

# Hebrews Chapter Eleven (vv.17-23)

## **True Faith Submits (vv.17-19)**

**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.

David Gooding: This chapter is the study of what faith is and how it behaves, in a word, what it means to be a believer. The particular emphasis in these sections of Hebrews 11 is that faith **supplies confidence** for the future (vv.17-22) and **strengthens** those under *trial* (vv.23-40).

After considering Abraham's faith in relation to his **sojourning** (dwelling as a stranger, v.8ff), the writer considers his **submission** in relation to the offering up of Isaac. Abraham was 'tried'. The word *peirazo* can either mean 'to tempt to do evil' or 'test by examining'. The latter is clearly in view here as God does not tempt any person to sin (James 1.13). We can expect numerous tests in the school of faith. Abraham was tested in relation to *forsaking* Ur (Genesis 12.1), *famine* (Genesis 12.10), *falsehood* (in relation to Sarah, Genesis 12.13), *family* (parted from Lot, Genesis 13), *fortune* (refused the offer of the king of Sodom, Genesis 14.17) and *fatherhood* (Ishmael, Genesis 16). Some, by faith, he passed. Others, through the flesh, he failed. True faith must and will be tested. We can expect to be called to justify our profession of faith by our works. This testing of faith is likely to increase in intensity as we progress in the school of faith but it is invaluable to help us develop spiritually in terms of faith and service (1 Peter 1.7). 'The toughest tests are reserved for the toughest saints.' *James 1.3-4: Knowing that the proving of your faith works endurance. But let endurance have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* What encouragement this would be to the Hebrew believers.

The offering of Isaac was a great demonstration of faith. **First**, note Abraham's **resolve** of faith. The Greek suggests that whilst the testing of Abraham was still in progress (during the journey? Genesis 22.4) he had already determined to offer up Isaac. He had met the test before God intervened. Clearly God had top priority in Abraham's life. If God commanded, he must obey and with haste. As part of this **resolve**, Abraham was willing to sacrifice at great cost. Isaac was his most prized possession; his 'only begotten son'. Although Abraham had more than one son (Genesis 25.1-6), he had only the one Isaac (Genesis 22.1). He was unique and the one in whom the purposes of God concerning a promised seed centred (v.18). The size of our offering says much about our faith. Would we be willing to offer our most prized possession fully and completely on the altar? Our greatest trial may well come where our greatest love is set. **Second**, note Abraham's **reckoning** and **reward** of faith. His great **reward** was that he received Isaac back from the dead. Abraham had already sacrificed Isaac in his mind, but God always returns to us again what we offer to Him (Proverbs 19.17, Galatians 6.7). This receiving of Isaac from the dead was a 'figure' or 'parable' of resurrection. In all this Abraham had been logically reasoning in his mind. He 'accounted' or **reckoned** that as God had promised him descendants through Isaac, He would have to raise him from the dead for this to be fulfilled. This was Abraham's deep 'inner conviction' and 'persuasion' as noted in *Genesis 22.5: And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. True faith, then, submits to the word of God. We are not asked to rationalise or question, or even understand, but simply to place total confidence in God's power. He is able (v.19).*

## **True Faith Secures (vv.20-22)**

**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 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.

Verses 20-22 introduce three instances of faith exercised at the time of death (cf. 11.13). **Isaac's** faith is illustrated **not** in the *choice* (see Genesis 27), but in the *substance* of the blessing. He blessed both Jacob and Esau concerning the future, exercising absolute confidence that what God had promised He would bring to pass. Jacob, the younger, received the full patriarchal blessing of Isaac making him heir of all God's covenant promises to Abraham. This meant that the Messiah would descend from Jacob and secured a double portion of the family property. This was as God had said it would be (Genesis 25.23). Faith can see (secures) the future. Faith has eternity in view.

