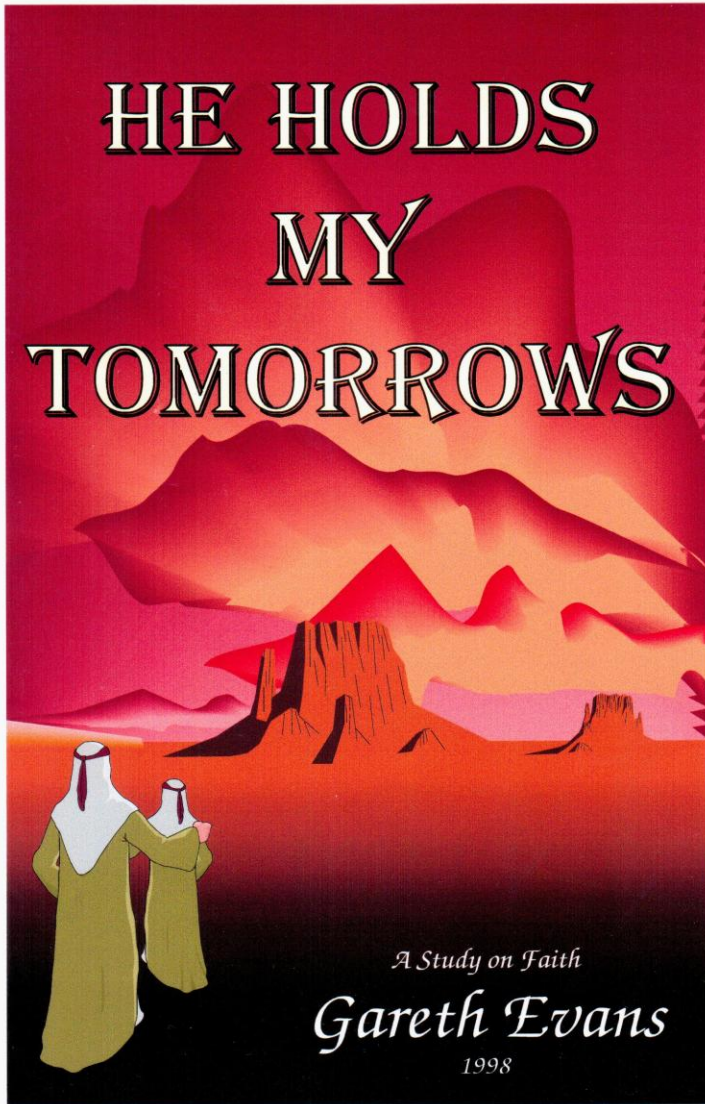


# HE HOLDS MY TOMORROWS



*A Study on Faith*

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## *Chapter One*

### **CONTROVERSY**

Mary had been ill for some months with Epstein Barr Syndrome, commonly called ‘Yuppie flu’ or ‘the disease of the nineties’.

Her doctors had tried many medications to bring her back to the healthy young lady she had been a year before, but they were perplexed, as were all the medical profession, by this disease which attacks the immune system, causing its victim to be very low in energy with continual weariness.

There was no known cure and ignorance of its causes began to produce fear in many of Mary’s friends. Some associated it with AIDS, that other scourge affecting the immune system. She had been very active in her church but now she stayed away as no one was sure if this disease was contagious. She read many books and watched television documentaries about the disease, even trying some of the experimental ‘cures’ recommended. Few friends came to visit her though some did telephone regularly to see how she was doing. They told her that the church were all praying for her and that she should remain encouraged.

Since her teen years, Mary had been a believer in the Lord Jesus, having given her life to Him at a church service. Over the years her belief and trust had grown as she studied the Scriptures, prayed and faithfully attended the church services. Through the trying months of her sickness she had held on to her trust in the Lord, believing that *all things work together for good to those that love the Lord*. Even though she did not understand, she would still trust Him.

Though she was not from my church, it was my practice to visit Mary a couple of times a month. We had become friends through another ministry in which we had been involved, so it concerned me to see her so weak in this dreadful disease. She would always be cheerful and grateful as I drove her to her bank or the shops, something she could not do for herself in that debilitating condition.

One day, however, when I arrived at her home, I found her greatly distressed. It took quite some time for her to compose herself enough to tell me what had happened. She had received a telephone call from one of her closest ‘friends’ at church, telling her that the prayer group had decided to stop praying for her recovery. The reason given was that ‘she obviously did not have faith, or she would have been healed by now’. The implication was that, as she was ‘faithless’ they could no longer consider her a part of their family!

What a terrible misunderstanding of the nature of FAITH and how it operates in our lives! As I study the Scriptures I see nothing that justifies the actions, or beliefs, of that church prayer group. To them, evidently, faith was something one could whip up at will, by one’s own effort or

diligence. If Mary had been able to create enough of this mysterious ‘essence’ called faith, God would have been compelled to meet her need of healing! ie; faith is quantitative; a sufficient measure pleases God. She only needed to believe *more!*

I believe in ‘divine healing’ as one of the riches afforded us in the victory of the cross, but have discovered that there is *no formula* to obtain it. God is still sovereign in granting healing and good health, and no amount of believing, hours of saying prayers, or buckets of tears measure up to His sovereign grace.

Like the father of the demonic child whose story is recorded in Mark 9, Mary cried out “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” In that story, the disciples had *believed* that they could heal the boy but they had failed. Jesus pointed out to them that it was *faith* they needed, not belief. One could add, “even the devils believe!”

### **Belief is NOT faith.**

Pastor John was worried! Just two years earlier, he had seen the attendance at his small church mushroom as many new people came into fellowship. Whole families had been converted and there had been talk of revival. They had soon passed the two-hundred mark in regular attendance, financial offerings were up by more than 100% over previous years and an excitement pervaded the sanctuary each week. It had been easy to preach and there were always volunteers to man the many ministries springing up in every department of the church.

“Pastor, we need to build a bigger sanctuary,” said his elders. “God is obviously doing a major work in our community.” It had not been difficult to persuade the congregation to go along with this and soon plans were being made for a sanctuary that would hold over a thousand worshippers. Anyone who expressed apprehension over the grandiose plans was branded as ‘lacking faith’. Indeed, as God was evidently in this, greater faith ought to be exercised. So, the plans escalated until a building was planned that would ultimately cost over three million dollars!

What John had not planned for was a great increase in mortgage rates at the same time as a major employer pulled out of that small town, leaving many unemployed, several of whom were members of John’s church. The interest payments soon became too large for the congregation, and the problem was compounded as people started to leave that fellowship rather than be in a church shackled with a large financial burden which was, in their opinion, not of their own making.

What had gone wrong? Had God failed them when they had exercised such great *faith*? Or had John - and his elders - mistaken faith for presumption? Indeed, had they ever understood what faith is? To them, faith was *sanctified risk taking* with the unspoken rider that, if things don’t work out, it must be God’s fault!

In His temptations by Satan, recorded for us in Luke 4: 1 - 13, Jesus shows us clearly the difference between faith and presumption.

Jesus had a real need - He was hungry after spending nearly six weeks in the wilderness. He had been led there by the Holy Spirit after His baptism in Jordan.

Though Scripture is silent, I believe it was there that He communed with His heavenly Father concerning the things that must happen to Him. He knew that His cup would be bitter. He also knew that He had a choice - His will or the Father's. After those days, Satan challenges Him with real temptation.

“If You are the Son of God, change these stones into bread.”

If He had done so, His hunger would have been assuaged and He would have proved Himself to be more powerful than His adversary. Surely that would have shown Him to be truly the Son of God. He knew He could do it! Why not name it and claim it? He could have, but that would not have been faith - it would have been presumption and would have been contrary to His Father's will.

In the third temptation, Satan even quotes Scripture to Jesus.

“You know that God will not allow you to be harmed. Even if You throw Yourself down from the topmost point of the temple, no harm will come to You. The angels will bear You up. Imagine what the people will think if You should do that! They will all flock to follow You, so You do not need to suffer and die on a cross.”

Jesus could have performed the miracle, claiming the promises of God's Word, but it would not have been faith; it would have been presumption, again contrary to His Father's will.

### **Presumption is NOT faith.**

Like Satan, there are many believers who will quote the Scriptures as their grounds for 'faith'. For example, I heard this taught on my television just this past week. The text was James 3: 2.

“The letter of James declares that if a man can control his own tongue, he is able to bridle the whole body. Therefore make sure you speak only positive things. If you do, you will never be sick!”

Such teachers justify their position with expressions of *faith*. “The Bible says it; I believe it; that's it!”

I am aware of major denominations who base their doctrines on such a misunderstanding of faith. They would group themselves under the generic title of *WORD OF FAITH* churches, more cynically called by terms such as *Name it, claim it!* or *Blab it, grab it!* or *Confess it, possess it!*. I seldom watch Christian TV but, when I do turn on my set on a Sunday morning, I will invariably find a station where such a message is being proclaimed.

I must confess that there is much good teaching in what they say. We need to be a people who can base our lives on the solid foundation of God's Word, with its many wonderful promises and riches that are ours *in Christ*. However, we must be very careful to correctly exegete the Word, claiming only those promises which apply to us, and being obedient to the conditions for such promises where conditions apply.

