

**Lesson 15 – “Obtaining a Good Testimony”**  
**Chapter 11:17-40**

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6*

In this second half of Chapter 11, referred to as the “Hall of Faith, we examine some of the lives of Old Testament saints whose examples of faith motivate and encourage us. And while these stories of victory, deliverance and faith are truly inspiring, what is more inspiring is the power and glory of God on full display in the lives of these everyday heroes.

Vss. 17-19. I don’t think there could be a better example of someone exercising their faith in the Lord than that of Abraham. How many people do we know who could pass the test the Lord gave him? A test he passed with flying colors. We all know he had been tested before – when he had been called to leave his country ... when he was called into battle with many kings in order to rescue Lot ... he was well acquainted with testing from the Lord, but this was different. We can only imagine the agony and the despair that must’ve befallen Abraham in that moment when God asked him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. This was the child of promise given to Abraham and Sarah; their long awaited child, born to them in their old age, impossible as that may seem. This was the child in whom all of Abraham’s hopes and expectations rested, the child upon whom such love and tender affection had been bestowed. And yet, Abraham, even though he must have felt as though a dagger had been thrust through his heart, never questioned God. He trusted Him, he put all his faith in Him, and he obeyed.

*“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’” Genesis 22:1-2*

We can’t help but notice how God referred to Isaac as Abraham’s “only son”, even though we know from scripture that Ishmael had already been born to Abraham through Sarah’s handmaid Hagar. Ishmael, however, represented a work of the flesh; a child born out of the impatient action taken on the part of Sarah and Abraham. The child promised by God to Abraham and Sarah was not Ishmael, but Isaac. Isaac, then, was the child of faith; the child that God, Himself, told them He would send. God does not recognize works of the flesh, but He will reward our faith when we believe.

Abraham loved the Lord with all His heart and had done everything the Lord had commanded up to now, but he loved Isaac, too, with the love of a father who had all but given up on ever having a son, and now he’s asked to give him up; to sacrifice him ... by his own hand!

When we think of the word test, maybe we’re reminded of our school days when we studied for tests. At least, those of us who wanted a good grade studied. Sometimes, if we waited until the last minute, we did some cramming, but we did our best to prepare because the last thing we wanted was to flunk. Right? And then the day of the test came, and we wrote down our answers and then anxiously waited to see if we had passed it. When Abraham was presented this test, there was no studying to be done,

no preparation, because God had already prepared his heart. Abraham had a personal, intimate relationship with His Creator, a relationship that had been carefully nurtured. In developing that relationship, Abraham had learned to trust and put all his faith in the Lord. That was all the preparation he needed. When the test came, he did the only thing his faith called him to do ... obey. This is what occurred when they had almost arrived at the place of sacrifice: *"But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' Then he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' So the two of them went together."* (Genesis 22:7-8) That wasn't just to reassure the boy, it was Abraham's faith telling Him that whatever the Lord chose to do, it would be for good. We see another example of this faith when he told the young men who had gone with him and Isaac to the place of sacrifice, *"Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."* "We will come back" ... this was Abraham's faith speaking out loud.

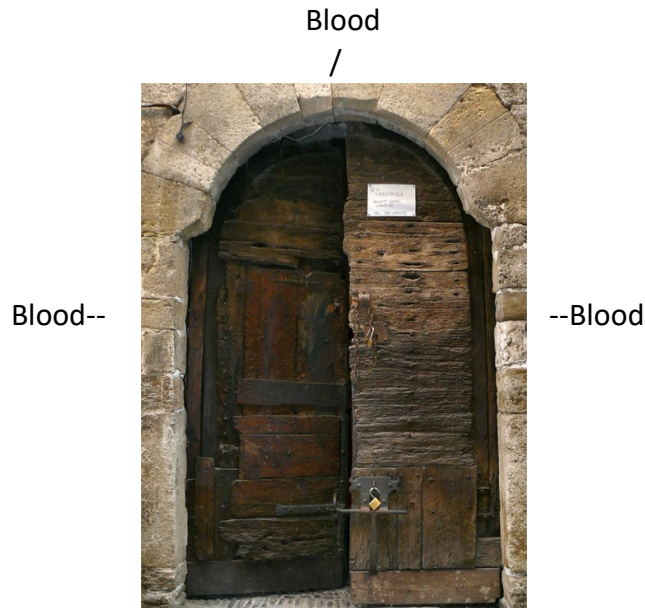
Vss. 20-22. As we continue in this 'Hall of Faith' chapter, we find mention of the next four names: Isaac, Jacob, Esau and Joseph. We see the progression of fathers blessing their children and grandchildren. Receiving the blessing of one's father in biblical times was an important event. It represented a sense of value to the person being blessed, as well as a hopeful future. Perhaps even more importantly, words of love, encouragement and acceptance were usually spoken by the parents, and what child does not benefit from that kind of affirmation? We read how Isaac blessed his two sons Jacob and Esau and, of course, we all know the story of how Jacob and his mother Rebekah devised a plan to trick Isaac into giving Jacob the birthright blessing, rather than Esau. The birthright blessing was usually bestowed upon the first born, but God had told Rebekah that of the two twins she carried, the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23), and so she was determined that Jacob should receive the blessing. When Jacob grew old, he blessed his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph. The birthright blessing bestowed on the eldest son was again given to the younger son when, even though Joseph tried to guide Jacob's right hand to Manasseh, the eldest, Jacob corrected Joseph and told him that even though Manasseh would become a great people, the younger Ephraim would be greater and would become a *"multitude of nations"*. The account is in Genesis 48. It seems as though God always surprises when He chooses the leader He wants, rather than the one people expect. This was certainly the case when He chose David to be King of Israel, among all his brothers who seemed to be so much more capable. *"For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* 1 Samuel 16:7

Joseph's faith told him that eventually God would return his people to the promised land. Even though he had lived in Egypt as a great leader, in his heart he remained an Israelite, and he asked that his bones not be left in Egypt.