Likewise **Jacob**, by faith and when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph. Genesis 48.21 says Jacob was 'sick' referring to a general wearing down of bodily health in old age. Faith is not conditioned on age or the physical health of the body. What limits our work for God is not lack of physical ability but lack of faith. The patriarchal blessing of Jacob was given, by faith, not to Reuben the firstborn, but to Joseph through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48, 1 Chronicles 5.1-2), again, the younger taking priority over the older. Joseph thus received the double portion of the

inheritance. The portion concerning the coming Messiah was passed in grace to Judah (Genesis 49.10). Again, Jacob looked far beyond the present into the future, telling all his sons what would 'befall' them in the 'last days' (Genesis 49.1ff). What God had revealed to Jacob concerning the future no doubt caused him to **worship**. Faith and worship are inseparable. As Jacob demonstrated, worship requires effort (cp. Genesis 48.2, Hebrews 11.21) and comprises appreciation, humility and service. The strength of our faith will be demonstrated in the fervency of our worship.

**Joseph** had lived in Egypt since the age of 17 (Genesis 37.2). Now, just before his death, he is 110 (Genesis 50.22). Essentially Joseph was a naturalised Egyptian, but his heart was with God's people and in Canaan, not in Egypt. Joseph had prestige, popularity and power in Egypt but his heart was set on better things, namely the promises of God. Where do we set our affections? He therefore 'made mention' or 'remembered' the promise of God to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12.7, 13.5, 15.7). He knew that the children of Israel would be 400 years in bondage in a strange land and 'afterward' God would bring them out (Genesis 15.13-14). Such was his confidence in God's promises that he commanded to be put in a coffin not a pyramid (Genesis 50.26). Joseph wasn't staying! He was Canaan minded. There should be a heavenly and spiritual character about all of us which when we see, reminds us we're bound for glory (earnest of the Spirit, 2 Corinthians 1.22). What a testimony of future deliverance that coffin would have been to all the children of Israel, not only in Egypt but also in the wilderness. Eventually Joseph was buried in Shechem in a parcel of land which belonged first to his father Jacob and so, by inheritance, to him (Joshua 24.32). This is the abiding influence of Joseph's faith which continued through the years and generations. It ever lifted Israel's eyes up to God in faith. The ministries of some will continue to bless others in succeeding generations.

### **True Faith Satisfies (vv.23-28)**

**23** *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.*

The verses charting Moses' life of faith begin with his parents, **Amram** and **Jochebed** (Exodus 6.20), and their great confidence in God (cf. 2 Timothy 1.5). The greatest heritage and example we can give to our children is that of faith; not fun, fame and fortune... When Moses was born, he was hidden for three months in the home (Acts 7.20). Exodus 2.2 attributes this act of faith to Jochebed, but here is widened to include Amram who was very likely a slave and therefore not at home as often. How delightful to see a partnership of faith. Both Amram and Jochebed came from the tribe of Levi (Exodus 2.1). This was a marriage within the tribe, which was later commanded by God that the tribes and their respective inheritances would remain distinct (Numbers 36.6-7). Any potential partner in marriage should not only be a believer, but be 'within the tribe'. Do you have similar scriptural convictions? What about future service? Don't marry for fleshly reasons. Marry for faith reasons! To hide a baby for three months in the home must have taken great **wisdom**, but then men and women of faith are often marked by wisdom. They were also **brave** as they defied the king's commandment (Exodus 1.22), although strictly speaking they did cast Moses into the river, just within the ark and after three months! God's people are obligated to obey the laws of the country in which they reside (Romans 13.1-7), unless obedience to these laws would mean disobedience to God. Murder violates the law of God.

Moses' parents went to such lengths because they saw he was a 'proper child'. The same word is used in Acts 7.20 (translated 'fair') and the LXX of Exodus 2.2 (translated 'goodly'). The word suggests more than just a pleasing appearance; it also has the idea of **approval**. In fact, Acts 7.20 suggests that Moses was 'beautiful' or 'fair' in the sight of God. Here was a child that was destined for great things in the purposes of God. Josephus suggests that revelation had been given to Amram in a night vision to confirm the same. Certainly Moses' parents recognised, by faith, something of spiritual beauty and purpose in him which gave them the confidence to defy the earthly king and obey the heavenly King. It is possible to live a life of faith in hostile and difficult circumstances. Many of God's people in Israel were idolaters (Ezekiel 20.6-8) yet they walked by faith. Faith depends, not on outward conditions, but on the heart.