To claim that *nothing can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus* is the unconditional blessing for all believers. However, the promises of the Upper Room - *peace which the world cannot give or take away, a joy that is full* - are conditional upon the covenant of the Upper Room. There the disciples covenanted to *encourage and refresh one another* ("wash one another's feet"), *to obey His commandment to love one another and to be obedient to His Word*.

I am convinced that there is another error in their understanding of faith. In reality, they should call themselves *WORD OF HOPE* churches, as hope has far more to do with belief than faith does! It is HOPE that says, "God said it! I believe it! That's good enough for me!"

We speak so little about Christian hope because we have confused it with worldly hope. Whenever the world speaks of hope, there is a negative possibility associated. "I hope it will not rain tomorrow." (it may do so!) "I hope I pass my exams!" ( I may fail!) "I hope you will be happy in your marriage." (there may be a divorce!) Christian HOPE has no such negative connotation. It is an eager expectation of what is certain! So, when we speak out the truths of God's Word, when we claim its promises, we are expressing hope, not faith.

Hope is an attribute of the mind and is evidenced in confidence. Faith is an attribute of the heart and is evidenced in obedience.

**Hope is NOT faith!**

Another aspect of the power of belief is seen in the area of positive thinking. The world understands that *what you believe you are, you are*, so company executives regularly attend courses on positive thinking. "How to think yourself to success." Now, we have seminars for church leaders based on the same premises and practices.

Sadly, there are many churches, some very large with TV ministries, who would preach *faith* but, in reality, present positive thinking. In recent years, we have even introduced such New Age practices as *visualisation techniques* to produce healing from sickness, mistakenly equating the positive thinking of visualisation to faith.

“Imagine the cancer within your body. Can you see it? Now imagine the hand of Jesus reaching into that sick place and pulling the cancerous cells out. He’s doing it right now as you see Him! Hallelujah! You are now healed!”

As strange as it may seem, there are many people today who will give you testimony that the Lord has done such a healing for them. They will claim it to be the result of faith - exercised in visualisation. I was actually present in the small group where the above directions were given to a woman who had come forward for prayer.

### **Positive thinking is NOT faith!**

There are great controversies raised whenever men speak about faith. Just what is faith? What, again, is a work of faith (1 Thess.1: 3 KJV) and further, what is the walk of faith? (2 Cor 5:7). To understand what faith is should be the desire of every believer as “without faith, it is impossible to please God.” (Heb 11:6).

Paul declares several times that we are “justified by faith” (e.g.; Ephesians 2:8,9 and Romans). James argues that “faith without works is dead” (2:17). Some who side with Paul (or rather, their interpretation of Paul) consider that James has no place in Holy Writ! Martin Luther, that great instrument of Reformation, declared that the book of James is “a book of straw” and should not be in the Scriptures! Others would side with James (or their interpretation of James), classifying all Pauline believers with derogatory terms such as “fundamentalists”.

Even the words of Jesus enter the controversy!

To Nicodemus He said those wonderful words, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16). However, when He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world to preach the good news, He added, “.. He who believes *and is baptized* shall be saved.”

Paul adds further confusion. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” (Rom 10:9).

So, are we justified by faith? If so, is faith believing? Or is it trusting, or confessing, or being baptized, or .....?

Even the translators of the King James Version showed their confusion when, in Hebrews 10:23, they write, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith ...”, translating the Greek word *elpis* as ‘faith’ when it is translated as ‘hope’ in every other context. Indeed, it seems to me that faith and hope are regularly confused by the average believer! Hope has far more to do with belief than faith does!

Let me repeat: ***Hope is an attribute of the mind and is evidenced in confidence. Faith is an attribute of the heart and is evidenced in obedience.***

But I am rushing ahead of myself .....



## *Chapter Two*

### **THREE KINDS OF FAITH**

When I study Scripture, I find three *kinds* of Faith.

**SAVING FAITH**

**FRUIT OF FAITH**

**GIFT OF FAITH.**

#### **Saving Faith**

*“For by grace are you saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works lest any man should boast”* Ephesians 2:8,9 (RV)

This is the experience of all those who have been born again - born of the Spirit. We acknowledge that we are sinners without any hope in this world and desperately needy of God's intervention in our lives. We are walking in darkness, unrighteous and strangers to His promises and blessings. If it were not for the fact that God has come into our human situation and revealed His love to us through the death of His Son on the cross, we would still be in our sins and most miserable.

However, the righteousness of God has been revealed to us, “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” (Romans 3:22) Paul declares that God justifies all who have faith in Jesus. (v26). What a lovely word that is! Justified - just as if I'd never sinned! That is how God now looks at us. He sees us 'in His Son' and not in our sin. It was firstly His grace in operation. He showed us favour that was not deserved.

Indeed, one of the many definitions of grace is *unmerited favour*. However, the definition that I like the best is this mnemonic:

**God's Riches At Christ's Expense.**

He paid the price that I might receive all the blessings of this wonderful Christian life.

(In passing, have you ever considered the difference between Grace and Mercy? Let me present this distinction for your blessing:

**Grace** is God treating me as I do not deserve;  
**Mercy** is God not treating me as I do deserve!)

This grace gift of God has to be received by faith – that which I have called *saving faith*. However, even this is a gift from God. I cannot believe with faith unless God gives me the ability to do so! There is no source of faith in me. I may make a choice to believe, I may want to believe but the ability to exercise saving faith is beyond me. I can believe in my head but I need to believe in my heart, and that twelve inches can be the longest distance in the Universe as it differentiates between the justified and those still in their sins.

For two years I had the privilege of teaching in a Jewish Academy. My position was as Head of the Science Department but, near the end of my time at that school, I was invited to speak to the senior class concerning the Christian faith. The teacher in charge of that class told me that they were studying Comparative Religion and that ‘today’s subject is *Christianity*’! Just *one lesson* to study what many spend all their lifetime doing – and still not understanding!

The following morning I was asked to call on the senior Rabbi, a meeting I did not relish as he had not been party to the original invitation for me to speak to the students. He welcomed me warmly, which set me at ease, and then told me of his experience with the same students that morning. “I have never seen them so animated and so eager to talk about God” he said. “They were amazed to find a scientist who is also a man of faith.” (How sad it is that so many people have this delusion. It is my experience that a relatively high proportion of scientists are also men of great faith. Indeed, many would say that they believe in God because, as scientists, they have to ask real questions about life and they find the only answers in believing!)

The Rabbi continued, “What saddens me is that my students only believe in God in their heads, and I do not know how to get it into their hearts!”

I told him that there was only one way, that of acknowledging that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, Messiah. He said that we would have to agree to differ, but the point was made. (For a more complete account of that wonderful time in the Hebrew Academy, where I was given much freedom to share my convictions about Christ, read my other book *Stepping Stones*.)

It is my sad conviction, after many years as a pastor, that many people in our congregations are no different from those Jewish students. They have a head knowledge, but no experience of the living Christ. They hope (in the worldly sense, with its negative possibilities) but know nothing of *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. (Col 1:27). Indeed, to so many, the word *experience* conjures up visions of emotionalism and wayward Charismatics and they are determined to safeguard themselves from such excesses.

It was the ‘beloved’ apostle John who wrote;

“These things I have written unto you that believe (*with the head?*) on the name of the Son of God; that you may know (*with inner certainty?*) that you have eternal life, and that you may believe (*with the heart?*) on the name of the son of God.” (1 Jn.5:13)

{italics mine.}

Throughout his letter he is constantly reaffirming the experiencing of our faith. He writes about fellowshiping with the Father, and knowing that we know Him. We know it because we experience His love and His Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God. Saving Faith (a gift from God) enables us to touch the divine, opens a channel so that life may flow into our souls. The Holy Spirit imparts life and we are born again. We are baptised by the Spirit into the Body of Christ and become one with all others in that Body. (1 Cor 12:13) Our believing with the head becomes a knowing of the heart. However, we are but babes in the faith and we need to grow.

Again, it is my sad belief that a large proportion of born again believers do not progress far from this starting point. They still need to be taught first principles of God's Word. They need milk not solid food. They are unskilled in the word of righteousness, for they are still children. (See Hebrews 5:11-14)

In John's first letter, the aged apostle sets out what I believe is a measuring rod for Christian maturity. He likens his readers to children, young men or fathers. (1 John 2: 13,14) It is interesting how he addresses each of these three for he is not writing to those who fit chronologically into the groups, but spiritually. I have met some young men and women whom John would describe as Fathers and Mothers in Faith. Sadly, I have met many, much older believers, having been in the church for several years, who have never progressed beyond being immature children. Jesus did say that unless we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven, but when we have entered through the new birth (John 3:3f), He expects us to grow into maturity. I am amazed how childish so many Christians are in their immaturity.

**A LITTLE CHILD** has had his *sins forgiven and has a relationship with the Father*. He (or she) can pray and enjoy the blessings of fellowship but displays little evidence of Christian growth. Such a person may be of any age chronologically but remains childish spiritually. He has saving faith but little more.

**A YOUNG MAN** is one who *has overcome the evil one , being strong as the word of God abides in him..* He (or she) is active in the battle for righteousness, walking in victory, getting to know God in more of His attributes.

