

Chapter 11

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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. 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.

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. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 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.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

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

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

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.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

INTRODUCTION

Being the aging ex-rock'n'roller that I am, my old lexicon creeps into my approach to Scripture. I've been known to designate portions of the Word as "cool", much to the bemusement of our congregation. But, sometimes there's no better word for it. This portion of Hebrews is particularly cool.

But, before we jump into the commentary, this first passage also reminds me of one of the more obvious abuses of Scripture that swept through "popular Evangelicalism" a few years back. Several big-time TV evangelists created something they termed "Now faith." The premise of their errant doctrine was that it was not sufficient to simply "name and claim" the things you expected from God, you had to believe that they were yours "now!" Faith that simply believed that God would perform at some future date was insufficient. You had to have "Now faith."

Of course, their proof text for this silly bit of preaching was the first two words of this passage, "Now, faith is the substance...." Yes, that's right. Not just any old faith is the substance of things hoped for - only "Now faith" qualifies – at least in the furtive minds of these overly creative preachers. Isn't it amazing how far people are willing to twist Scripture to come up with a novel concept or new movement in the church?

Anyway, setting that aside, let's consider one of the genuinely great portions of this letter.

COMMENTARY

Let's quickly review the end of Chapter 10 to establish the context that opened chapter 11. After posing his contrast between those who reject the Word and are subject to wrath with those who receive the word and stand firm in the face of persecution, the author declared that their endurance would pay off in the end. Though their earthly goods were spoiled, they knew within themselves that Heaven contained a better, eternal, "enduring substance" (v.34). So, they were to maintain their confidence, which would be greatly rewarded (v.35). And, as they persevered patiently, they were assured that after they had done those things that God had ordained for them, they would receive that promised inheritance (v.36). As they endured and pressed on just a bit longer, Christ would make good on His promise to return in power and resurrection (v.37).

What a marvelous exhortation. But, what a seemingly impossible task! Who can endure the loss of everything they own? Who can suffer the torturous deaths of their friends and loved ones? Who can stare down a starving lion, or a burning stake, or boiling oil, and hang on to their declaration of Christ's sufficiency? How is it possible for people to rise to such courage?

Verse 38 introduced the answer --- "Now, the just shall live by faith."

The opposite of faith is "a-pistis", or dis-faith. It is described by the words "if any man draw back." The result of dis-faith is "my soul shall have no pleasure in him". Verse 39 then summarized,

"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

So, there is the equation. Faith is not only the basis of earthly endurance under pressure; it is also the means through which our very souls are eternally saved. In that context, the author continued - - -

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

The term "now" is a transitional word. It's like a stop light, refocusing the reader's attention on the point being made. It was used in identical fashion back in verse 38, "Now the just shall live by faith."

To really get our arms around this verse we must understand a couple key elements. The English word "substance" has appeared twice in the last few verses. In verse 34 of chapter 10, when speaking of a heavenly, enduring substance, the Greek word "*huparxis*" was used, meaning property, wealth, or goods.

However, in this verse (11:1) it is the Greek term "*hupostasis*", meaning, "to stand, or be placed, under." It is a contraction of two Greek terms - "*hupo*" or under, and "*stasis*", a standing. It is a very intriguing word. It is the root of our English term "understand." When we grasp a concept or idea, we "stand under" its authority, meaning, or influence.

"*Hupostasis*" is most often rendered "confidence" in the KJV. The Apostle Paul used it twice in his second letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 9, verse 4, we read –

“Lest haply, if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we - that we say not ye - should be ashamed in this same confident [hupostasis] boasting.”

And, in chapter 11, verse 17 –

“That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence [hupostasis] of boasting.”

The Hebrews author also uses it similarly in chapter 3, verse 14 –

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence [hupostasis] steadfast unto the end.”

But, twice in the Hebrews letter it takes on a different, more unique, form. The first occurrence is in chapter 1, verse 3 –

“Who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person [hupostasis], and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.”

The translation "person" in the KJV is a bit of an anachronism. Most of the earlier English versions render it, "substance." The NAS reads, "the exact representation of His nature." The NIV reads, "the exact representation of His being." Kenneth Wuest renders it, "the exact reproduction of His essence."

So, Christ is "the very image" of God's substance." Regardless of His outer, physical image, His true nature and essence are identical to God's. It is in that form of usage that we read, "Faith is the **substance** of things hoped for..."

"Faith" is the Greek term "*pistis*", which means "a firm persuasion or conviction based upon hearing." In every New Testament usage it designates faith toward God, Christ, or spiritual things. So, our firm conviction in the things of God, revealed to us through the Word, is the essence, substance, or identical nature "of things hoped for." And, what are those "things hoped for"? Well, in the author's context, it was Christ's return and the Heavenly reward for those who patiently persevered.

Now that I've complicated the whole deal, let me simplify it - - -

Some folk persevere, some turn back. Some hang on to Christ through every persecution and trial, some are offended and denounce the truth of Christ. What is the difference between the two? One of them has hope of a great reward, and they press forward knowing that God has empowered them to make it to the end. That confidence, that faith, is of the same essential nature as the heavenly reward, itself. As the gift of eternal life is from God, so is the definite persuasion that God will perform His every word. It is all of Him, from Him, to Him and for Him.

“For 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)

Faith is a gift from God, worked in us to guarantee our security all the way to our predestined reward. But, that's only the first half of this verse! The second half declares that faith is "...the evidence of things not seen."

Oh, well that's just way too cool.

The word "evidence" is the Greek "*elegchos*," or "*elenchus*," depending on the manuscript. In all of Scripture, it appears only in this verse, although a form of "*elegmos*" is used 2 Timothy 3:26 -

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof [*elegmos*], for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”

In Paul's context to Timothy, it meant "to prove something as accurate or right".

As for "*elegchos*", I will defer to Spiros Zodhiates' definition –

"It implies not merely the charge on the basis of which one is convicted, but also the manifestation of the truth of that charge, the results to be reaped from that charge, and the acknowledgment, if not outwardly, yet inwardly, of its truth on the part of the accused."

That's a big definition. Allow me to simplify using current events.

During the O.J. Simpson trial, there was a great deal of debate over his innocence or guilt. The one thing the prosecution lacked was the key piece of evidence that would prove his guilt beyond all question. If someone had produced a bloody knife with O.J.'s prints and Nichole's blood, there would have been absolutely no doubt as to his guilt and subsequent conviction. So, O.J. would have understood the murderous charge, acknowledged the punishment due him, and known in his conscience that he was guilty and deserving of the conviction. All of that would have happened because of the "evidence."

Now, wait, it gets better...a Greek friend of mine told me that "*elegchos*" - evidence - is commonly used to denote a "title deed" - the contract that proves ownership of a piece of property. That deed is the incontrovertible evidence that the land belongs to you. Hold on to that thought, I'll get back to it in a moment.

Faith, the firm, God-given conviction of Heavenly things, is the evidence, or proof-positive, of "things not seen." What are the "things not seen"? The Heavenly realm; the angelic host declaring "holy, holy, holy;" the throne of God before the crystal sea; the Heavenly city and our dwelling place that Jesus went to prepare! The eternal rewards, unending health and happiness, living in the light of God --- I've never seen these things! But, I know they exist. They are more real and precious to me than anything this earth has to offer. How do I know they exist? What is my proof?

Faith.

Faith is the evidence that all the rest of it is real. If there were no real God, living in a real Heaven, sitting on His real throne, which sent His real Son to redeem His real people and bring them to His real habitation so they could behold His real glory, there would be no real faith. Sinful, animalistic flesh has no capacity to maintain such hope over the course of a lifetime without the indwelling Spirit of God instilling faith into His people. It is impossible for lustful, self-centered men to maintain such high and glorious notions and die joyfully under persecution, rejoicing in the spoiling of their goods, if they were not imbued with a confidence from on high. The very fact that they believed it and lived by it, was proof that all the rest of it was true.

Okay, you say, I buy it so far. But what about me, personally. How do I know that I will inherit the Heavenly estate?

Faith.

Faith is your title deed. The Heavenly promises exist and the very fact that you believe them and are convicted by them proves that the whole promise is yours. You hold the evidential deed of trust.... Faith.

I preached for a year in a converted trailer in Dover, Tn. When the little group of believers invited me to come teach them, I asked where they would be meeting. Rather than drive me out to the land where the trailer was sitting on blocks, they took out the title deed and showed it to me. That was sufficient. I knew they had a place. They had evidence, so I knew the rest was true.

That is what faith does. Faith in God's word is the evidence that captures us, convicts us, holds us, and charges us. That internal confidence of God's truth, despite every outward circumstance to the contrary, proves that everything we hope for is real and tangible, and we are about to inherit it, based on our adoption, redemption, and title deed.

Cool, eh?

{2} - For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Faith has always been the means by which men could approach God and satisfy His justice. The author proved this point at length as he recounted the "great cloud of witnesses" who achieved a good standing with God through faith. Faith is the one and only way to satisfy Him, and without faith it is impossible to please Him. As he recounted the list, reaching far back into their Hebrews history, the unifying factor in men who ever achieved right standing with God was their faith.

{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.

Not only do we understand the final goal of our lives through faith, but we also understand how it all began. "Big Bang" theories aside, the Scriptures declare that the spoken word of God was sufficient to create everything out of nothing. God did not need a ball of gas and matter to explode out into the black nothingness. He spoke the stars into their place and commanded the planets into their orbits. The heavenly host are counted and named, each with a purpose. They all redound to the glory of the Almighty God.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."
(John1:1-3)

How do we know that is the way the world began?

Faith.

