knew their baby boy was favored by God. They

realized their boy had a special calling on his life. We don't know how they knew this, but they did. They put baby Moses in a basket and floated him down the Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter finds him and takes him in. Moses receives a good secular education in Egypt. But he also becomes aware of the one true God of Israel. How? By God's providence Moses's own mother is hired to be his nurse and during his formative years she teaches him about God and God's relationship to the Israelite people.

READ Hebrews 11:24-25

Moses grows up and makes the choice to forsake the comforts, privileges, power, wealth, status and honor of Egyptian royalty. He instead identifies with the Israelite slaves. That decision required faith – to leave behind all you can see for what appears to be nothing. In his sermon in Acts 7 Stephen says that Moses realized that God was giving the Israelites salvation by his hand. So early on, Moses is aware of his calling. He knows God wants to use him. Well, God's timing is perfect. As it turns out Moses's pathway to becoming Israel's deliverer took him into the land of Midian where he would tend his father in law's sheep for the next 40 years!

READ Hebrews 11:26

Here the writer of Hebrews compares what Moses did with what Christ did. Moses fully identified himself with God's covenant people rather than the Egyptians. Moses set aside all the wealth and treasures of Egypt so that in God's time he could go and do what God called him to do. Moses realized his mission was to save the Israelites from their slavery. Moses "was looking for the reward," but it was not an earthly reward. It was a heavenly reward. What a great picture of Jesus. He voluntarily gave up the glory of heaven. He came down here in obedience to His Father's will. Jesus identified with us. He became one of us in order to save us from our slavery to sin and Satan.

READ Hebrews 11:27

You remember the story. Moses fled from Egypt after killing an Egyptian whom he witnessed beating up one of the Hebrew slaves. Moses feared the king. That's why he left so abruptly and why he stayed away all those years. But then God calls Moses from the burning bush. And Moses returns to Egypt to meet with Pharaoh. When Moses does this he is no longer "afraid of the anger of the king." Why not? Because Moses had faith. He was fully aware of God's presence in his life. He could see Him who is invisible. Moses sensed God's hand of protection on him. He trusted God to guide and empower him in carrying out his mission of deliverance. Moses saw the invisible God at work in all those incredible events leading up to the Exodus.

READ Hebrews 11:28

You all know the story. God sends a series of plagues upon Egypt and each time Pharaoh hardens his heart and refuses to let the people go. Finally God has had enough. He institutes the Passover (Exo 11-12). This is something brand new. It's never been done this way before. Putting it into practice requires faith. God instructs Moses to have the Israelite people "sprinkle the blood" of a lamb over the doorpost of their houses. God then will "pass over" the houses with the blood and not allow harm to come to the firstborn in those households. But those that do not have the blood will face God's judgment and the firstborn will die. You know what happens next. Probably thousands of firstborn sons and daughters died that night. The entire land of Egypt went into mourning. Pharaoh finally relented and let the people go. There's a mass exodus out of Egypt as well over a million Israelites finally head for the Promised Land.

The next two events mentioned in Hebrews 11 illustrate the faith of the Israelite people. We often focus on their faithlessness, but here they are commended for their faith.

READ Hebrews 11:29

This is a familiar story (Exo 14). At first the people didn't seem to have much faith at all. They cried out in fear as the Egyptian army approached. But when Moses stretched out his staff and the sea parted it took an act of faith to walk in between two vertical walls of water. But they did as they were told and as a result they were saved.

READ Hebrews 11:30

Why would they do that? Because God told them to! Here we have another familiar story (Joshua 6). Not your conventional battle plan, but here it is. God instructs Joshua to have the people march around the city of Jericho once for six straight days. On the seventh day march around the city seven times. The priests then will blow the trumpets and the people will shout and the walls of Jericho will come tumbling down. To follow that plan took faith. You know there were probably some jeers from the city walls. You know what the people must have been thinking – this is crazy. What good is this going to do? But they obeyed what God told them to do and as a result God gave them the victory.