Many believers are not aware that there is a battle going on, and they live their lives in ignorance of Satan's tactics, robbing them of the joys and victories that should be theirs. Others know there is a war but consider the antagonists as being God (or Jesus) and Satan. Let us be clear about this - there is no war going on today between Jesus and Satan – that was fought 2000 years ago and Jesus won! – *He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. (Col. 2:15)*

The battle today is between Satan and YOU. Does that frighten you? It should not when you realise his tactics and know that the Lord expects you to win - because *greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.*

Paul could rightly say, *"I am not ignorant of his tactics"* (2 Cor.2:11) How many of us can say the same? The Young Man can, for he is strong and the Word of God abides in him.

**A FATHER** is one who is mature, having passed through the other two stages. He (or she) has come to *know Him who is from the beginning*. He KNOWS the eternal One. Surely this should be our goal, “To know Him and to make Him known.”

I am reminded of Moses who was known as God’s friend. He talked with God on Mount Sinai and in the tabernacle, so that his face shone and the people could not bear to look upon its shining. He knew God intimately. However, tasting of divine things only produces desire to taste of more, and so the prophet makes a request of God, his friend.

“O Lord,” he cries, “please show me your glory!” (Exodus 33).

God says that He cannot reveal His glory for that would surely cause the death of Moses. However, He adds a striking comment.

“Moses,” said the Lord, “I know your *name* so I am going to reveal to you My *name*,” and He proceeds to declare Himself as a God of mercy and grace, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth...” In biblical days, one’s *name* spoke of his character, as will be seen if you make a study of biblical names. God is saying that He knows the *character* of Moses so He is willing to reveal His own character.

Do you want to know more of God, He who is from the beginning, the Eternal One? He wants to make Himself known to you, but He knows your *name*!

How can He make His character known if your name is “unfaithful one, hypocrite, doubter, proud one, weak one, deceiver, childish...” ?

He waits until you will grow into maturity as the Young Man whose name is “strong one, overcomer, faithful one, man of integrity, ....” and then makes more of Himself known, so you can continue in maturing to the stature of a Father or Mother of the Faith.

Thank God for His wonderful gift of saving faith – but we must go on into maturity of faith.

### **Fruit of Faith**

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22,23*

When we bought our first home in Canada, we were delighted that there were several fruit trees in the garden. There was an apple tree, two plum trees and two cherry trees. However, we were to be disappointed when the summer came as the fruit was poor. I decided to prune the trees so, with saw in hand, I performed the operation. I knew little about pruning trees except that it is essential to open up the centre of the tree to the sun, and to remove all wasteful suckers that would drain the life-giving nutrients from the fruit-bearing branches. My friends said that, in my ignorance of correct pruning technique, I had cut away too much material and the trees would

now surely die. The following summer we watched in amazement as each of the trees bore so much quality fruit that they were weighted down to the ground.

I well remember the evening that Anne and I sat out on our garden swing, enjoying the balmy Ontario weather. We heard a strange noise, quickly followed by other similar noises. It was like a long groan with a sudden “Aahhh...” of relief. We looked around to see if someone was in pain near us. Imagine our surprise when we realised the sound was coming from our fruit trees! Then we saw the reason for the groaning.

One of the branches on our apple tree was swelling and the groan showed the effort of the tree as it grew. Suddenly there was the sound of relief as the swelling burst and an apple popped out to take its place among all the other beautiful fruit on the branch! Our cherry and plum trees were behaving the same way, though their groaning was of a different sound. Evidently, the trees were trying so hard to please us by producing the best fruit that they could!

Of course, none of my readers believe what I have just written. It is foolishness to think that a tree can bring forth fruit by its own effort! Yet, that is exactly what so many believers think when it comes to having the fruit of the Spirit in their lives! Somehow, we cannot have the fruit of faith unless we work very hard to produce it and by becoming more spiritual!

The Psalmist David understood how spiritual fruit is produced. In Psalm 1 he wrote,

*The righteous man is like a tree planted by streams of water, that brings forth fruit in his season.*

All the tree does is stand there! It opens its branches to the sun, drinks in the rain and draws its sap from the watered ground beneath. Then the nature of the life within the tree produces the appropriate fruit. So it is that spiritual fruit is produced. As we abide in the vine, which is Jesus, our hearts are opened to the ‘shining face’ of God and we draw from the wells of the Spirit of God and fruit, characteristic of the new life within us, is produced in season. This doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time to mature as a Christian; it takes willingness to be pruned; it takes standing upon the promises of God’s Word; it takes consistent trust. It *doesn’t* take effort!

Many believers see themselves like trees, but they spend much time examining themselves for evidence of fruit. Instead of looking out along the ‘branches’ to see if fruit is evident, we would be better occupied in turning our eyes inward toward the trunk of the tree, the source of all the nourishment that the branches receive. We would be better to turn our eyes upon Jesus, the true vine into which we have been grafted. Then the fruit would grow and others would see it, in its season.

It is He who produces the fruit of faith in all who abide in Him and, like the tree of Psalm 1, draw from the streams of Holy Spirit water.

Let us understand something more about all the fruit of the Spirit. We so easily associate them with characteristics found in all people, but they are only available to those who have been born

again of the Spirit. It is He who produces them in us and the non-Christian cannot know anything about them!

*The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit; they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned."*

*1 Cor 2:14.*

Thus it is that *longsuffering*, for example, has little to do with patiently waiting for the traffic lights to change! Many a non-believer has far more patience than many a believer! The world cannot know anything about the *love* that is shed abroad in the believer's heart, the *joy* that abides when all around us is going wrong, the *peace* in the midst of the storm. They are fruit of the indwelling Spirit and riches only for the child of God. Similarly, the fruit of *faith* will only be evidenced in the life of the maturing believer.

As I study these nine fruit, I have come to the opinion that they grow more exotic or rare as I read along. Every new believer has had some taste of love, joy and peace. Truly, from the moment of the new birth, many can give testimony that, *'heaven above is softer blue, earth around is sweeter green; something lives in every hue that Christless eyes have never seen'*

*(G Wade Robinson)*

Then, as time goes on, the initial *joy* and *peace* seem to go as the Father begins the process of disciplining us to conform us to the image of His Son. However, as we abide in Him, the fruit returns in a richer, fuller experience. We initially experienced His *love* overwhelming us, but now we find it reaching through us to others. His *joy* first came as a new song in our hearts making life seem like a new day, but now we begin to find that song welling up within us even in the darkest of nights. At first, His *peace* stilled the storms that were raging in our hearts, but now His *peace* is a deep security in the midst of life's storms.

In the maturing believer, we begin to see more of the character of Jesus in bearing the ridicule of the world. Our *longsuffering* replaces the rebellious nature of the old man that once we were, and we find we do not react to trying situations as before. It has been said that if you want to see the *gentleness* of Jesus, look at His actions; if you want to see His *goodness* look at His attitudes. So it is that, as we grow in the fruit of the Spirit, we become *good* in both our actions and our attitudes.

Then the life of *faith* becomes evident as the believer begins to walk in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit, seeing the hand of the Lord leading and guiding him. The *meek* man is one who has laid down his own rights and submitted himself fully to the Lord's will. He is maleable, teachable - moldable into a vessel fit for the use of the king.

Finally, the rarest of the fruit, is able to come. This is the fruit that the apostle Paul longed for - *self control*. This is the 'putting to death' of which he wrote in Romans 7:15-24. He recognised how impossible it would be for him to produce this mastery over self if it were not for the fact that, through the work of the cross, there is such a victory possible.

*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.* Romans 8:1.

Such fruit only comes from the Holy Spirit within the believer and the same is true of *faith*. Only He can produce it; no effort of mine will avail!

An extra thought on the fruit of the Spirit. The word “fruit” is singular. These are not many different fruits growing independently of one another, but one fruit evidenced in different ways. It has been suggested that the first three (love, joy, peace) are an inner experience of the Holy Spirit abiding in the believer; the second triplet (longsuffering, gentleness, goodness) are an outward expression as we relate to mankind around us, and the last triplet (faith, meekness, temperance) are to do with our union with God.

### **Gift of Faith**

*“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. .... To another faith by the same Spirit; ...”* 1 Corinthians 12: 7, 9

The third kind of faith that I find in the Bible is called the gift of faith. The apostle Paul is writing to the church at Corinth about the *charismata* - (Greek = ‘grace gifts’) - given by the Holy Spirit to the church. There are many such gifts listed for us in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 together with the ministry gifts named in Ephesians 4:11.

The gifts are given to individuals, not that they might glory or boast in them but that they might be for the benefit of all. In truth the gifts are given to the *church* and individuals are only the instruments that the Spirit would use. It is striking that in all three references mentioned, Paul also emphasises the unity of the Body of Christ. The purpose of all the gifts is to enable the church to grow in unity so that it might succeed in its ministry of bringing men and women to the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

How then is the gift of faith evidenced in operation ?

Imagine this scenario in the Board of Elders meeting of a local church. A proposal has just been made to start an extension work in the neighbourhood to try to reach the unchurched peoples of the street. It is acknowledged that this is the only evangelical church in the area and there is an increasing number of young people, unemployed and in need, forming companionship gangs. Many church members have expressed their emotions, ranging from compassion to fear, so the proposal has been made. Neither the pastor nor any of the elders have the energy or the ability to work with these young adults so it is recognised that a new youth worker needs to be employed. “But how shall we pay him and finance this ministry ?”

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<sup>1</sup> John 17 - still the Lord’s prayer.