If you can believe such a magnificent and incredible story of how everything sprang into being, and can withstand every trial that accompanies such a belief, then your conviction is the proof that it is true. Because, the same God who spoke everything into existence spoke light into your heart and spoke faith into your being.

Heaven and faith are of the same substance.

{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.

Starting at this verse the author launched into a list of well known Old Testament personages in order to establish one basic premise - "the just shall live by faith." Over a four thousand-year span these figures rise from the dust of antiquity to testify of God's dealings with men. These are the heroes. These are the ones who talked face-to-face with the Almighty. These are the ones who fought to establish the nation of Israel. These are the ones whose names are memorialized in Biblical history, and etched into our collective memories. But, they all had one thing in common –

Faith.

Despite their circumstances and overwhelming odds, they each stood firm in their resolve that God would hasten His word to perform it. On that basis they were justified in the High Court of Heaven and are assured of the riches of glory.

The list includes people born before, during and after the great covenants - the Abrahamic, the Sinaitic, and the New Covenant. Regardless of their status under any legal or gracious covenant, their faith was the single feature that distinguished them from the mass of humanity and qualified them to be members of this exclusive list. No personal perfection or performance is eulogized here, only the faith through which men are accounted righteous.

So, the author started at the start. He began with the first generation to spring from Adam and Eve. He started with the two brothers, Cain and Abel. That's how far back justification by faith alone goes! Cain and Abel are the first two recorded natural-born citizens of the Adamic lineage. The younger found favor with God and was murdered while the elder brother was cast off. The brief story of these two feuding boys goes like this –

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” (Gen.4:1-12)

On the surface, anyone reading this account would naturally conclude that God's rejection of Cain's offering was based on the relative merit (or lack thereof) of Cain's actions. After all, it plainly states –

“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.”

So, it is all about "doing." Right? Well, not according to the author.

Cain and Abel knew that they were to bring offerings to God. Chances are that God commanded such offerings, but we have no record of their education. Cain was a tiller of the ground and brought God an offering that was the result of his own labor. Meanwhile, Abel was a shepherd and he brought a first-born lamb which had been sacrificed - hence the phrase "and of the fat thereof."

Like all the bloody lambs that would go after it, this first sacrificial lamb spoke of Christ's final atonement for sin, making Abel's offering prophetic. In fact, Jesus accounted him as the first prophet –

“Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, **from the blood of righteous Abel** unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barchias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.” (Mat. 23:24-25)

Notice that Jesus labeled Abel "righteous." Was this an "earned" righteousness because of the value of his offering, or an imputed righteousness because of the future offering which would fulfill the type of Abel's lamb? If it was an earned righteousness, then the slain lamb actually removed the sin Abel inherited from his dad. But, if Abel's righteousness was imputed to him, then it was the result of faith. That is the only equation the Bible allows. Only faith is accounted as righteousness before God - a righteousness accounted to men apart from their deeds.

Way back at the beginning, right on the heels of the first sin, we find God teaching the consistent message. Just as He had told Abel's mother that the seed of the woman would one day conquer the serpent, He preached through Abel that the victory would be accomplished by sacrificial death. And, Abel believed it. That's faith.

So, God accepted Abel's offering on two counts: it spoke of the Lamb of God who would remove Adam's sin, and it was offered in faith - "...by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice."

And, just as Abraham believed God and it was counted as righteousness, that same exchange was present with Abel - "by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts."

Meanwhile, Abel's been dead for at least 6,000 years. But, he is still preaching. That first bloody sacrifice continues to testify to the sufficiency of Christ's single atonement. And, believing in that sufficiency results in the gift of righteousness.

Oh, one more thing before we move on --- Mankind continues to be divided into two camps, the children of God and the children of the devil. The children of bondage have always hated the "children of the free" (Gal.4:31). Abel got it right, but he was martyred for his commitment. His blood cries out against the injustice done to him. The evil children will always seek to murder the ones whom God loves and accepts. But, faith perseveres, not counting the cost.

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18)

Okay, we're moving on.

{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.

Enoch, the seventh descendant from Adam, father of Methuselah - the oldest man in history - grandfather to Lamech, and great-grandfather to Noah, is one of the most mysterious characters in Genesis. And, though Jude quotes him (Jude 1:14), very little else is said about him. In point of fact, all we know is where he ranked in the genealogy, and this short account –

“And Enoch lived sixty and five years and begat Methuselah; and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters; and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years; and Enoch walked with God, and he was not - for God took him.” (Gen.5:21-25)

Biblically, that's it! However, the New Testament writers were also versed in the apocryphal book of Enoch and the book of Jasher, which recounts much of the Genesis narrative. Nevertheless, this solitary figure in the seventh generation from Adam was distinguished by one particular thing - "Enoch walked with God." Then one day God "took him." And, the Hebrews' author wrote that Enoch was plucked up off the earth - translated. He did not die and lay in the dirt waiting for the day of resurrection. He was instantaneously changed from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible.

So, the author contends, God must have been pleased with old Enoch. Otherwise, He would have left him on earth. But, God grabbed this one guy and immortalized that single act for us to ponder thousands of years later. One man in the midst of a wicked world managed to please the Almighty. He had no law or settled covenant to respond to. Yet, it is recorded that Enoch pleased God. So much so, that God snatched him up into Heaven. How is that possible?

Enoch had faith!

{6a} - But without faith it is impossible to please him:

To be repetitive, if Enoch was taken up off the earth and individually separated to God, then it is self-evident that God was pleased with him. That means that Enoch was faithful. Had he not been, God could never have been pleased with him. It is impossible to please God without trusting, believing and resting in Him. That is the force of the author's argument.

Enoch must have done that – proven by the fact that Enoch was translated.

{A quick eschatological footnote: Notice, by the way, that before God destroyed the earth he removed the righteous, just as he did at Sodom. He protected his remnant through the flood, but he removed the seventh, the number of completion. Enoch is a type of the complete church, the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Rom.11:25), removed before the final cataclysm. Just thought I'd point it out to pique your interest. I'll let it go, now.}

Back to faith ---- Have you ever mulled over this Proverb? –

“An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.”
(Prov.21:4)

I can understand God being put off by a high look or a proud, arrogant attitude. But, this verse says that a fellow out plowing his field, just doing one of the everyday chores of life, is sinning against God. How is that fair?

It is fair because the work was being accomplished without faith. Proud, self-sufficient people feel no need of God. They are secure in their own self-worth. They have no sense of God's presence or His gracious generosity. So, they go about their lives unconsciously ignoring the very One who holds their breath in His hands. They are faithless. So, their every activity is displeasing to God. Their simplest action is counted as sin. Their most mundane movement is damnable rebellion.

But by faith, a believer's most damnable sins and reprehensible encroachments are covered by the blood. And even though our most valuable contributions are nothing more than "filthy rags", our faith in God's gracious salvation is accounted as perfection. So, the same action - say, plowing, for instance - is sin for one man and the work of blessed hands for another. The difference is not the action, itself. The difference is in the faith of the one who walks behind the plow.

{6b} - ...for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

This verse is sort of like "the ABC's of faith". The first, preliminary requirement of faith, the basis of the whole deal, is that a person must believe that God IS. Certainly, atheists cannot exhibit faith in the God that they deny exists. Faith starts with "God IS."

When God met up with Moses on the backside of the desert and gave him orders to return to Pharaoh's court, Moses responded –

“Behold when I come unto the children of Israel and shall say unto them,
The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me,
What is his name? What shall I say unto them?” (Ex.3:13)

God answered –

“I AM THAT I AM; and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of
Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Ex.3:14)

God IS. His name announces that fact, "I AM." While the pantheon of Roman, Greek and Egyptians gods were nothing but stone and wood, the God of Israel distinguished Himself by the very fact that He actually "IS." Faith starts with that fact. Faith does not start with a belief, a philosophy, a hope, an ideal, an experience, or a subjective argument. Faith begins with a fact - God IS. But, faith is more than that single objective truth. Even the devils in hell acquiesce to that fact.

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well. The devils also
believe, and tremble.” (James 2:19)

Faith requires more than simply becoming intellectually or experientially convinced of God's existence.

...and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Faith requires that we enter into a relationship with the God who IS. We must come to rely on Him. We must know that our pursuit of Him will pay off. We must be convinced that His word is more real, more substantial, than our circumstances. We must know that He is faithful to Himself and His word. As such, since His word declares that He will reward those who seek him with all diligence, we press toward Heaven, firm in the knowledge that He IS, our Savior IS, Heaven IS, and the reward IS.

By the way, is it necessary (in this day of easy-believism and the rampant theology that claims that one simple declaration of Christ as "Lord and Savior" is tantamount to eternal security) to point out that this verse includes the phrase "diligently seek him"?

Those who get the reward are those who are diligent, unbending, repetitive, unswerving, tireless, constant, and persistent. No person would continue such a chore if he or she were not convinced both of the reward and of the One who rewards. So, we're back to the ABC's.

It's all about faith.

{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.

This is a jam-packed verse. The story of Noah's Ark is one of the earliest Bible tales we learned as children. For 120 years Noah built a boat in the middle of a desert. His neighbors watched. His wife and sons watched. The evil world watched. But, Noah kept hammering and spreading pitch. God had warned Noah that destruction was coming on the whole earth.

“And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” (Gen.6:13)

Then, He told Noah how He would do it –

“And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven, and every thing that is in the earth shall die.” (Gen. 6:17)

Now, considering the rampant evil of Noah's time, how is it that this one man had sufficient righteousness to avoid the deluge? Verses 8 and 9 are very instructive.