READ Hebrews 11:31

Here the faith of Rahab, a woman, a prostitute, a Gentile, a Canaanite is commended. Joshua 2, Rahab demonstrated faith when she showed hospitality to and hid the Israelite spies. She sent the king of Jericho and his cronies on a wild goose chase while she hid the spies on her rooftop. The whole city of Jericho had heard about the God of Israel. Listen to what Rahab tells the spies... READ Joshua 2:11-14

As a result of her faith Rahab did not perish with those who were disobedient – the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho. They had all heard about the God of Israel but only Rahab had faith in Him. For her faith in the God of Israel Rahab and her family ended up being spared later on when Jericho fell (Joshua 6). An interesting side note about Rahab... She ended up marrying a Jewish man named Salmon. They had a son named Boaz who married Ruth. Rahab ended up being the great great

grandmother of King David and is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew Ch 1. It's a remarkable story!

READ Hebrews 11:32

The writer of Hebrews says, "I wish I had the time to go into more detail..." But instead he briefly summarizes the rest of the O.T. history of faith. The period of the Judges was an awful period in Israel's history. But they had their heroes of faith – men like Gideon (Judges 7) who was told that his army of 32,000 men was too big to fight against the Midianite army of 135,000. Based on how they drank water from a stream God reduced Gideon's army down to just 300 men. Gideon followed God's rather bizarre instructions and his small band of men armed with pitchers, trumpets and torches defeated the Midianites. Basically God caused the Midianites to panic and they killed each other with their own swords!

Barak and Samson and Jephthah each have their own stories of faith and are also talked about in the Book of Judges.

Then there is the period of Israel's monarchy. Though far from perfect, David was a man after God's own heart. He refused to kill King Saul, the Lord's anointed. He was a valiant warrior who trusted God and to whom God gave great military victories throughout his life.

Samuel was a dynamic leader at a crucial point in Israel's history. He boldly spoke God's word. He rebuked the high priest Eli. He confronted King Saul several times. He anointed David as king.

After Samuel there are no more names mentioned. What you have instead are descriptions of the wide range of faith experiences by Israel's many leaders. Some good experiences and some not so good!

READ Hebrews 11:33-35

Joshua; the various kings namely Saul and David; the various judges and kings namely Samuel and Solomon; Abraham, Moses, David's promise in 2 Sam 7:11-13 of an eternal kingdom and Solomon; Daniel; Shadrach,

Meshach and Abed-nego; David from King Saul and Elisha from the Syrian army (2 Kings 6); Samson and King Hezekiah; Saul, David, Jonathan; David when he slew Goliath; Elijah in 1 Kings 17 and Elisha in 2 Kings 4; here the writer may have in mind the heroic martyrs during the Maccabean times;

READ Hebrews 11:36-38

Jeremiah, Joseph, Elisha; the prophet Zechariah; the prophet Isaiah; the prophet Uriah (Jer 26) and even John the Baptist; many of the O.T. prophets included Elijah and Elisha and later John the Baptist.

READ Hebrews 11:39-40

Though these men and women (some we know and many we do not know) lived by faith in God, they died not receiving what was promised. But that did not discourage them. They stayed the course. They had their eyes on the ultimate prize, their eternal inheritance with the Lord.

That last phrase "apart from us they should not be made perfect" is talking about our salvation. Those O.T. heroes could not see that their salvation would be in Jesus Christ. But what they could not see, we CAN see. They could only look forward by faith to God's future provision for the human sin problem; that God would someday send a Messiah, a Redeemer, a Savior. But we can look back and see God's provision in the Person of Jesus Christ. We can see that Jesus is the One who was promised.

By faith we look back at Jesus's death on the cross as being full payment for our sin. WE have something better than THEY had. We have full revelation! And so that finishes Hebrews Ch 11 and takes us to Ch 12...

READ Hebrews 12:1

The picture here is of those great heroes of faith having run their race well now sitting in the stands cheering US on. They are rooting for us. They want us to endure to the end, to finish the race set before us. So then, we can't quit now. We must press onward toward the prize! We must keep the faith!