The question is sincere as the church has been struggling financially in recent years. The simple answer, and there is always someone who will give it, is that ‘we must pray more, and God will supply’. That is true so long as it is God’s purpose to start the work and employ the youth worker. But how do we know if this is His purpose? It sounds good, but there are many programs that sound good to us but never seem to receive God’s blessing.

The elders decide to wait on the matter, to pray and to come together one week later to make the decision.

As they enter the Board Room, imagine you are an invisible witness who can read the thoughts on each man’s mind. “One for, one against ....two for, three for, two against ..... four for, four against .... and the pastor....”

How can they possibly come to any agreement? - while the young people on the streets are continuing in their lostness!

The men start with prayer and then begin to share their thoughts. Suddenly, one man, who had entered as an ‘against’, speaks up. “When I came in here tonight I was of the opinion that this is not the time to start a new work. However, as I have listened to the arguments for and against, *something has happened within me* and I have changed my position! I know that the Lord is in this! I’m voting that we appoint a new youth worker!” Others begin to speak and, within just a few minutes, a unanimous decision is reached. What happened ?

Not only did each man hear what the others were saying but, because they were men genuinely seeking God’s will, they heard Him speak in their spirits. He planted within each of them *faith* to believe. That is the gift of faith. Though the financial difficulties were real, He gave them faith that overcame the circumstances. It may only have been a ‘grain of mustardseed’ but because it was planted in their spirits by God Himself, their mountain would be removed. Such faith is always rewarded by the blessing of God. Such faith always removes mountains!

I have seen the *gift of faith* in operation several times. I have seen people doing great things for God when all around them thought it impossible. They stopped looking at the circumstances because they knew His prompting.

I have a dear friend named Yorrie Richards who once stammered so badly that it was impossible for him to say a simple sentence. He came to know the Lord when facing a court trial for theft. The trial judge warned him that “the path you have chosen to follow may well end at the gallows.” All the town knew of his background in crime, and many were cynical about his conversion.

Some time later, Yorrie and I met up again and he suggested to me the most impossible thing. He wanted to book the main hall in his home town and to preach the gospel to all those who had known him in his youth, and had been so unbelieving. I advised him against such a venture as it



would surely cause us much embarrassment and could hardly do any good for the gospel. He insisted that the Lord had laid this on his heart and he believed it to be His leading.

We booked the hall and advertised the meeting. I stood aside after the introductions and Yorrie faced his audience. He immediately began to stutter and I felt embarrassed for him. I could hardly bring myself to listen. Then a strange quietness fell over the room as Yorrie's voice became more controlled and he began to speak with authority and confidence, telling what the Lord had done. There were many tears shed that night as God worked a miracle among us, because one of his 'weak and foolish' ones had responded to His gift of faith. Many thousands throughout Britain and Canada can give testimony today of the anointed preaching of Yorrie Richards.

Thus I present to you the three *kinds* of faith:

saving faith  
fruit of faith  
gift of faith.

What immediately strikes me is that all three find their source in GOD - not in the believer! There is nothing I can do to produce faith in me, so please don't tell me to 'have more faith' when you see me sick or struggling in my Christian walk. What I need to develop is more hope, not faith.

## *Chapter Three*

### **WALKING BY FAITH**

If you were to choose some Biblical characters to demonstrate what it is to walk by faith, whom would you select ?

Caleb, who, though more than eighty years old, wanted to fight giants?

Elisha, who stood against all the prophets of Baal ?

Daniel, who publicly prayed knowing that it might cost him his life ?

It is interesting to see those whom the Bible notes as examples of faith.      None of the above!

The apostle **Paul** writes about faith in his letter to the Romans, chapter 3: 28. “... *we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*” He then takes all of chapter 4 to give his example of the patriarch Abraham, to whom ‘faith was reckoned for righteousness’.

The apostle **James** also takes Abraham as his supreme example of the life of faith, declaring that faith without works is dead. He asks, “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect ?*” (James 2: 21,22)

However, he adds a second example, one which must seem strange to all of us. He presents to us Rahab the harlot, who welcomed the spies sent into Jericho. By all human standards she was a hardly a commendable person - besides following a despicable trade, she was a traitor and a liar who cared only for her own safety. Yet she is named as an example of faith.

What is even more surprising is that James is not the only one who so considers her! The author to the book of Hebrews also names her in his extensive list. In my former understanding of faith, I would certainly not have considered her! - nor many others mentioned in Hebrews 11. Then, maybe it’s my understanding of faith that has to change.

Some would even title chapter 11 of Hebrews as “*Heroes of Faith*”. I see no heroes there, just ordinary people like you and me, who experienced all kinds of circumstances in the walk of faith. Some conquered kingdoms, by faith; others were put to death, by faith! A better title for the chapter would be “*Examples of Faith*” as its purpose is to show us that, in His sovereignty, God leads men and women along many different paths in order to fulfill His will in and through them. To us, torture and death do not seem compatible to God’s will for the believer, but history is replete with stories of how the church grew rapidly upon the blood of martyrs. It was God’s will that they died, so that they might be ‘to the praise of His glory’. This is not to say that He does not have compassion for the feelings of people. Of course He does, but, among His saints He is developing those who, by their suffering and death, will bring greater glory to Him than by their life. To them He has guaranteed a ‘better resurrection’.

*Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright,  
God leads His dear children along.  
Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night,  
God leads His dear children along.  
Some through the water, some through the flood,  
Some through the fire, but all through the blood.  
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,  
In the night season and all the day long.  
(G.A.Young)*

In the Gospels we read of **only six people** whom Jesus commended for their faith. If the choices of Paul, James and the author of Hebrews raise your eyebrows, wait till you see those whom Jesus chooses!

At least three of them were not even Jews, one was a leper, another had been sick for many years, one was blind, three declared themselves ‘unworthy’ and all were sinners.

**The Roman Centurion** of Matthew 8: 5 - 13.

His servant was lying paralysed at home so he asked the Lord if he would heal him.

“I’ll come with you,” said the Master, but the centurion answered him. “Lord I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but just speak the word and my servant will be healed!”

Let us understand this; he probably had the finest house in the city, for the rank of a centurion in the Roman army was one of great honour. His unworthiness was not because of his status but because he realised he was in the presence of someone far greater than himself. He continued, “Lord, I am like you, a man under authority.”

Under what authority did he consider Jesus to be? He had no delegated authority from the Jewish authorities, nor did he have the status of one schooled at the feet of a great rabbi. He was a lowly carpenter - but He did have the authority of the anointing of God, and the centurion recognised this. How? By faith!

Jesus marvelled and said, *“I have never found such faith in all of Israel!”*

Where was the faith? The centurion had an *inner witness* that this man, Jesus, was a man with divine authority. He obeyed that witness (of the Holy Spirit) and submitted himself to that authority.

“I am not worthy; just speak the word and it shall be done.”

**The woman with a hemorrhage** of Mark 5: 25 - 34.

This unfortunate woman had endured much at the hands of many physicians with no healing from her embarrassing and distressing condition. Indeed, she was getting much worse. The law declared her ‘unclean’ so she was not allowed to enjoy many of the privileges of the common folk. She could not attend the celebrations of Feast Days, nor enter the synagogue to worship, and most of all, she must not come near the ‘righteous’ Pharisees and ‘holy men’.

She had heard of Jesus, but an *inner witness* told her to reach out to touch the hem of His garment. This was contrary to everything that she had been taught, but she obeyed and was healed. There was no precedent for this. She did not believe because she had heard of others being healed the same way. She simply obeyed an inner impulse.

Jesus said, *“Take heart, daughter. Your faith has made you well.”*

**The Canaanite woman** of Matthew 15: 22 - 28.

This woman’s heart was breaking as she sought help for her demon-possessed daughter. She came to the Lord but even He seemed to shun her and His disciples tried to drive her away. She was not a Jew but she saw what almost no one else had seen, even the disciples up to this time. She recognised Jesus as “The Lord, the Son of David”. These were terms well known to apply to the coming Messiah. Others had not yet recognised Him, but this Canaanite woman had. Such revelation only comes by the *inner witness* of the Holy Spirit. This same revelation came to Peter on Mount Hermon, nearly two years later! Jesus tested her understanding, her revelation, by challenging her that it was not good to throw the children’s bread (ie; healing for the Jews) to the dogs (ie; Gentiles). Her reply shows that she fully understood, by revelation, that He truly was the Messiah.

Jesus said, *“O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish!”*

**Blind Bartimaeus** of Mark 10: 46 - 52.

Though blind, Bartimaeus could see more than all the great multitude of sighted people surrounding Jesus. He lived in the cursed city of Jericho and had lost his sight, becoming a beggar, despised by all around him. When he cried out, the people sternly told him to be quiet but he would not cease in his crying, for like the Canaanite woman, he had received a revelation, an *inner witness* of Jesus as Messiah. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Jesus called the beggar to Him and asked a strange question. “What do you want me to do?”

Bartimaeus replied, “Master, I want to regain my sight!”

Jesus said, *“Go your way, your faith has made you well.”* And immediately he regained his sight. Revelation had preceded confession with healing as a result.