“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah; Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” (Gen. 6:8-9)

There it is again, the telltale sign of a faithful man. Noah walked with God. So, did God save him because he was just and perfect? No, God saved him by grace. First, Noah "found" grace; then he was accounted just. And, the Hebrew term translated "found" in this verse does not imply that Noah was even looking for it. This was all God's doing.

So, God told Noah that He was going to do something He had never done before. Since the time that "God made the firmament and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament..." (Gen. 1:7) there had been no such thing as a flood. In fact, many

theologians speculate that there had been no such thing as rain. If the firmament God built created a "greenhouse environment", there would have been only a mist to keep everything fed and watered. The firmament may have shielded Earth's inhabitants from the damaging ultraviolet rays of the sun. That may be why the average age of men dropped so dramatically after the flood.

In any case, God was going to do something absolutely unprecedented. He was going to destroy all the inhabitants of the earth and start over. And, Noah believed it. He believed it so much that he acted on it.

Now, there's an interesting bit of wordplay that goes on in Noah's shipbuilding. Genesis 6:14 reads,

“Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.” (Gen. 6:14)

The Hebrew word translated "pitch" in this verse is "*caphar*" or "*kapper*." "*Kapper*" is also rendered "atonement" in Lev. 17:11, etc. So, there is a typological model constructed here. The atonement of Christ covers sinners, sealing them into gracious salvation. The ark is typical of the place of the believer "in Christ" (Eph. 1:1-14). The ark also represents the place of refuge when God executes His judgment.

In fact, the covering, or lid, over the Ark of the Covenant was called the "kappereth." That is the place where the blood was poured, where the angels with touching wings sat, where God's glory ascended. It is called the "mercy seat." It is the place of atonement for sin. It is the "pitch."

And, as icing on the typological cake, the ark came to rest on the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month (Gen.8:4). Later, God changed the Hebrew calendar, declaring that the seventh month was to be reckoned as the first month, called Abib or Nisan (Ex. 12:2). God established His Passover on the 14th day of Nisan (Ex.12:6) and Christ died on the Passover, at sundown. Three days and night later brings us to sundown on the 17th day of the Noah's seventh month – the day the Lord resurrected and the ark settled!

So, believing that God was going to bring about something no one had ever seen, Noah followed the exact materials and proportions that God laid out. That boat spoke of Christ, the final atonement - pitch, or covering - that would shield those who found grace from the judgment God would pour out on the unbelieving world -

...by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Noah's belief and reaction accomplished two things. He and his family were preserved. But, his witness to a wicked world testifies eternally against them. For 120 years God allowed time for repentance as they watched a man building a boat in a desert and predicting the end of all life. But, not a man turned from his ways. Not a woman asked what she should do to be saved. Not a child climbed aboard before God closed the door.

That is another side of faith. The faithful witness stands as a condemnation against this untoward, evil generation. Faith is the means by which God is saving us, but it is also a witness against the faithless whom He judges.

But, the significant point as concerns Noah is that he is added to the list of those who attained righteousness with God through faith. His work, his expert shipbuilding, his consistent testimony, his preaching to his family, his gathering of animals, none of these saved him.

It was faith that kept him high and dry.

That equation - righteousness in exchange for faith - is the lynch pin on which the New Covenant hangs. In contrast to offering God our personal righteousness and attempting to obligate Him to grant us Heaven on our merit, the New Testament in Christ rests in His finished work and His righteousness imputed to our accounts. Faith defies circumstances. Faith reckons God's word of promise to be more substantial, more rigorous, and more trustworthy than the details of our individual lives.

{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.

As the author continued his journey through the history of faith, he led his Hebrew audience back to the Abrahamic Covenant and reminded them that Abraham, along with a great many others, died with that Covenant in their possession. However, the complete fulfillment of the particular promise(s) eluded them. Nevertheless, the faith of these ancient heroes continues to preach to us thousands of years after the fact. They regarded the word of God as sure and steadfast, regardless of their individual circumstances.

Faithful to Himself, God will perform every "jot and tittle" of His word. Every promise - and every detail of every promise - will come to its appropriate completion. Generations of men and women may come and go, but our terrestrial clocks are no hindrance to God. Thousands of years of unfulfilled promises put no damper on the faith of those who received them. Neither should we then, because we have yet to see the completion of every nuance of every

Old Testament prophecy, jump to the conclusion that God has brushed them aside. We need to continue in the "faith of Abraham," trusting in God's unfailing commitment to Himself. Earthly circumstances are never the test of God's word. Faith defies circumstances, and stands firmly on "thus sayeth the Lord."

"We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor.5:7)

Now, to the Hebrew audience there was no more notable historic figure than Abraham, the first man to be called a "Hebrew" (Gen. 14:14). The term may derive from one of Abraham's progenitors, Eber (Gen.10:21), or it may have come from "*abhar*", which essentially means "to cross over the river." That latter phrase may be a reference to the Euphrates river, and is derived from Joshua 24:2-3. But, in practice, the name Hebrew came to denote a "sojourner", or one without a permanent home or dwelling place.

The story recalled here is of Abram dwelling in the land of Ur of the Chaldees when God spoke to him, giving him a particular command –

“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen 12:1-3)

God gave Abraham a command and a promise. Well actually, several promises. And, importantly, Abraham believed God. He reacted. He obeyed. He moved because he believed. Although he was about 75 and childless, he believed that God would make him a great nation. Though he was living on the backside of nowhere, he believed that God would make his name great. Though he was only one man among millions, God singled him out and said that He would defend him. Blessing and cursing from God would fall on anyone who blessed or cursed this one man. And, though he had no family of his own, save his wife, he believed that one day all the families of planet earth would be blessed through his heritage.

That's a lot to believe!

So, Abram forsook his father's house, taking his wife and nephew, Lot, their substance and people and headed for Canaan. But, Abram did not know where he was going. He just started walking. Somehow he convinced his wife and nephew that this was God's will and he set out across the open country waiting for God to say, "Okay, stop, this is it."

That's what faith does. It believes God's word and starts moving obediently in God's direction, not knowing the future but trusting in the One who holds tomorrow in His hand. And, sure enough, God stopped him and said, "This is it!"

“Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.” (Gen.13:14-17)

That's it, Abe! This is yours! Like it? Set up camp...

{9} - *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:*

The first phrase of this verse is really vital. Abraham dwelt in the very land that God Almighty promised to him as an inheritance. But, he lived there as a "sojourner", one who was just passing through a strange land, not a permanent resident. Though it was his by God's own decree, yet he lived in "tabernacles" - tents, temporary dwellings. He did not burst onto the scene, declare his ownership and build a palace. He lived like a stranger in his own inheritance.

This verse also takes an enormous leap forward in history and ties Isaac, Abraham's son of promise, and Jacob, Isaac's youngest twin boy, to the promised inheritance. Here are a few verses that validate the continuous nature of the promise:

“Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac. And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.” (Gen.17:19-20)

“And the Lord appeared unto him (Isaac), and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” (Gen. 26:2-5)

Notice that the promise to Isaac was not conditioned on anything Isaac was required to do. It was a "done deal." It was certain to happen for two reasons:

- 1) God performing the oath which He swore to Abraham; and,
- 2) Abraham's faithful obedience to God's voice, His charge, His commandments, His statutes, and His laws.

So, God's own faithfulness to God's own word hangs in the balance over this particular set of promises to Isaac.

“And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou (Jacob) liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land, for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” (Gen. 28:13-15)

Very familiar language, eh? The same promises were passed down from one generation to the next. But, each time they passed, they skipped the eldest son (Ishmael and Esau) and moved to the "children of promise" (Rom. 9:8, Gal. 4:28). And, though each of them held the promise of inheritance straight from God's own lips, yet they all lived in tents, appearing more like transients than land owners.

Why?

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

Abraham, his son, and his grandson all lived in temporary dwellings because they were seeking a city that was firm, with steady foundations. And, since it was God who began the trek, they sought a city that God would construct. In a couple of verses the author will spell out the spiritual significance of that fact. So, hang it in your memory and we will get back to it momentarily.

{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.

Sara was 90 years old and Abe was 100 when she became pregnant with Isaac. As the Scripture so delicately puts it, "...it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women." (Gen.18:11b) Nonetheless, she believed God when He said

she would bear a son. In fact, she believed it so much that she laughed. So, they named the boy Isaac, which means "Laughter".

That child was the next generation in the blessed lineage. Though Abram bore a previous son, Ishmael, by his handmaiden, Hagar, it was Isaac who would receive the birthright. As we saw with Cain and Abel, the second son received the blessing. That preference for the younger child occurs throughout the Old Testament, teaching in type that the first covenant of works was superseded by the second covenant of promised grace. In fact, Paul uses this very family to make that very point in Galatians 4:21-31.

But, getting back to the author's immediate point, faith was the catalyst in Sara receiving her promised child. In contrast to Abram and Hagar trying to work out God's promise in their flesh, the promised heir came through miraculous intervention. The first, fleshly effort was rejected; the second heir was the result of (and resulted in) faith.

{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.

Looking back, the Hebrews' author stated that God had indeed kept part of His promise to Abraham – a multitude of offspring. However, when God promised Abram the innumerable heritage he was childless and his wife was barren. Nevertheless, through the miraculous offspring - and his brother who fathered the Arab nations - Abraham indeed begat a multitude.

But (and here's the point), Abraham never saw the multitude. He saw only his son. Still, that one boy was sufficient evidence that everything else would come true. Abraham was not swayed by the seemingly insurmountable situation of his life. All he needed to see in order to know that every bit of the inheritance was his was one, single, solitary heir.

{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.