Vss. 23-29. Here we have the account of the faith of Moses, preceded by the faith of his parents in first hiding him for three months, and then placing him in a basket in the river, all because of Pharaoh's command that every male child born was to be cast into the river (Exodus 1:22). Moses' life stands as a testament of faith. He was found and raised by the daughter of Pharaoh and was afforded all of the luxuries and position that being a Prince of Egypt entailed but, upon learning who he really was, and who his people really were, and the God they served, he chose to leave that life behind for a life that would surely bring suffering ... *"esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt"*. He had experienced the treasures of Egypt, but he was looking past the pleasures of earth to his

eternal reward. When we understand all of the material things Moses chose to leave behind when He was called by God, we see him as a type of Christ. Christ, too, left all of his glory and kingdom behind when He chose to obey His Father's will and come to earth in the form of an infant born to humble parents.

Moses' faith gave him the courage he needed to stand up for the cause of the Israelites. And when God told him to sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts of all the people, he didn't question it; he obeyed and, as a result, the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites, and the firstborn of every Israelite family was saved.



*It has been said that the Old Testament shows us many pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Passover is just one of them. When Moses had the Israelites place the blood of the Passover lamb on the lintel (top) of the doorpost and on each side of the door, we see a prophetic picture of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross ... OUR Passover Lamb!*

Another example of Moses' faith is given here of him leading his people across dry land in the Red Sea. Imagine how his faith must have grown when, after they had all safely passed, he saw the wall of water come down and consume Pharaoh's army!

Vs. 30. Now we come to the story of the city of Jericho, a city known to be impenetrable because of the strong, thick walls protecting it. Yet, this city had to be taken by the Israelites in order to reach the land God had promised them. It sat right in the middle, and God told the Israelites what they had to do in order for those walls to come down. It took seven days ... seven days of marching around the city and listening to the people inside mocking them; and yet, the walls fell on the seventh day ... not by physical force, but by faith.

Vs. 31. Of the seventeen people named in this chapter, there are only two women: Sarah, whose story is well known ... becoming the mother of Isaac in her old age, and then there was Rahab. Rahab, the bible tells us, had been a harlot or, as more commonly known, a prostitute. And some would say, how on earth could a prostitute make it into the hall of faith? Well, we know that God is not a respecter of persons. (Romans 2:11) In Joshua, Chapter 2, we read how Joshua sent two spies into the city, and they

were told to bring back a report. Rahab, who was not yet a believer, but knew about God and what He had already done for His people, took the opportunity to hide the spies in her home so that when the King's men came looking for them, they were nowhere to be found and were saved. Because of her actions, they told her that she and her household would be spared when the city fell into their hands, as it surely would. Rahab, in spite of her sinful past, had become a woman of faith. This is what she told the two spies when she hid them: *"And as soon as we heard these things (the parting of the Red Sea and the victory over the Amorites), our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, **for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.**"* (Joshua 2:11) This was her declaration of faith! Her heart had been changed by God, and her belief in Him had made her righteous in His eyes. *"... but where sin abounded, grace abounded much more."* (Romans 5:20) What an encouraging and profound lesson for us; it doesn't matter what's in our past ... believe in God, and HE will give you a new future!

Vs. 32-38. The deliverance and victory spoken of in these first four verses were due to acts of faith on the part of the believers. They were able to accomplish what they did because their faith told them that they could rely on the strength of God because nothing was impossible for Him. But we cannot ignore the fact that the last three verses show us that having faith is not a guarantee that there will be no suffering. These are examples of martyrdom ... those who died *because* of their faith. Specifically mentioned here are the prophet Zechariah, who was stoned (2 Chronicles 24:20). Isaiah was said to have been sawn in half. Although there is nothing in scripture to support this, there are ancient texts found that expand on the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of 2 Kings, telling about the reign of the evil King Manasseh, at whose hands Isaiah is believed to have been killed. The prophet Urijah was killed with the sword (Jeremiah 26:20-23); and the one referred to as wandering around in sheepskins and goatskins is Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). The ones who wandered in deserts and mountains, dens and caves refers to those who escaped death, but had to live the rest of their lives away from society, in seclusion. There is no doubt that these martyrs endured great suffering, but theirs was a divine grace that enabled them to endure to the end ... they sought and received their eternal reward. *"My eyes are on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me."* Psalm 101:6

Vs. 39-40. When we read that the heroes of this chapter did not receive the promise, it's referring, of course, to the promise of the New Covenant. We, as believers today, have received this promise, and our salvation is built on our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we had a meter to measure our faith, how would it read? Does it depend on our circumstances? If it does, in today's world, we may not fare too well. We're surrounded with so much discouragement and fear. But there is much to be hopeful for ... that fact that we're saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And as for fear, I like what Pastor Sean said in one of his sermons some years ago; he said this: *"When fear knocks at your door, if you let faith answer, no one will be there."* We cannot let walls of discouragement and fear hinder our walk of faith. Just like the walls of Jericho, God will fight the battle for us and give us the victory. Just like the saints in this chapter, we, too, can obtain a "good testimony" by allowing our faith to motivate us to obey the Lord. May our hearts always be encouraged by the promises of God.

*"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."* Revelation 2:10

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