**The woman in Simon’s house** of Luke 7: 37 - 50.

In John 11:2 and Matthew 26:6 it is said that this woman was Mary, sister of Lazarus. Simon, a Pharisee, watched her actions and began to judge Jesus as lacking discernment, for she was recognised as a sinner. Jesus, however, was fully aware of who she was but recognised her actions as anointing him for burial. She probably had little understanding of this but, acting in obedience to an *inner witness*, the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and motivated by love, she had ministered to the Lord prophetically.

Jesus said, *“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

**The tenth leper** of Luke 17: 11 - 19.

Ten lepers had come to Jesus seeking to be healed. All obeyed His instructions to go to the priests, to be declared ‘clean’. This was a requirement of the Old testament and, though one of them was a Samaritan, he also obeyed. On the way to the priests, all of them were healed but only the Samaritan acknowledged that his healing was not some magic trick but was due to God so, falling at the feet of Jesus, he began to glorify God. He had obeyed the audible voice of the Son of God and had been healed.

Jesus said, *“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”*

In **all six examples**, faith was evidenced and fulfilled, in **obedience**. If there had been no obedience to the recognition of authority, to the revelation of deity, to the inner witness of the prompting of the Spirit, to the spoken word of the Lord, there would have been no miracles recorded.

### **Definition of FAITH**

How then shall we define faith so that it meets all the questions of controversy and explains the choices of Jesus, Paul, James and the writer to the Hebrews?

When I ask people to define faith the usual answer is to quote Hebrews 11: 1

**“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”**

Yet, when asked to explain their definition, I find few who have a convincing explanation. To me the author is simply saying what the apostle Paul has said elsewhere, as quoted in the last chapter.

a) What is it that we hope for ? Barclay, the author of the popular devotional series, Our Daily Bread, defines hope as *‘eager expectation’ for that which is promised*. The apostles Paul and Peter both gave testimony before their accusers of our great hope of resurrection. To them, our hope is sure. To the author of Hebrews, it is as an anchor fixed within the veil of the presence of God. We hope for what we shall surely receive. What shall we receive but that which flows from the grace of God; that which He has promised? His gift of salvation, His gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us; His gifts given by the Holy Spirit. His GIFT.

I picture the little child at Christmastime or a birthday. He knows he will receive something special from his parents - a gift from their love. He eagerly waits for the big day. He has hope for that which is surely going to come. Finally he receives what is promised - his gift. This is the substance of that which he hoped for. His expectation has become reality.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is a **GIFT**.

b) When I first arrived in Canada, I viewed the trees in our garden with great anticipation of enjoying their fruit the following spring. However, I had no knowledge of whether they were apple trees, plum trees or peach trees. I am not a scholar in horticulture and could not recognise the trees by their leaves or shape. When the fruit began to arrive, however, I had no doubt what

each one was. I knew them by their *fruit*. The fruit was the evidence I needed. The nature of the trees had not changed, the character of the trees had not changed, but these had been hidden from my understanding, until the fruit came. The evidence of things unseen was the fruit upon the branches.

So it is that the evidence of the Spirit-filled life is in its fruit. Jesus said, “For the tree is known by his fruit.” (Matt 12:33)

Faith is the evidence of things not seen. It is a **FRUIT**.

The author of Hebrews 11 is saying no more than Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:9 and Galatians 5:22.

I define faith in this way:

***“God’s finger in the hearts of men and women, moving them to do His will.”***

It is evidenced in **obedience** as an attitude of the heart. It is not an attitude of the mind. It is BELIEF AND RESPONSE. The moving finger is God’s, the response of obedience is ours. The first and greatest work of faith a man can do is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ - unto salvation. Revelation precedes confession - see Peter on Mt. Hermon, “Thou art the Christ.” It is evidenced in repentance, baptism, confession and good deeds (works of righteousness). Where these are not evident, one can rightly doubt (like James) the reality of faith; it is effectively ‘dead’.

The **walk of faith** is a daily submission to His will (revealed and unrevealed). Holding onto Daddy’s hand! As Peter said, “To whom else can we go ?” As we hold on, our Father is able to move mountains! - because of His character, not because of our strength of mind or belief! Note that even the devils believe in all that our Father can do, but that is NOT faith.

## *Chapter Four*

### **HEARING GOD'S VOICE**

Easy for some!

It was a strange sight that caught the eye of Moses as he shepherded his father-in-law's sheep. A bush was burning fiercely but was not being consumed! The leaves remained green, though the flames licked about them.(Ex 3:2) He had never seen anything like this wonder in all his time in Egypt as Pharaoh's son, nor in the many years since those days, in which he had lived as a shepherd in the land of Midian. He stepped a little closer to investigate.

Suddenly a voice rang out. "Moses!"

Can you imagine his surprise, especially when it appeared that the voice was coming from the interior of the burning bush! The voice continued, "Take your shoes off your feet for you are standing on holy ground!" I'm sure he was quick to obey for he was much afraid.

Thus began the long time of communion between God and Moses. Thereafter they spoke together often, as the Lord directed His servant in leading the Children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, gave instructions for the building of the tabernacle and dictated several laws for His covenant people. Indeed, we read that they spoke 'face to face as a man speaks with his friend' (Ex 33:11). No wonder Moses' face shone!

Don't you envy Moses being able to talk with God in that way? I certainly do.

One can speculate on what it was that Moses saw, and what he heard when God spoke to him. What did God's voice sound like? Was it a deep, resonating baritone as a trained Shakespearean actor? Did it have a lilt or an accent? (Welsh maybe, like mine, seeing that He evidently enjoys visiting my country periodically, in great outpourings of revival?!!!!) What language did He speak - that of Egypt where Moses was educated or that of the Midianites where Moses had lived for the past forty years?

All we can say for certain is that it was a language that Moses understood.

Was it the voice of a man or did it sound like 'rushing waters' as Ezekiel described the voice of the Almighty? Elijah the prophet heard Him speak with a still, small voice, while Isaiah recorded that He spoke 'in my ear'.

Surely, it must be easy to walk in God's will when he speaks to you in an audible voice, just as He did to Moses and others of Old Testament days. It would be easy to walk the walk of Faith in those circumstances!

Would it?

Maybe God would then demand much more of us if we could hear His voice clearly. We would have no excuse to disobey and our obedience would not be faith. Slaves obey their masters but it is often out of fear. That is not the kind of obedience that the Lord requires.

*He is looking for a people who are tuned to hear His voice in the spirit and whose very nature has become obedience.*

Not an obedience due to fear but an obedience due to character. It has never been in His nature to compel or manipulate His people into doing His will or to walk according to His purposes. He has always given them the freedom to respond in love and willing obedience. The faith that pleases God is not evidenced in the obedience of fear but in the obedience of love and willingness.

Young Tommy was restless at the supper table as he wanted to go back outside to his waiting friends. “You cannot leave the table until you have finished all your meal,” his mother said. Tommy gulped at his food. “And sit down on your chair while you eat,” added his father. Tommy was slow to respond, so his father repeated the instructions in a voice, a little slower and a little louder. Still Tommy slouched by his chair, his eyes straining to watch his friends out of the window, as he crammed another fork full of spaghetti into his mouth.

His father’s voice grew more stern and he spoke deliberately. “I have told you to sit down when you eat, so DO SO NOW!” Tommy sat down, a sullen look on his tomato-stained face. His mouth was full so he could not speak but inside his head, a voice shouted out, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside!” Hardly an attitude of obedience that would please the father!

The still, small voice.

The prophet Elijah had seen God do a mighty miracle before all the prophets of Baal. He was bold in slaying all these false leaders and the ‘hand of the Lord was upon him’. (1 Kings 18:46) However, when he heard that Jezebel, the wicked queen, was seeking to take his life, he fled into the desert to hide and mourn. “I’ve had enough, Lord” he cried. “Take away my life!” Hardly what one would expect from a ‘man of faith’! First, an angel is sent to inquire why he is in this state, and then the Lord Himself speaks to Elijah - not in the great wind that tore apart the mountain, nor in the earthquake or the fire, but in a still small voice. Surely, the first three would have caused him much fear and he would have responded quickly if God had spoken. But the still, small voice is unthreatening. He is ordered to return to Damascus and to anoint his successor, Elisha. Thus, Elijah regains his zeal for the Lord, for he has heard His voice. His obedience is that of faith.

I am reminded of ‘doubting Thomas’ the apostle who would not believe that the Lord had risen from the dead, until he could see Him and put his fingers in the nailmarks of the wounded hands. When Jesus appeared before him, Thomas finally believed and Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.”

He might well have also said, “Blessed are they who have not heard (with the ear) and yet have obeyed!”

The walk and life of faith that pleases God is seen in the man or woman who, ‘have not heard (with the ear) and yet have obeyed.



Should we expect to hear the Lord's voice? Of course we should. It was Jesus Himself who said that 'the sheep hear My voice'.

When the Lord wants to communicate to us, to teach us His will, to direct us in His paths, He chooses not to do so with a loud voice, but by the still, small voice, heard only by the soul in tune with Him. He wants to speak to His sheep and most of them, I am sure, want to hear His voice.

Communication is always the responsibility of the communicator if the communicatee is willing to hear. That is why a good teacher will always seek to know if his students have understood what he has tried to teach. I was a schoolteacher for eighteen years during which time I taught Physics to senior high school students. To me it was more important that my students *understood* what had been taught them, rather than that they could repeat to me all the laws, equations, etc., with little understanding of the fundamental principles involved. They might forget the equations but, once understood, they would never forget the principles. That is why I found it so difficult to accept the wide-spread use of pocket calculators in the classroom. Pupils simply plugged-in numbers to given formulae, getting the correct 'numerical' result without ever understanding what the 'result' represented nor how it was obtained.