"These all died in faith..." Who constitutes "these all"? It is possible that the author meant everyone he has mentioned so far in this chapter - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abe, Sara, Isaac, and Jacob. But, since the emphasis of this portion of the letter has been on the promises made to Abraham, it is difficult to conclude that Abel, Enoch and Noah are included in this verse. Abel, Enoch and Noah were never subject to the Abrahamic promises.

I am more prone to think that this verse applies more exclusively to Abraham, Sara, Isaac, and Jacob. Though they had the promises that make up the Abrahamic Covenant, they all died without seeing the fulfillment. Remember that the full promise was quite sweeping in its scope. For openers, when Abraham asked God how he could know for sure that he would inherit Canaan, God told him that he would die, but his descendants would go into a land where they were not known and become slaves. But after 400 years they would come out richer than when they went in. After that, they would return to the land of Canaan and possess it.

Plus, the particular detailed promises included:

- 1) The descendants of Abraham, through the promised child, must become as numerous as the dust, stars and sands, until they are virtually, if not literally, uncountable.
- 2) Not just a single nation, but multiple nations must come from these descendants and many kings over these nations.
- 3) These covenantal promises will continue generation after generation, and God will be a God to the descendants everlastingly.
- 4) The land of Canaan is an everlasting possession of the descendants of Abraham.
- 5) The descendants of Abraham will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God would curse those who cursed them, and bless those that blessed them.

It is easy to see that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never experienced the full extent of these promises. But, the author is going to go even further. After he finishes recounting the "heroes of faith" in this chapter, bringing the list up to the edge of the New Testament, he will once again say,

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." (vs.39-40)

None of the Old Testament figures who were justified by faith actually received the fulfillment of the promises. God withheld them from the Old Covenant forefathers, waiting for "us". By "us", I assume that the author is referring to those who are living under the New Covenant – or, more particularly, the Hebrews converts. But, when these promises are finally fulfilled, or once the singular "promise" comes to pass, they and we shall all be perfected, made complete, fully accomplished in God's plan.

That being the case, we all fall into one of two theological camps:

- 1) Those who say everything is fulfilled and we are now in a state of "perfection" (that perfection being spiritual if not physical).
- 2) Those who would contend that prior to the resurrection of our bodies and the consummation of all things there are still promises left to the future.

I fall into the second camp. (If this is perfection, it's overrated.) And, given the author's treatment of the shaking of Heaven and earth in Chapter 12:26-28, I believe he is in that camp, too. But, we're not there yet...so, I'll wait.

Back to the text at hand - Abraham's immediate family did not receive the bounty of God's promises. Nevertheless, they looked for them. They expected them. They viewed them afar off. They believed them and embraced them.

And, if they did not personally witness the completion of every detail of every promise...so what? They were not here on earth as permanent residents. They were only passing through. They lived in "tabernacles" of human flesh, temporary dwellings, until they could move into the kingdom that had eternal foundations.

The promises, each and every one in all its detail and in every aspect, would come true (and will come true). But, they (and we) may come and go from planet earth without ever witnessing their materialization. That does not make them any less true. By faith, they (and we) can embrace every nuance of God's word and look expectantly forward as God works out His plan in time and eternity.

The best of us Christians are, after all, merely strangers and pilgrims here on earth. One day we will inherit it, according to Jesus. But, for now we are not the landlords, we're just the renters.

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

Men who declare, as Abraham's family did, that they are Hebrews, sojourners, pilgrims, strangers, declare that they have no settled land and are in search of an established place to call home. Those who declare themselves to be strangers on earth show plainly that they seek a Heavenly home.

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

Here we read another of the author's hypothetical statements. "If" Abraham's family and descendants had not remained strangers in Canaan, but sought to return to their original land, they would have packed up and gone. But, the fact

that they remained generation after generation shows that they were driven by faith. They believed that this was their land. They were convinced that God would give it to them. They were content to live and die in tents until the time that God accomplished His word.

And, what if He did not do it in their lifetime? Well, that's the best part of faith. Faith looks past the circumstances and believes God anyway. And, that confidence opens the pathway to the eternal inheritance. In the end, it isn't a home on earth that the faithful seek. It's a home in the sky.

But, the author's words are also a warning. Everyone who starts this journey of faith is required to press ever forward. If we take up residence in the place of promise and start longing for our old estate, God may very well open the gate and let us wander. Such a warning is well heeded by the faithful believer, knowing that the Good Shepherd keeps us and that He will curb our desire to wander.

Faithful Abraham took up residence in the land he was promised and he never looked back.

{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.

Did you catch that? I know it is applied to Abraham's gang, but the truth of salvation by grace through faith exalts God, regardless of which generation of people is acting in faith. Because the "heroes of faith" died without seeing the completion of God's promises, God credited their belief in His eventual accomplishment as righteousness. And, because they lived their lives looking to God, instead of looking to their circumstances, God is not ashamed to be called their God.

Wait, I don't want to underplay this. I'll take another shot at it.

God ought to be ashamed of every one of us miserable sinners who spend our lifetimes in the pursuit of self. He ought to have turned away from the human race way back at Adam and let us destroy ourselves. Justice should have demanded that God blot us out every one, like He did in the flood. His righteousness should have forced Him to turn His back on us once and for all. But, even in our wretched state, covered in sin and buried in our egos, God holds out the gracious promise that some folk will reach a state of such Divine undeserved favor that God will not be ashamed to be named among them. Wow!

And, how do we get from here to there?

Faith.

Oh, but it doesn't just stop there. Oh, no! There's more!

Not only is God unashamed to be associated with faithful people, but He has built an eternal dwelling-place, a Heavenly city, in which they will dwell. They will no longer be accounted strangers, wanderers, or homeless pilgrims. They will be eternal residents in the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." That is the proof that He is not ashamed of them! He has called them to come live with Him! Just as He comes to live with us as we sojourn here, He will take us to Himself and grant us an eternal residence in His eternal city.

Only grace alone, by faith alone, will get you there.

Next, the author moved into the successive generations who received the birthright promise from father Abraham. Although Abraham was a sojourner in the land of promise, the rights of inheritance continued to be repeated, by man and God, to the children and the children's children. By faith, they each received them, believed them, and passed them down to successive generations, awaiting their fulfillment. The first of these heirs was Isaac.

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

Abraham was promised innumerable offspring though he was childless. Prior to Isaac's birth, Abraham had produced a child with Hagar. But, God rejected that boy when it came to passing down the birthright. Instead, God promised Abraham that he would conceive by his wife, Sarah. That child would be a miracle, considering their relative ages. And, just so there would be no confusion concerning God's intention to bless the future generations through Isaac, He called him Abraham's "only begotten son".

But, one day God tested Abraham by instructing –

“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.” (Gen. 22:2)

So, Abraham obeyed and took two young men with him. On the third day of their journey they reached the mount God had spoken of and Abraham told the young men -

“Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you.” (Gen. 22:5)

Those are words of faith. Abraham did not tell the two young men that he was preparing to kill and burn the boy. He said they were going to worship God, and

he indicated that they would both be back. Abraham laid the wood on Isaac's back, took the fire in hand, grabbed his knife and started up the hill.

Now, for emphasis on the vital details, the Hebrews' author pointed out that this boy who was bound for the knife and fire was the Abraham's promised offspring, his sole heir, the next generation through whom the promise of blessing flowed -

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

That's really, really important. This boy who was about to die was the very kid who God designated as the namesake and progenitor of all Abraham's future offspring.

“And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.” (Gen. 17:19)

“And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.” (Gen. 21:12)

So, in true sacrificial style, Abraham was preparing to slit the throat and burn the body of the child who was the next generation of the blessed seed, through whom would flow all the promises given to Abraham. If the boy died, the whole deal would be off; no more seed, no more heirs, no more inheritance. But, Abraham had faith –

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

Remember that God had produced this child from a dead womb, with the seed of a nearly dead man. Abraham told the young men they would be back because he believed the promise of God would come true despite circumstances - including Isaac's death. He believed that the promise was so sure that, even if he slew Isaac, God would raise the dead boy up again. He would have to. His faithfulness to His own promises lay in the balance.

Well, as they ascended the hill, Isaac got curious.

“And Isaac spake 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: so they went both of them together.” (Gen. 22:7,8)

Genesis 22: 8 can be read two ways and they are both legitimate. One reading would say that God, by Himself, would provide a lamb suitable to be a sacrifice. The other reading says that God will provide Himself to be the sacrifice. And, of course, either reading sets up a Christological type. Christ was the lamb provided by God as the final sacrifice for sin. But, Christ was equally God in flesh, provided as a sacrificial lamb.

Plus, Abraham's words were prophetically fulfilled in both literal and spiritual terms. When they reached the top of the hill, Abraham built an altar, laid the wood on it and placed the boy on the wood. Immediately, Isaac knew that he was the intended sacrifice. Abraham lifted his knife and prepared to plunge it into his beloved Son's neck. But, at the critical moment, an angel of God intervened, calling from Heaven, saying -

“Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” (Gen. 22:12)

Abraham looked around and saw a ram caught by the horns in a nearby thicket. So, Abraham took the ram, slew it, and burned it before the Lord. Sure enough, God provided a sacrifice for Himself. That was the literal fulfillment of Abraham's words. But, it also spoke of the Lamb of God to come who would be slain on some future Passover.

As well, there is a great typology of salvation in this story. While some people see Isaac as a type of Christ ("thine only son") when his father laid the wood on his back and led him to the place of his sacrifice, likening it to Christ carrying His own cross up to Calvary, I think that Isaac is more a type of you and me. He is led to the place of judgment where his father (the type of God in this scenario) is about to mete out the punishment we sinners deserve. The dagger of judgment and certain death dangles above us and the fires of hell are smoldering below us. But, at the critical moment in history a ram appears to be our substitute. The judgment on us is abated and it falls on the ram, in our place. And, to make the type plain, the ram's horns are caught in a thicket. In other words, his head was encased in thorns, just as our Lord worn His thorny crown.

So, the substitute was slain and the boy was returned to his father, "raised from the dead" in a type. We also are raised from the dead in our substitute. And, we are guaranteed safety from judgment because of an oath made by God that Christ would have an innumerable heritage, "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Rev.5:11).

After Abraham burned the ram, he called the place Jehovah-jireh, roughly translated "it shall be seen" or "the Lord who provides." Then, the angel of the

Lord called out a second time and repeated the portion of the Abrahamic covenant that directly related to his heritage through Isaac.

”And, said, by myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”
(Gen. 22:16-18)

Now, lest we lose the essential focus of the author's comments, why was Abraham able to perform so obediently? Faith. He believed every word God had spoken concerning the boy and his heritage. So, even if the boy died, Abraham reckoned that God was able to raise that same boy up again. Otherwise, God's promises would lay unfinished.

Faith prevailed.

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

Isaac had twin boys, the one whom God loved and the one whom God hated (Mal.1:2-3, Rom. 9:13). God had told their mother, Rebekah, that the elder would serve the younger (Gen.25:23). So, when Isaac was close to death and ready to pass on the birthright, Rebekah and Jacob devised a plan to trick old, blind Isaac into giving the blessing to the younger boy.

Of course, in the providence of God, before Isaac spoke his blessing, Esau had already given his birthright over to his younger brother in exchange for some pottage (Gen.25: 29-34). In chapter 12, the Hebrews' author will use that exchange to remind us of what true profanity is - failing to recognize or value the promises and covenants of God. But, when Jacob came into his father's room, carrying the savory venison his father loved, covered with his brother's clothing, and having the skin of a goat's kid on his hands, Isaac believed him to be the eldest boy and gave him the blessing.

“And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed: Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.” (Gen. 27:27-28)

By faith, Isaac passed the future promises to his son. He believed that God would perform every word of His promise, even though they lay out in the distant reaches of time. He spoke to his single son of the multitudes to come. He spoke of earthly blessings, plenty of food and drink, and nations that would bow before him. He spoke of Isaac's preeminence over his kindred, and the blessings and curses that would fall on anyone who blessed or cursed the chosen lineage. By faith, he foresaw the future as a certainty.

By the way, prophecy "works" because the future is definite. The God who is above time sees the end from the beginning and all of His creation marches in step with His decrees. Our part, like Isaac's part, is to believe the revealed word.

So, Jacob possessed the birthright that should have gone to Esau. But, God wasn't finished, yet. He added His own blessing to the boy.

“...and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” (Gen.28:13-15)

The totality of the Abrahamic promise passed down to Isaac. After wrestling all night with an angel, his name was changed to Israel, and he became the progenitor of the twelve patriarchs of the nation of Israel.

{21} - *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*

We have covered this in some detail in our comments on Hebrews 8:6-13. When it came time for Jacob to pass along his blessing, he skipped over his 11 eldest boys and called for Joseph's two sons. Joseph naturally placed his eldest son, Manasseh, at his father's right hand. But, Jacob craftily switched his hands and placed the blessing on Ephraim's head. He began -

“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” (Gen.48:15-16)

Joseph realized that his father was about to set the birthright on the younger boy and removed Isaac's hands. But, Isaac refused saying -

“I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And, he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh; and he set Ephraim before Manasseh. And, Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.” (Gen. 48:19-22)

By faith, old, dying Isaac spoke of the magnificent future that would befall the descendants of Joseph's sons. And, he was so confident that the land of Canaan belonged to his family, that he repeated the pledge that God would return them to that land. Although Joseph was the second highest ruler in Egypt and had set his brothers up as princes over their own Egyptian territories, Isaac knew that they would leave and go back to Canaan.

Why? Because the promise of God said so.

{22} - By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

When Jacob was ready to die, Joseph charged his sons that they would bury him with his fathers in the cave that was in the field of Ephron the Hittite, back in Canaan. It was the cave where the bones of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were resting. Joseph, meanwhile, was so convinced of his father's blessing and God's promises that he made sure to have his own bones taken back there, too.

”And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die. And, God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And, Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So, Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.” (Gen. 50:24-26)

Those are the words that close the book of Genesis. The author has systematically gone through the first book of the Scriptures and shown how the forefathers, the blessed lineage, found favor with God by faith. Their faith was accounted as righteousness, and they lived under the protection and provision of God.

So, to get to the core of the author's point - faith has always been the method through which men achieve a good standing before God. It was never by their works, their flesh, their merit, or their personal righteousness. God proclaimed his word and the fathers believed that word. Against seemingly insurmountable

odds, and despite overwhelming circumstances to the contrary, they looked toward the future fully confident that God would perform his oath to its fullest.

That is the faith of Abraham. It ought to be our faith. Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God ought to be reckoned in our hearts as more sure and certain than our circumstances, our fears, our doubts, or any facts to the contrary. No matter where we live in relation to the historical unfolding of God's plan of salvation, we ought to believe that every word will be fulfilled in its totality, whether it occurs before our lives, during our lives, or after our lives.

God's faithfulness is on display.

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Is.55:11)

So, what should we do if we come across a promise of God that appears unfulfilled? Have faith. What should we do if we wait and wait and wait on the Lord to provide, but we're slipping into desperate straits? Have faith. What should we do if the Lord tarries and we reach the end of life not having received the promise of His return? Have faith. Every word of God is truth. Every word of God is faithful. Every word of God is an anchor for our souls.

By faith we will prevail.

The two most prominent forefathers of the Hebrew nation are Abraham and Moses. In many ways they stand juxtaposed against each other. Where Abraham is the father of the faithful, the recipient of the everlasting covenant, Moses is synonymous with the law, received at Mt. Sinai and passing away in the light of the New Covenant. Nonetheless, as the Hebrews' author continued to recount the heroes of faith, he turned his attention to Moses, showing that even the man who brought the Tables of Stone down to Israel was himself justified by faith.

{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.

After Joseph died, generations passed and the children of Joseph's brothers increased in Egypt. Eventually, a new king rose up who did not know Joseph. The massive number of the children of Israel concerned him. So, to put a stop to their rapid rise, he put them into bondage as slaves. Still, the Israelites increased. So, Pharaoh commanded the women who worked as midwives for the Hebrew women that if a boy child was born to the Hebrews it was to be killed.

But, the midwives feared God and refused to follow the king's command. So, the king made a rule, charging all his people,

“Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river; and every daughter ye shall save alive.” (Exod. 1:22)

Now, one of Levi's offspring took a Levite wife and bore a son, "a goodly child," and hid him for three months. This they did, according to the author, by faith. They trusted God in the face of horrible circumstances.

{24} - By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

Moses' mother put the baby into an ark of bulrushes and sent him floating down the river. As providence would have it, he floated right into the hands of Pharaoh's daughter, who was washing in the river. So, the very river that was designated by the king as the means of death for Hebrew boys floated the deliverer of Israel right into his own household.

Moses' sister watched the proceedings and approached Pharaoh's daughter, asking if she would like a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. Under the Princess's supervision, Moses' own mother came to feed her baby and raise him right under Pharaoh's nose.

Moses grew to be accounted as Pharaoh's grandson. But, Moses was aware of his own heritage and one day he watched his kindred laboring under their burdens. He saw an Egyptian taskmaster beat an Israelite slave, and Moses slew the Egyptian, hiding the body in the sand. Well, word got around and when Pharaoh found out, he sought to kill Moses. But, Moses fled and wound up in the land of Midian.

The author contended that Moses' attachment to his kin, refusing to reign over them as an Egyptian prince, was an act of faith. And, as brutal and questionable as the act of murder was, it was the catalyst that led Moses into the desert for 40 years until he encountered the burning bush.

25) - Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

Moses sided with his kin rather than indulge in all the carnal pleasures of Egypt. That decision to defend his brethren cost him dearly, putting his very life in jeopardy. But, the author pointed out that the pleasures of sin are short lived. It is interesting that he admitted that sin is certainly pleasurable. The flesh loves to indulge itself, and it craves satisfaction. But, the sins of our lives are like the sins

of Egypt, pleasurable for a season. After that, we must "pay the piper." Moses preferred to stand up for what was right rather than succumb to sin's temptations.

That takes faith.

If you are not convinced of a higher authority than your flesh, you will not deny your flesh. Only faith in God can inspire men to rise above their daily desires, to take sides and suffer with the "people of God."

{26} - Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

Moses suffered reproach and lost his standing, his authority and his livelihood, running for his life. He chose to align himself with God's people, rather than enjoy sin's short season, and he counted the Christ-like reproach, the hatred and scorn of the people, as greater gain than all the Egyptian treasures. Just as Christ was hated "without a cause" (Ps. 35:19; John 15:25), so those who are aligned with Christ will be hated by the rulers of this world. Moses suffered persecution for the righteousness' sake, just as every servant of Christ will bear the reproach of their Master.

Moses reckoned that the earthly Egyptian rewards were nothing in comparison to the reward he would receive for following after God. When he saw God's people being beaten and tortured under the yoke of slavery, Moses sided with the Israelites and relinquished his Egyptian heritage. Being aligned with the people of promise, through whom the blessings of God flowed and the Messiah would come, was of more value to Moses than the temporary riches of Pharaoh's court. He understood this relative value through faith. Moses had faith that God's word to Israel was true and would be every whit fulfilled.