So, is God speaking to us, His sheep? If so, why are we not hearing what He is saying?

Learning to recognise His voice

I believe He speaks to me every day but His voice is so often drowned out in the cacophony of other voices that rush through my head. I need to learn the secret of which the Desert Fathers spoke and wrote, a mystery understood by those men and women of Church history, whose lives have impressed us as being in deep communion with God; those called, often derisively, the *mystics*.

The Desert Fathers ( and mothers) were the men and women of the 4th Century, a time when Christianity had become accepted by the Roman emperors and Christendom as a political, worldly system had been born. To be obedient to their understanding of the Lord's command to 'take up one's cross', they had withdrawn from the world and all its 'voices' and had sought solitude in the Egyptian desert. To them, solitude was not being alone, but being able to draw so close to God, that they would become unaware of all other persons around them. They learned to be still, to develop an inner silence, to meditate upon Him and to hear His voice. (*An excellent book on their teachings is "Desert Spirituality" by Henry Neuwen.*)

I'm sure we do not need to withdraw into a monastic life-style but we do need to spend quality time if we would learn to recognise His voice. We do not need a great intellect that understands all theology, nor do we need a Bible College diploma or Seminary degree. He speaks, not to the intellect and mind but to the spirit, where His Spirit communicates to ours.

To hear His voice, we need:

- . a hunger, a passion for His will
- . a heart set on being obedient to whatever He wants
- . time spent in His Word
- . a quiet place for meditation
- . inner silence and solitude

“The Lord told me ...”

Nothing so disconcerting to a pastor than to have someone come to you, supposedly for counsel, who begins the conversation by saying , “The Lord told me ....” ... end of conversation! I usually try to ask them how the Lord spoke to them, only to discover that, in my opinion, it was no more than a thought they had, possibly originating in the emotion of some meeting or in conversation with a friend - but seldom originating in the Lord. If only we would be quicker to ask such a question whenever people say, “The Lord told me”, maybe we would stop people being so flippant in use of the expression.

For four years, my wife and I had the great privilege of working on a Mercy Ship traveling between Europe and West Africa. On board were doctors, surgeons, nurses who volunteered their skills in performing life-changing operations, for hundreds of unfortunate Africans who could not afford the high costs of surgery their maladies required. Though it was a very fulfilling time, there were many days of great stress and weariness, but to those in the developed nations who received the reports of the work being done by the medical staff and the rest of the ship’s crew, it must have seemed to be a very glamorous ministry. I remember so many who came to work on the ship who said that they were there because the Lord had told them to come. It always surprised me how many of them discovered, just a short time later, that it was not where they really wanted to be. Obviously the Lord had made some mistake - or they had mistaken his voice for another.

I have had others tell me that the Lord had told them to do something which was contrary to Scripture! I personally know two women who left their husbands because “the Lord told me to”, even though there was no evidence of unfaithfulness or mistreatment. One husband was a believer but he had entered into a (perfectly legal) business arrangement with an unbeliever. The wife claimed that the Lord had told her to leave her husband because he was “unequally yoked” with an unbeliever! What a misuse of Scripture - and certainly not the Lord’s will for any marriage!

Many believers use this expression, “The Lord told me ...” sincerely, believing they have been led by God. This may have been through a dream, the encouragement of a friend, circumstances, a verse of Scripture becoming prominent, ‘coincidences’ or just a growing personal inner desire. All of these are genuine ways, preferably collectively, that the Lord can lead us to walk in His will, particularly if our #1 desire is to so walk. However, it would be advisable to say “I believe the Lord would have me do this .... “ rather than the ‘spiritual’ expression that “The Lord told me...” which might do lots for the ego but is often so damaging to Christian testimony.

That rare occasion - a personal testimony.

In my life, I have had a number of experiences where I knew His presence in a more-than-usual way. Let me emphasise that they are rare, not the norm. On two occasions I have heard Him speak to me in an audible voice. I do not try to explain these, they certainly are not because I am

more spiritual at those times than other times. In fact both times were when I was with a heavy heart. I will tell you of one of them.

It was 1983 and I had been pastor of the small Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Sidney on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, for less than one year. They were a warm, loving congregation and we had developed a deep attachment to many of them. However, prospects for the church to grow in numbers were not good, as there was a 'freeze' on local land development and suitable buildings were scarce. In fact, we were meeting at the local headquarters of the Free Masons! I was not receiving a great salary but it was evident that soon, the church's limited expenses would exceed their even-more limited income. This small congregation were an offshoot of the larger church in nearby Victoria, the capital city of the province, but there was now little relationship between the two, least of all any commitment by the mother church to underwrite the cost-overheads of the daughter.

It was a drizzling Sunday evening late in November. Anne had taken our three daughters to a meeting at the mother church while I decided to walk and talk with the Lord concerning the growing heaviness upon my heart. Should I return to teaching - at least part time - to augment my income and so not be a burden on the church? Should I resign and seek another position, telling the church that they could not, at this time, afford a full-time minister? Should I put out a 'fleece' to try to find God's will? My mind was full of questions but I was not receiving any answers!

My footsteps took me to the top of a local beauty spot from where one could look out over all the surrounding countryside. Bear Hill had become a favourite retreat location for us, and it was at its summit that I rested - and found my 'burning bush'. I heard an audible voice! Its words were clear and were repeated so I understood them clearly. Though my spirit gave witness that this was a Divine moment, I looked around to see if there was anyone else on the hilltop with me. There was no one else present. The Lord was speaking and His words were clear.

*"You will pastor Victoria Alliance Church!"*

There was no explanation how this would come about. At that time, Victoria Alliance Church had three pastors and the senior man had been there just about one year. He had his Masters degree in Theology while I had never been to seminary and had only recently been ordained. Maybe God was not speaking of the present time and His words had relevance only for the future? How would that answer my questions for the present? Perhaps He meant that I was to approach the senior pastor and suggest that the mother church took over the daughter church again, and that I be taken on as their fourth pastor? Such were the thoughts racing through my mind as I returned home.

I told Anne of my experience and we decided to be silent about this, believing that if the Lord had truly spoken, He was perfectly able to bring about His purposes without our interference. Imagine our surprise just a couple of weeks later, to hear that the senior pastor had announced his resignation from the Victoria church! We were tempted to telephone everyone at that church to tell them that we knew who was to be their next pastor, but we decided that discretion was a better choice and so remained silent. As an extra precaution, we stayed away from that church

over the coming months, so we could not be tempted to manipulate their situation to bring about 'God's will' for them.

It was several months later that the District Superintendent called to invite me to pastor the Victoria Alliance Church. I immediately responded in the affirmative, causing him to remark, "That was quick!"

"Brother," I said, "I knew four months ago!"

During my seven years at Victoria C&MA church, there were many times that I was tempted to leave, but I stayed for I knew that the Lord had called me there and believed that He would call me out when it was time to go. We have no doubt that, when an invitation came in 1990 to serve on board the Mercy Ship, it was His time to move on.

Why did God speak in an audible voice? It certainly wasn't because I was more spiritual than others nor because He had just woken up to my need! Maybe, just maybe, it was because my heaviness was so real that it had brought me to the place of solitude that I needed, the place of inner emptiness and silence where I could hear Him speak. Maybe, it was just His sovereign act of speaking into my pain out of His great love.

Relating this story reminds me of the words I once heard spoken by Floyd McClung, then a notable teacher with Youth With A Mission. He was speaking on the subject of *prophecy* but his words could well apply to my circumstance in hearing the voice of God.

He said that *whenever you receive a word of prophecy, put it in the bottom drawer and lock the drawer! It was not given to you for direction, it was given to you to build up your faith. There will come a time when you will need to remember, possibly in a difficult situation, that God gave that word. You may then have confidence that He has brought you to this place - and most surely is able to bring you through.*

I believe these to be very wise words, much needed in these days of multiple personal prophecies made from public pulpits. There are so many believers very confused by words of knowledge and prophecy that have been made over them, with little evidence of their fulfillment and little accountability by their proponents. A charismatic gift really needed today is that of *discernment*.

My trust in the Lord is not built on these very rare experiences when I heard His audible voice; it is built upon the confidence that He is leading me every day as I hold on to his hand. I do not have to hear His voice audibly but it is essential that my spirit is in tune with His so that He can lead me.

Corporate prayer.

One of the greatest blessings I have received is in the area of corporate prayer. When I was a young believer, I found most prayer meetings rather boring as there was much repetitive praying and little evident answering. Things changed when the Lord began to do a wonderful work among the youth of our church. These young men and women began to pray for one another in a remarkable way as it became evident they were hearing the inner prompting of the Lord in the things they should pray for. I began to realise the power in corporate prayer when those praying are collectively hearing the Shepherd's voice.