{27} - By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Pharaoh wanted Moses killed for his offense against the Egyptian taskmaster (Ex. 2:15). But, Moses fled into the desert, believing that the preserving hand of God would protect him. For forty years he dwelt in the desert, marrying Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, a priest of Midian.

“And, it came to pass in the process of time, that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And, God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” (Ex. 2:23-24)

So, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and the man of faith, who persevered in the desert, casting aside the riches of Egypt, became the chosen deliverer of Israel.

{28} - Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

After appearing before Pharaoh repeatedly, demanding the release of God's people, Moses declared ten plagues against Egypt. With each declaration of God's command to release His people, Pharaoh's heart was hardened until the worst of the plagues occurred.

“And, the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterward he will let you go hence; when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.” (Ex. 11:1)

Every Hebrew family was to take a young, spotless lamb and slay it. The blood of the lamb was to be brushed onto their doorposts. During the night, they were to eat the roasted lamb, breaking none of its bones. They were to eat it fully dressed, with their sandals on their feet and their staff in hand. They were to eat in haste and be ready to move out. That night the death angel of God passed through Egypt and slew the firstborn of every household, both man and beast. But, wherever the blood was on the door the death angel "passed over." That event became a memorial to all the generations of Israel to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt and their return to land of promise.

But, the author's point is that every bit of that activity required faith. Moses believed every word that proceeded from God and he acted on it. Though he was forty years in the wilderness, he believed that God had raised him up to deliver the children of Israel. Though Pharaoh's kingdom was unassailable, Moses and Aaron marched into the king's court and announced that the slaves were to be released. Though it had never happened in human history, and was not in accordance with the natural processes of earth, Moses believed that God was going to change the water to blood, bring plagues of frogs, lice, flies and locusts, kill all the animals, bring boils on the people, rain down fiery hail and create an oppressive darkness. Moses believed that the blood of a lamb was sufficient protection against the plague of death.

By the way, Moses did not just believe the spiritual implications of God's words. He took them quite literally. Moses could have believed that the blood was sufficient to save, but without actually applying it to the door there would have been no protection. Faith results in action. Faithful people produce good fruit.

The lamb of the Passover was a type of Christ, the innocent, spotless lamb of God who died to deliver God's chosen people from their sins. In fact, Christ died

at 3:00 p.m. on the Passover day just as the High Priest was slaying the Pascal lamb. Faith is wrapped up in Christ. Whether we read of the forefathers looking expectantly forward to the promised Messiah, or look backward to the moment when God's lamb hung on the tree, faith revolves around the person and work of Christ.

Plus, as I said, faith results in action. And, the action of faith stands in opposition to every circumstance or fact to the contrary. As Moses did, we must look to God's declarations and move in obedience with His word. God will direct our steps, and each step will move us closer to Christ --- in faith.

Faith was the defining characteristic and common "glue" that bound the Old Testament saints together. But, after listing the most ancient Hebrew heroes - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses - the author turned his attention to Israel as a nation.

{29} - By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

This is one of the most famous stories in human history. After the plagues destroyed the Egyptian economy and killed the firstborn, Pharaoh practically begged Moses to take the Israelites and leave. The stage was set for God to dramatically fulfill a promise He had made to Abraham –

“Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance.” (Gen. 15:13-14)

One by one those promises came to fruition -

- 1) God declared that Abraham's offspring would go into a strange land and serve for 400 years. Through Joseph, all 12 tribes ended up in Egypt. Though they were originally rulers, they ended up in servitude.

“Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And, it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.” (Ex. 12:40-41)

- 2) God told Abraham that when the children of Israel left Egypt, they would "come out with great substance." After the plagues, the Egyptians were so anxious to be rid of the Israelites, that they gave them an overabundance of wealth.

“And, the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptian's jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment; and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.” (Ex. 12:35-36)

- 3) God promised to judge the nation that enslaved Abraham's descendants. Let's camp here for a moment, because it is an essential element of Hebrews 11:29.

No sooner had the Israelites begun their journey than God led them right to the wilderness of the Red Sea. Meanwhile, Pharaoh started to rethink his decision. He rounded up every chariot in Egypt and began to pursue them. When the Egyptian army caught up with them by the banks of the Red Sea, the Israelites saw them and feared for their lives. They cried sarcastic, faithless things –

“Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?” (Ex. 14:10)

And,

“Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.” (Ex. 14:12)

But, Moses stood on God's promise of deliverance and assured them,

“Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today. For the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” (Ex. 14:13-14)

God told Moses to lift up Aaron's rod (the very one which later budded and was placed into the Ark of the Covenant) to divide the sea. And, God declared that He would cause Pharaoh's army to follow –

“And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them; and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.” (Ex. 14:17-19)

God had been leading the children of Israel with a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. The pillar removed itself from before the Israelites and stood behind them, separating them from Egyptians. On the

Israelite's side, the pillar lit up the night sky. But, on the Egyptian's side the pillar was a cloud of darkness.

Now, just in case we miss it, these are the very same images of God that passed through the divided animals 430 years earlier when God swore His oath to Abraham. Abraham had asked God how he could be assured that he would inherit the land of Canaan, which question resulted in this epic human drama. God made a covenant with Himself via a "smoking furnace and a burning lamp." And, those same two representative symbols showed up to complete the promise.

So, with the protective pillar in place, Moses stretched out his hand and a strong east wind blew. The waters divided and the Israelites marched across the sea on dry land. What a spectacle! And, what an exercise of faith! Not only did Moses have to put himself "on the line" for God and stretch out the rod, but every child of Israel had to walk down into the sea –

“And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.” (Ex. 14:22)

Each and every individual saw the pillar of fire behind them, protecting them, and they saw the miraculous delivery in front of them. They had to put their lives in God's hands, walking under the watery barricade, trusting the promise that God would take them safely over.

Amazing.

These faithless, cynical complainers had to walk, in the middle of the night, under the light of the pillar of fire - by faith - through the divided walls of water, knowing all the while that their very lives were in the hand of the Almighty.

Well, as the morning came, the Egyptians decided to pursue. But, as their speeding chariots reached the middle of the sea, God knocked their wheels off and the Egyptians realized that God was fighting for Israel. The Lord told Moses to stretch out his hand again and the waters came crashing back into place, burying the whole army of Egypt.

Every single detail occurred exactly as God promised Abraham it would. I can't help but be amused, though, at how God instantly enriched His people. He had told the Israelites to take gold, silver, raiment and whatever they could "borrow" from the Egyptians. Then He drowned their debtors.

And, the point the Hebrews' author wants us to notice is the contrast between the faithful Israelites and the faithless Egyptians. One was delivered and the other

perished. One was saved as a nation and the other was punished as a nation. One nation was the object of grace and the other was the object of wrath.

God had promised Abraham, and swore an oath on Himself, that the children of Israel would be delivered, and He swore that he would punish the Egyptians. That promised deliverance, based on a covenantal promise, required faith --- and, God supplied exactly that! Whatever is required for God to perform His oath, God will supply it out of faithfulness to Himself.

But, there is an equally dark side to this lesson. God will harden the heart of the people he has sworn to punish. That punishment may be a necessary ingredient of God's faithfulness to His people, but it is also just as inevitable. In Hebrews 11:29 we witness faith and dis-faith, but we also see an historic display of the utter sovereignty of God.

“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” (Rom.9:17-18)

{30} - By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

Here again, every Sunday School child knows the story of Jericho. But, the author wants us to know that the children of Israel did not just march quietly around the city of their enemies in blind obedience. They circled the city in faith. They had an inner confidence that if they followed God's word, God would perform on their behalf.

But, the fall of Jericho has a special significance in the history of the Abrahamic promise. Not only had God promised Abraham that his descendants would be delivered from the land where they served, but He also promised to bring them back to Canaan and give them the inheritance. The book of Joshua begins with God affirming to Joshua that He would be with him and not forsake him (1:5). Then, God instructed him,

“Be strong and of a good courage; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them.” (Josh. 1:6)

The children of Israel had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and they were now only 3 days from entering the Promised Land.

“Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.” (Josh.1:10-11)

But first, following Moses example from 40 years prior, Joshua sent spies in to view the land. And, the first place they came to was the fortified city of Jericho. It would be impossible for the children of Israel to cross into their land if they marched unprotected toward this walled, war-ready city. So, the two spies went where they would be least noticeable - to the house of a harlot. When they returned to Joshua, they told him what Rahab had said. The city was terrified of the Israelites. They had heard about the Red Sea and the destruction of the Amorites. They knew that the God of Heaven fought for Israel. And, Joshua was strengthened in his resolve; sure that God had delivered the land into their hands. So, after three days of camping at the river's edge, Israel crossed Jordan.

[If we had the time, it would be worth comparing this crossing of the Jordan to the Red Sea crossing. At the Jordan River, God did not separate the water until their feet touched it. They had to line up, lift the ark, and march toward the water in faith, trusting that God would either part the water or they would drown. And the ark, a type of Christ, went before them, waited in the middle as they all passed through it, and came up behind them, sealing their entrance in to the land of promise.]

After their crossing, they set up a stone monument at Gilgal (which, incidentally, was found just a few years ago), and they circumcised all the men of Israel who were children when the journey started. Then, they rested in the plains of Jericho and kept the Passover. The very next day after the Passover they ate the corn that grew in the "land of milk and honey." And, from that day forward the manna, which had sustained them for 40 years, ceased to fall.

But, that's just the tip of the miraculous iceberg. As Joshua stood by Jericho, "the Captain of the Host of the Lord" appeared to him, sword drawn, ready to fight. And, just as the voice from the burning bush had instructed Moses to take the sandals from his feet, the Captain told Joshua,

“... Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And, Joshua did so.” (Josh. 5:15)

Now, knowing that angels repel worship, this Captain of the Lord's Host can only be Christ, Himself. This is yet another Christophony.