I was leading a Missions Bridge School, in which our goal was to disciple eager believers and to give them a missions ‘experience’ in a developing or third-world nation. One evening our topic was *corporate prayer* so I taught the twelve students a practice I had learned in my first church. We quietened our hearts in a silent prayer and then I read a meditative psalm. The students were then instructed to meditate in silence for the next fifteen minutes, using the psalm as a basis for their meditation. On completion of the fifteen minutes - a very long time for most of us unaccustomed to such practice, I asked each person in turn, to tell us of their thoughts. They were to describe any pictures, relate any stories, quote any scriptures they had received, without trying to make any interpretation of their thoughts. As each told of their thoughts, I began to look for a pattern. My wife, Anne was the last to speak. She is not given to charismatic experiences but that evening she spoke of seeing a vision of a white ship sailing on black waters off the coast of Victoria. I had also seen a black cloud lifting over the city revealing a white ship on its waters!

I summed up their thoughts with words like this: “It seems that we have four themes running through our meditations. Several of you have spoken of our governments, both federal and provincial, our native peoples and this ship. I wonder how we are to pray.”

That evening two dear friends had unexpectedly come to visit Anne and myself and were even now sitting at the side of the classroom. Robin and Anne Jones lived up-island but were spending the evening in Victoria, taking in this Mission Bridge class, though not as students. Anne spoke up. “Gareth, please forgive me for interfering, but I think Robin has something very interesting to share.”

I invited Robin to speak so he told us their reason for being in Victoria that evening. “At midnight, I shall be at Victoria airport with two local (provincial) politicians, greeting two federal politicians who are coming to discuss the purchase of a ship. This is to be used to develop a ministry to native peoples who are subject to the courts. Rather than committing first-time offenders to prison, we wish to begin a Christian ministry of taking them to sea for a period of three weeks, training them in seamanship skills and teaching them Christian principles. This will be jointly funded by the provincial and federal governments.”

We had heard from God! He had revealed His heart to us and we knew how to pray. That Mission Bridge class prayed that ministry into being for He had given us faith appropriate to the need.

## Chapter Five

### HEBREWS 11

If Hebrews, chapter 11 is not recorded for us as a list of the heroes of faith, what is its purpose? Why has the Holy Spirit, the author of all the Scripture, placed this chapter here?

As in all matters of Biblical interpretation, we need to consider the literary context. For several chapters, up to and including chapter 10, verse 18, the author has been writing about the practices and purposes of the Old Testament covenant, law, temple and sacrifices. These are contrasted with the better things found in Christ.

We have	a better salvation	ch.2
	a better Law giver	ch.3
	a better rest	ch.4
	a better High Priest	ch.5
	a better covenant	ch.8
	a better promise	ch.8
	a better sacrifice	ch.9

In chapter 10 verse 19, he begins a new theme.

v19: *Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ....*

v22: *.... let us draw near with a sincere heart ...*

v23: *.... let us hold fast the confession of our hope ...*

v24: *.... let us consider how to stimulate one another ....*

He is now writing to emphasise the life style that should be characteristic of those who have experienced the 'better things' found in Christ.

*Remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, (v32) ..... therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (vv35-39).*

The next portion, chapter 11, is written to give us examples of 'living by faith'. It is striking that Caleb, Elisha and Daniel are missing while Moses (a murderer), Sarah (who laughed at God's promise) and Rahab (a liar) are present. It does not take a spiritual giant to walk the walk of faith. Anyone, whatever their spiritual maturity, can begin this exciting journey today, walking in faith, without which it is impossible to please God. Another example of God's amazing grace!

Hebrews 11:1 *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*  
We have already considered verse 1 as a definition of faith, a gift and a fruit.

Hebrews 11:2 *“For by it the elders obtained a good report.”*

Men and women of old, who walked in Faith, had a good testimony, a good report. Others looked at them and knew that such people walked with God. There were **lessons to be learned** by watching how God worked in their lives. Similarly, our lives should also be a testimony of faith, revealing God’s leading and our obedience to that leading. The world does not want to hear our words of believing in what to them is irrational - they want to see the witness of our lives.

We are not called to stand in the world giving testimony to Christ; we are called to stand in Christ giving testimony to the world.

Hebrews 11:3 *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.*

All religions have their stories about creation. Some are wonderful and mythical. The foundation of our faith is found in an uncreated God Who called all creation into being by His Word. This is beyond human comprehension, beyond scientific explanation. All science can do is investigate what is already in existence - and stand back in awe as it proves the reality of what is written! It is only possible to comprehend, when God has granted an inner revelation, the faith to enable us to believe. This is not replacing reason; it is over and above all reason. “He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

We shall now begin to consider each of the characters named in Hebrews 11, to see how the Lord led them in the walk of faith. Coming from the standpoint that the Holy Spirit deliberately led His human author in the choice of people named, I ask myself to read beyond the words to see **what principles of the walk with God He has made evident in these examples**. I am thrilled as I see the great truths of The Faith being revealed. I pray that the following chapters will excite you as we consider them together. May the Holy Author speak to your soul concerning what He has written here.

## *Chapter Six*

### **CAIN AND ABEL**

**Hebrews 11:4**      *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.*

The original story is found in Genesis 4: 1-8.

A question often asked in Sunday School quizzes: “Who was the first man to shed blood?” There is no convincing reason to believe that Adam had not slain an animal for food, but the first recorded shedding of blood is that of Abel shedding the blood of a lamb. Students, in their eagerness to answer, often say that the first was Cain who shed the blood of his brother in an act of murder.

Cain was the first-born son to Adam and Eve. His mother was so excited. Surely he was the ‘seed’ promised by God in His declaration of war against the serpent who had deceived her.(Gen.3:15) She names him “SPEAR”(the meaning of ‘Cain’), saying “I have a man from the Lord.” Soon she realises her mistake as he grows up with all the characteristics of other babies yet to be born! He was probably just as naughty!

Another son is born whom she names “VANITY” (the meaning of ‘Abel’) realising that the battle is not to be over as soon as she had thought. Such hoping had been in vain. Evidently, there were to be other ‘seeds’ so which of them would be the one to wound the serpent’s head ?

Years pass during which time there is no communion with God, no worship, only a deep sense of guilt in the parents and a growing questioning and desire in the two sons. I can imagine their lives in those early days , just outside the walls, and see them asking their parents about the garden and the cherubim who stood guard over its gate. I wonder if Adam or Eve were ever able to tell their sons of what had happened within those walls - it was hardly a story that they would want to remember! However, there has always been in man a desire to worship, whether it is the Living God or any of the multitude of gods represented in the variety of religions of the world. Cain and Abel would have been no different.

As the boys grew up, they developed different interests. Cain worked the land and became a tiller of the ground, producing beautiful flowers, vegetables, fruit and herbs. He followed his father who toiled in the fields all the days of his life. The younger son, Abel, became a shepherd, wandering with the animals as they sought good pasture.



It was Cain who first thought of bringing a gift to God. We do not know his purpose but there is no reason to believe this to be anything less than a genuine, thankful offering, (the Hebrew language would certainly imply that). Maybe there was a hope that God might show him favour and allow him back inside the garden. Where should he take the basket of produce he had washed, polished and put together so carefully? Possibly to the gate guarded by the cherubim? The basket looked so beautiful with all its varied colours and aromas. He placed the basket before the angel as his brother looks on.

Brother Abel wonders what he can bring as an offering to God. He doesn't want to be left out if there is any chance to appease God, but he has no beautiful produce to bring. Indeed, he has nothing he has obtained by the sweat of his brow. All he has is some cattle, goats and sheep.

*By FAITH he offered a better sacrifice. What does that mean?*

We read that "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Evidently God spoke to Abel. I am reminded of Jesus' words to Peter on Mount Hermon, recorded for us in Matt.16:17. "Blessed are you .... flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father..."

God's voice was not the voice of thunder, nor the voice recognised by the senses, but the inner voice heard only by the soul and often not recognised as being His.

"I will bring a lamb" thought Abel (in response to the inner voice). "A young lamb, a firstling. I will kill it, dress it and bring it with its fat." So he presents his offering before the angel at the gate. His faith was evidenced in obedience to the inner voice.

The next action belongs to God. It is He who has led both men here as He wants to teach them and us, some vital principles of the righteous life. "*He had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard.*"

### **The destructive power of Offense**

The men are important as well as their offerings.

God knows the heart of man and knows the man to whom He can trust His revelation and prompting. He said to Moses that He knew his name (ie; character) and would therefore reveal His name (ie; character) and glory to Moses (Ex 33:12 - 34:8). When Simon declared that Jesus was the Messiah, his master realised that such knowledge had come by revelation from God. Though he often spoke out of turn and was little educated, his heart was right, so God gave revelation. Knowing that this was a testimony to his character, Jesus renamed him Peter, a rock. How does God see my heart, your heart ? Does He see the character that will please Him ? What name would He give you ? Does He see one to whom He can reveal His glory, knowing that you will not usurp some of that glory for yourself ? Does he see one whose heart is pure, one to whom He can reveal Himself ? (Matt 5:8) A pure heart is single-focused; unalloyed by love for things of the world.

Cain did no wrong in bringing his offering to God - in fact he should be commended for his actions. However, God knew that there was potential in Cain for offense that leads to sin.

Offense in itself is not sin. Jesus caused offense to the Pharisees, the scribes and even some of His friends, yet without sin. However, it is a weapon greatly used by Satan the enemy, to rob believers of their victory, and has been the source of more church splits than anything else in his arsenal. Sadly, more people leave the spiritual battlefield because of being offended than for any other reason. The number one reason that missionaries leave the field and pastors leave their pulpits is not finances, ill health, visa or language difficulties, but because they, or someone they work with, have been offended.