Why bring this up? Well, let's say for a moment that I am correct about Melchizedek, and he was, really and in fact, pre-incarnate Christ. Then, after God promised Abraham the land and the uncountable offspring, but before Sara

was pregnant with their first child, Abraham came in contact with, and was specifically blessed by, Christ the Lord. Now, as the children of Israel were entering the very land that was promised to Abraham's descendents, the fulfillment of the oath God swore with Himself, Jesus appeared again to finish what He started.

Isn't that amazing? Jesus appeared to bless the childless progenitor of the entire Hebrew race (as well as being the "father of the faithful"). Then, this same Jesus came to fight for Israel so they could inhabit the land that God swore to Abraham hundreds of years before. That, my friends, is faithfulness to His word.

Anyway, the Lord instructed Joshua to have all the men of war circle the city of Jericho once a day for six days. The procession would be led by seven priests carrying seven trumpets of ram's horns who would be followed by priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant. Then, on the seventh day they would circle the city seven times, blow the seven trumpets and all the people would shout at the top of their lungs.

And, they did.

In faith, they followed God's word. And, oh yes, God had attached a promise - when they did all that marching, blowing trumpets and shouting, the walls would fall down flat.

And, they did.

{31} - By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

But, when the walls fell there was one place, one lowly little house on the wall, which was left standing. And, it had a scarlet cord hanging from the window where the spies had escaped. The only house left standing was a harlot's house. Rahab believed the word of mercy spoken by the spies, and acted in faith when she hung the emblem of God's grace out her window. She had heard the tales of God's miraculous provision and powerful destruction, and she feared God. When the spies came to her door, Rahab aligned herself with the people of God and hid the spies when the king of Jericho came looking for them.

And, once again the Hebrews author sets up the contrast - the unbelievers perished, but faithful Rahab was delivered. Rahab ended up marrying into a respected family of one of chief tribes, and she figures prominently in God's history of salvation. She is the great-great grandmother of David, in the lineage that led to Christ. And, in a way, it's comforting to know that the family tree of our Lord was peopled with sinners (like you and me) who trusted God and acted in faith.

{32} - And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets...

The Old Testament is replete with tales of heroes and conquerors who faced overwhelming odds, who stand as testimonies to faith in, and to the faithfulness of, God. The first four the author chose to mention are chronicled in the book of Judges, before Israel had a king.

Gideon tore down the altars of Baal, and saved the Israelites from the crushing hands of the Midianites. Though he was a poor descendant of Manasseh, and with a band of only 300 men, he routed "the Midianites and Amalekites and all the children of the east (who) lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as sand by the sea side for multitude." As a result, Israel had 40 years of peace and quietness (Judges 8:28).

Prior to Gideon, Barak raised an army of 10,000 men from the children of Naphtali and Zebulun. After 20 years of dire oppression, Barak went out to fight the army of Jabin, king of Canaan. Deborah, a prophetess of God, told Barak that God would deliver the king's army into his hand, but the captain of the host, Sisera, would be sold into the hand of a woman. Barak knew that the defeat of Jabin's nine hundred chariots of iron would be to God's glory, and not his own. But, he rushed faithfully into the fray. Barak won the day and Sisera fled the battle on foot, only to wind up with his head nailed to the floor of Jael's (the wife of Heber the Kenite, a descendant of Moses' father-in-law) tent. The victory brought Israel 40 years of rest (Judges 5:31).

Samson was born after 40 years of Philistine oppression (Judges 13:1). His mother, Manoah, was barren. But, an angel visited her and announced that her son would be a Nazarite unto God from the womb and would begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. Samson had a remarkable strength, and once slew a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. But, he fell for the wiles of a woman named Delilah, and put his trust in his long hair instead of the God of Heaven. Still, at the point of death, Samson, blinded and tied to pillars, called on the Lord and was willing to martyr himself to destroy the enemies of Israel. In faith, he bowed himself with all his might, and when he rocked down the pillars of the house, three thousand men and women fell from the roof and all the lords of the Philistines perished.

Jephthah was a son of Gilead, born of a prostitute, so his father's legitimate sons cast him out, declaring, "Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman." (Judges 11:2) But, Israel had fallen once again into idolatry, forsaking the Lord and refusing to serve Him. So, God gave them into the hands of the Philistines and the children of Ammon, and there was war

between them. Not knowing where to turn, the elders of Gilead came to Jephthah, who was living in Tob with a band of "vain men," and begged him to be their captain. They promised him that he would be the head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. Jephthah vowed to God that if he had victory over the armies of Ammon, when he returned he would sacrifice whatever came first through the door of his house to meet him. Sure enough, Jephthah was victorious.

But, when Jephthah returned home, his only daughter came out to greet him, playing timbrels and dancing. Jephthah was heartsick. He tore his clothes, crying, "Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back." (Jud. 11:35) After two months to bewail her virginity, her father kept his vow and killed his daughter (Jud.11:39). Jephthah then defended the Gileadites against their own family, the Ephraimites, and slew 42,000 of them, making Gilead the primary house in Israel. Jephthah judged Israel for six years before his death.

Even to his own hurt and against his own house, Jephthah was faithful to every word he pledged to God. God took him from the humblest of beginnings, cast out from among his brethren, and raised him to the ranks of Israel's renowned judges.

David was the greatest king Israel ever knew. The whole of Israel, the northern and the southern tribes, was united under King David. Even as a shepherd boy he trusted in God when he slew a bear and a lion with his bare hands. He was taken from the fields by Samuel the prophet and anointed to be king. God was mighty with young David, bringing him to the battlefield to slay Goliath the Philistine. His fame grew in Israel. But, King Saul saw him as a threat and an enemy, forcing him to hide in the caves and dens of the earth, fleeing for his very life. One day Saul fell on his own sword and David rose to the throne, just as God said the faithful shepherd would.

David was a great prophet of God who wrote the Psalm that Christ quoted on the cross (Ps. 22:1)." God called David "a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will." (Acts 13:22) And, David figured prominently in the Messianic promise. God pledged to David that He would establish the kingdom of his seed, and would "establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." (2Sam. 7:13)

And, David figures eschatologically. After David's death, Ezekiel wrote,

“And, I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd, and I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it.” (Ez.34:23-24)

And,

“...they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people, and the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.” (Ez.37:25-28)

But, perhaps the highest praise we can give David is that Christ was called "the son of David" (Mat. 21:9). That name held a great hope for Israel, because they knew that the Messiah would come through the Davidic line and sit on David's throne, restoring Israel to the unity and power it had under its greatest king.

Samuel was the prophet to King Saul and King David, announcing the word of God to the children of Israel. He faithfully heard the word and delivered it to both king and pauper. And, the prophets before and after Samuel, likewise, heard a voice others could not hear, but in faith they delivered God's blessing and cursing to God's chosen people.

{32-34} - And, what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

The courage of Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, Samson and David overthrew the kingdoms of their enemies. Gideon tore down the altars of Baal, just as David rescued the Ark of the Covenant and restored worship to Israel. They all moved with fear, trusting God and obtaining promises. David pulled a lamb from the lion's mouth. Jephthah defeated Ephraim when they threatened to burn all the houses of Gilead. David escaped Saul's murderous intentions, just as the others were delivered in battle. Gideon was taken from the threshing floor, destitute and weak, to become Israel's deliverer, just as Jephthah was a prostitute's son, or as David was a shepherd. They were all mighty warriors who believed that God had given them the land of Canaan, and they fought valiantly to conquer God's enemies and take the land as their possession.

{35} - Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

Through faith, the prophet Elisha raised the son of a Shunammite woman from the dead (2 Kings 4:18-37). Through faith, Ezekiel prophesied to dry bones, and a multitude sprang to life (Ezek. 37). Through faith, Samson was tortured, having his eyes gouged out, and martyred himself for God's honor. Even Jesus said of the prophets,

“...and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city.”
(Mat.23:24)

Through faith, says the author, the prophets did not count their lives as dear, but gave up their flesh for the glory of God, expecting to be raised incorruptible. So confident were they in their eternal reward, that they were willing to die and wait for God to raise them anew.

{36-38} - And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

When I read these verses I am reminded of all the "prosperity" preachers who dominate out television airwaves. They promise the unconverted that if they will just come to Jesus and "make Him your Lord and Savior," then their lives will instantly improve, their finances will flourish, their marriages will be idyllic, their children will behave, their influence in the world will increase, they will driver bigger cars, they will be invited to a better class of meetings by a better class of people, and everything they touch will turn out wonderfully. They will be "Overcomers for Jesus," so to speak.

But, when I read the list of terrors that our predecessors went through, not just in the Old Testament but in the entire history of Godly faith, I am overwhelmed at the courage and perseverance that it takes to be faithful. Apparently, the people God eulogized in His word never heard about the "prosperity" doctrine. But, I don't think they mind, today.

I cannot imagine a greater compliment from the mouth of the Almighty than to know that He considered the world unworthy of you. And, what value is there in

the fleeting trappings of earthly wealth when the God who owns everything has promised you a Heavenly inheritance?

"Strangers and pilgrims on the earth" know that "man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." (Job 14:1) And, if that is our expectation, then everything we get beyond that is pure grace. Every peaceful moment, every quiet day, every moment of love, every meal, every night sleeping in a warm bed, every paid bill, every creature comfort, is a gift of kindness from God eternal.

Pardon me while I wax on a bit.

I once heard a girl say, when her life wasn't going as splendidly as she thought it ought to, "I don't deserve this!" And, she was right. She was driving a nice car, living in a nice apartment, had a good job, was married to a good fellow, and was wearing one of her multiple outfits (with matching shoes and purse). I agreed with her, she did not deserve any of that. In fact, what she deserved was hell forever. Every day that she was not living in the pain of judgment was purely grace from the very God she refused to bow to. I wonder how she would have reacted if God gave her a cave, a goatskin, affliction and a good scourging.

But, God reserves that sort of life for those of whom the world is not worthy. Isn't that remarkable? But, a million years into eternity, I'm sure they would never change places with those who had a comfortable – albeit Godless - life on earth.

Okay, I'm done. Back to the text....

{39} - And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

Now, this is where things get a bit more controversial. But, if we follow the author's line of reasoning, we can avoid some of the confusing pitfalls and theories.

Everyone who was mentioned in Chapter 11, from Abel to the last of the prophets, obtained a good report with God (and in Scripture) through faith. However, they all failed to receive "the promise." There has been plenty of speculation and interpretive creativity applied to this phrase over the years. But, we need to assess what the author, himself, considered to be "the promise" they all failed to receive.

Some commentators have speculated that "the promise" refers to Heaven, itself. I find this pretty tenuous. Consider these fact that:

- 1) In Luke 16:22 Jesus called Heaven "Abraham's bosom."
- 2) Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration.

3) Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." (John 8:56)

Given such events and statements, it is awfully hard to believe that the Old Testament saints were refused a Heavenly entrance until we get there, too.

Likewise, some have postulated that "the promise" refers to the resurrection mentioned in verse 36. That's possible, but it is only part of the story. The resurrection, by itself, fails to satisfy the overall context of this epistle. In fact, the next verse gives us an essential ingredient to solve this puzzle -

{40} - *God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

Whatever specific promise the author is referring to must have been made to all the ancient fathers and also to the New Testament era audience of this book. And, it must result in perfection for the entire group. Now, sometimes we forget (being 2,000 years into New Testament history) that the first century Church was filled with Jewish converts. In fact, the title of this book - "Hebrews" - ought to make that painfully obvious. So, the promise referred to here must be one that the Hebrew audience knew and still hoped for.

Also, verse 40 appears to have a future hope connected to it. Some commentators read it as though the author was declaring the culmination of the promise, falling on the New Testament Church and fulfilling it once and for all. But, without getting ahead of ourselves, the next chapter is going to begin with an exhortation to follow in the footsteps of faith that the predecessors trod. If we have already received the full promise of perfection there is no point in exhorting us to faithfully run "the race set before us" under the hand of God who is actively chastening and correcting us. Chastening and trials are for the purpose of "perfecting." Perfect people do not need correction. But, God continues chastening His church, even up to the present. So, our ultimate perfection as a massive group has yet to occur.

So, within the context of the author's letter, what promise is he referring to?

He is clearly referencing the promised New Covenant - made with Israel, promised to Abraham and repeated in Jeremiah. That has been the recurring theme of this entire epistle.

Follow me, here.

The first chapter of Hebrews started with a declaration of Christ's superiority over the prophets and angels.

The second chapter concentrated on Christ's words, His incarnation, and His lineage as "the seed of Abraham." We were only two chapters into this letter when we bumped into the first reference to the Abrahamic promise.

Chapter 3 demonstrated Christ's superiority over Moses and an exhortation to believe (*pisteo* - have faith), unlike those descendants of Israel who fell in the wilderness.

Chapter 4 started with a promise of rest, missed by those who had no faith. Verse three introduced God's Sovereignty into Israel's failure, pointing out that God kept them from entering the Promised Land rest, "although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." Still, there remains a rest (*sabbathing*) for the people of God who rest from their work in faith. Verse 14 introduced the idea of Christ as High Priest, beginning the contrast between the Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant.

Chapter 5 demonstrated Christ's superiority over all priests. Then, a theological principle was laid out in verses 7-9 that Christ learned obedience through the things He suffered and "being made perfect" (past tense) became the author of eternal salvation.

{Notice the process - learning obedience through suffering and chastening, leading to perfection. To make the obvious point, Chapter 12 is going to say that the New Testament Church is still in the "chastening" mode, not yet "perfected".}

Chapter 6 started with an exhortation to continue in "strong meat" doctrine, and "let us go on unto perfection" (as in, not yet arrived...). It went on to advocate good works and the "labour of love". Then, in verse 12, we saw the first reference to "the promises" –

“And, we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Heb. 6:12)

Now, just so there was no confusion about which promises he was referring to, verse 13 identified them –

“For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.” (Heb. 6:13)

Then, as an example, the author reminded his readers of Abraham's promise of innumerable offspring and he based Abraham's confidence on the fact that God swore it on Himself. So, after Abraham patiently endured he obtained the promised child and the nation that sprang from it.

The balance of chapter 6 went into detail about the absolute immutability of God and His desire to show the "heirs of promise" that they could have a "strong consolation" in Him. The promise was secure because it was enacted "by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). And, on top of all that, our forerunner, Jesus, entered within the veil, performing His high priestly duties forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Chapter 7 recounted Abraham's own encounter with Melchizedek and compared Christ's priestly credentials with the Aaronic priesthood. It concluded -

“For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.”

Here again the immutable oath was mentioned and contrasted against the law of Sinai. This is a vital distinction. While the Abrahamic promise predates the Sinaitic law, the law does not negate the promise. The author drew a clear dividing line between the two.

Chapter 8 addressed Jesus' more excellent ministry despite not being a Levite. Then, starting at verse 7, we read the longest verbatim Old Testament quote found in the NT Scripture. It is a direct quote from Jeremiah 31,

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...”

The entire New Covenant promise was recounted through verse 12, which concluded,

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

So, chronologically, the promise to Abraham was sworn by an immutable oath. But, the law was added to Israel's history to convict them of their sinful unbelief – which unbelief God foreordained "from the foundation of the world." Then, God promised a New Covenant that would bring Israel back into perfect fellowship with Him, forgiving their sins and iniquities,

"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord."

The end result of the New Covenant is -

"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."

Now, to restate a point I made back when we considered these verses, the author lifted the promise of Israel's restoration and forgiveness out the pages of Jeremiah without comment or criticism. He did not "spiritualize" the promises or take a moment to explain how they apply to the Gentile church (the popularly-touted "true" Israel). In fact, what the author assured His Hebrew audience was that "the promise" still stood and was firmly grounded in the immutable character of God.

Chapter 9 contrasted the Aaronic service in the temple with Christ's service in Heaven. And, it demonstrated the sufficiency of Christ's blood atonement.

Chapter 10 began with the fact that the law had a shadow of good things, but not the substance of them. Then, Christ's sacrifice was shown to be the end of animal sacrifice, the one sacrifice being sufficient to pay "for sins for ever." Then, in order to show where perfection would be accomplished (not by the law, but by Christ), we read -

““For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us; for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

So, here at the midpoint of chapter 10, the author reminded his readers, yet again, of Jeremiah's New Covenant promise. And, he spelled out the central figure in whom Israel's promised redemption and perfection would be accomplished - Christ.

The balance of chapter 10 exhorted the readers to enter God's presence by "a new and living way." No longer were the Hebrews to approach God on the basis of the Sinaitic law, but on the basis of faith. That faith was anchored in the unchanging promise of God, made to Abraham and spelled out by Jeremiah.

But, starting at verse 32, building toward Chapter 11, the author admitted that life as a believer is filled with trouble and trial. Still -

“...cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward, for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might **receive the promise.**”

Okay, here is the promise once again cast into the future. The author exhorted his readers to endure the trials of this life, knowing that there was a reward awaiting them. And, after they had followed God's word, they would (future tense) receive "the promise."

He continued, "For a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry". That was why "the promise," in all its detail and grandeur, was (and is) still in the future. It is tied to the return of Christ. But, in the meantime, how should the reader react?

"Now, the just shall live by faith..."

And, with that notion on his lips, the author launched into Chapter 11. After reviewing the faithful perseverance of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, he stated, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises..." (Heb. 11:6). Then, he recounted the heroic ventures of Israel's judges right up until their greatest king and prophet, David and Samuel. But, at verse 36 he delivered a litany of trials they all endured, having obtained a good report through faith.

BUT, none of them received "the promise!" God had refrained from fulfilling "the promise," having provided a better thing for the first century audience, that they (the Hebrew believers) would experience the full conclusion of God's unchanging vow together with the Old Testament forefathers. The culmination of Israel will be experienced at the time of Christ's return, when their sins will be forgiven, the law will be written in their minds and hearts, and the fullness of the Abrahamic Covenant will unfold in all its splendor. Individual converts who came to Christ during the "times of the Gentiles" will experience it and "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" will experience it.

And, it will happen when Christ returns.

That's the sum theology of the book of Hebrews. Despite the various interpretations of this book that attempt to conclude that God is finished with His elect, beloved nation, the author makes a clear and concise argument for just the opposite conclusion.

The period of time when all the Old and New Testament saints, and the houses of Israel and Judah, are "made perfect" will begin when Christ appears the second time. That has not happened, yet. As a result, all the theological speculation that God is finished with Israel is putting the cart wwaayyy before the horse. Using Israel's current state as proof that God is not going to redeem them is a moot point. The full redemption has not occurred, yet.

The good news is (to those of us who share Abraham's faith) that God will perform His immutable oaths whether we agree or disagree with how He does it, and with whom He does it. If He is faithful to keep thousands of years of historic promises to stiff-necked rebellious unbelievers (like Israel and me), then we can look confidently to the future and rest in the faithfulness of God to perform every promise of gracious salvation.