Here is a brief outline of five scriptural examples of people being offended and what it cost them.

**Matt.13:20, 21** one is offended by the Word. eg; he doesn't like its call to commitment.

**Result:** *no fruit.*

no love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal.5)

**Matt.13:53-58** familiarity breeds contempt - they are offended (v57).

**Result:** *no supernatural ministry*

no answers to prayer, no revelation.

**Matt 26:6-10** disciples (especially Judas - Jn 12:4) are offended (v8)

**Result:** *no confidence*

Judas goes out to betray his Lord. (v14)

**Matt 26:31-35** disciples offended because they do not understand.

**Result:** *no testimony*

Peter (the Rock) crumbles before a little girl.

**John 6:51-61** disciples offended at Jesus' call to commitment

**Result:** *no communion or fellowship*

they walked with Him no more (v66)

God would challenge Cain just as Jesus challenged those He loved. John the Baptist was offended by Jesus when the latter did not visit him in prison. (Matt 11:2-6) and Mary was offended by Him because He did not rush to prevent the death of Lazarus (John 11:1-35, note vv9,10). Indeed, I would suggest that the reason Jesus wept was because of the way she spoke to Him when finally she came to see Him outside Bethany. She used the same words as her sister Martha, ("*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*") but the response of Jesus was very different. Surely He did not weep for Lazarus, nor the professional mourners, for He had known of their situation since He had decided not to come at their first call. He also knew that in a few minutes they would all be rejoicing at the resurrection.

The Lord allows offenses to come into our lives to teach us something about ourselves, about the condition of our hearts. When we allow that offense to become sin, (causing the Saviour to weep and Satan to gloat!) we reveal a character to whom God will not give revelation, nor the prompting of faith.

### **The atoning power of the Blood**

Secondly, God had regard for the offering of Abel but not that of Cain. Some have said that this is because Cain should have known that to approach God, he ought to have shed a lamb's blood. But how would he have known that? Further, he had no sheep; they belonged to Abel. I believe that kind of reasoning is putting the cart before the horse. God chose the offering of Abel in order to teach them, and us, what was previously unknown. **The only way man can approach God is through the shed blood of a lamb.** There was nothing wrong with Cain's offering but God chose Abel's. Indeed, later, when God would institute various kinds of offering for the feast days of His people, the produce of the field was a very acceptable offering. (eg; Lev.6: 14-23)

Throughout the Old Testament we read of God reaching out to His creation seeking to win them back into fellowship with Himself. He finds few whose hearts are pure before Him until, at the flood, He wipes all but one family of eight persons off the face of the earth. Later He calls out a special people for Himself and reveals to them His will in the Ten Commandments. They prove themselves incapable of the righteousness demanded by that Law so He reveals how He will deal with their sinfulness.

For all forms of uncleanness, blood had to be shed.

Especially was this true of that annual great Day of Atonement when the sins of the people and the nation were to be covered over for another year. Amidst great ceremony and ritual, a lamb was taken. It was to be 'spotless', a one-year-old male. Its blood was poured into a basin and taken by the High Priest into the most holy place in the tabernacle or temple, where it would be offered before God. All the nation would wait with bated breath hoping that God would accept this sacrifice for another year. Great was the rejoicing when the High Priest returned to them unharmed. God had been pleased again to accept them as His people!

These Old Testament rituals were but a shadow of that which was fulfilled in the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, at the cross of Calvary. However, He did not shed His blood that our sins might be covered for another year. The death of the perfect lamb was to remove our sins completely, as far as the east is from the west, - into the depths of the sea. To those who have placed their trust in the finished work of Calvary, there is no more condemnation but an access into the presence and fellowship of God. Paradise has been regained!

### **Cain's response**

The heart of Cain was revealed. He was very angry and his countenance fell. The Lord asked him why he was angry and asked him an interesting question. *"If you do well, will you not be*

*accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you but you must master it.”*

Evidently, Cain had not yet sinned! There was no sin in his approach to God nor in his offering. Cain's attitude was wrong, his taking offense was wrong, but the fruit of sin had not yet come. He must master sin's temptation and do well. However, he fails, Abel is slain and Cain is cast out, nevertheless with God's mark of protection upon him.

In considering this story, Jewish commentators have an interesting understanding of the question posed by God. They see it as an early reference to tithing! Cain's offering was not acceptable because he had not '*rightly divided*' his produce. They translate, "If you had rightly divided, would not your offering have been accepted?"

### **Summary**

As I read the story of Cain and Abel in the context of faith, I see the Lord teaching us the following principles:

- 1. Approach to a Holy God is only through the shed blood of a lamb, the perfect type of the coming Lamb of God, Jesus.**
- 2. God knows the heart of man and will only reveal Himself to those who are pure in heart.**
- 3. God permits offenses to come to teach us about our heart's potential to sin.**

## *Chapter Seven*

### **ENOCK**

**Hebrews 11:5**      *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."*

The story of Enoch is very briefly recorded in Genesis 5: 18 - 24.

Another children's Bible Quiz question asks, "Who was the oldest man who ever lived who died before his father ?" Methuselah, the son of Enoch !

Enoch lived on Earth for three hundred and sixty five years, walking with God before 'God took him'. This walking with God was a walk of faith, without which it is impossible to please God. He knew what it was to fellowship closely with his creator, to hear His voice and to know His guidance. How sweet that fellowship must have been! Although all creation about Enoch showed evidence of the fall of Adam and Eve, he still enjoyed the presence of God. Today also, when all around us might seem corrupt and evil appears to prevail, the child of God who walks by faith can still have sweet fellowship with his Lord. History is replete with stories of believers whose circumstances were most difficult, but whose testimony was radiant because they knew the Divine presence.

By FAITH Enoch was *translated* - a better understanding would be "taken up".

What does this mean ? Surely it is not that Enoch believed so much that he would be taken up, that God did it for him! Instead, it was God's sovereign act that translated Enoch, in order to teach us a great truth.

#### **The hope of Resurrection**

What Biblical principle can we learn from this short account that has meaning for us today?

Clearly, there is the principle of ETERNAL LIFE.

For those who walk with God in faith, there is the promise of resurrection, or rapture at His second coming,<sup>2</sup> unto eternal life. Both Paul and Peter, when standing before the people, declared that this is the **hope** of all believers. Indeed, Paul knew this was the main cause of his persecution. "*I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead.*" (Acts 23:6). Other religions might teach reincarnation or a salvation based upon works of righteousness. Our message however, is unwavering in its declaration of a resurrection unto eternal life for all who walk with God, by faith.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4: 17

This hope for which Paul and Peter, and all the apostles, were willing to die, is based on a fact - as is all Christian hope, unlike the hopes of the world. I remind you that Christian hope is best defined as **“an eager expectation for that which is certain”**. Our hope of resurrection is founded in the most glorious event of all history - the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. When one looks objectively at all the stories, theories, opinions about that first Easter Sunday, he must come to the conclusion that the most attested fact of all history is that Jesus of Nazareth, having been crucified on a Roman cross, and buried in a borrowed tomb, rose from the dead, resurrected into new life.

He appeared to the disciples and many others. The apostle Paul records that more than 500 brethren were eye witnesses of His new life, almost all of whom were still alive to testify to that fact at the time of the apostle’s writing many years later. These men had nothing to gain by perpetrating a lie and everything to lose by insisting on the truth. There was great persecution of the believers, many of whom lost their lives because they would not deny what to them was fact. Tradition tells us that all but John, of the apostles, were martyred for what they knew. Jesus rose from the dead! Now they understood what He had meant when He taught them, *“Just a little while and the world will not see Me, but you will see Me; because I live you will live also”* (John 14:19). This was to be their hope - an eager expectation for that which is sure - and the promise exemplified in the testimony of Enoch.

The resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental argument of our Christian belief. Without it, there is no Christianity. Such a religion is no different to all others in that it can offer no hope. It is also important for the following reasons:

*It shows the justice of God who exalted Christ to a life of glory, as Christ had humbled Himself unto death. (Phil 2: 8,9)*

*The Resurrection completed the mystery of our salvation and redemption; by His death Christ freed us from the penalty of sin, (Romans 5:8), by His suffering He freed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13), and by His Resurrection He restored to us the most important privileges lost by sin (Rom 4: 25).*

*By His Resurrection we acknowledge Christ as the immortal God, the efficient and exemplary cause of our own resurrection (1 Cor 15: 21; Phil 3: 20,21) and as the model and source of our new life of grace (Rom 6: 4-6; 9-11). (Catholic Encyclopedia)*

### **Paul’s testimony**

It was because of their hope of resurrection to eternal life that the early believers were persecuted. The Scripture records for us the testimony of the apostle Paul, standing before the chief priests and the Council on trial. “I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!” (Acts 23:6) The Council was made up of two main parties; the religious Pharisees, believers in a resurrection of the law-keepers, and the political Sadducees, non believers. Naturally, there was dissension at Paul’s words, so the troops were ordered to take Paul back to his cell. Now a political conspiracy arose with the purpose of assassinating the apostle, but the Roman military commander was made aware of the plot so he ordered that Paul be taken to Antipatris where

Felix, the Roman governor, had his palace. Before the governor, Paul repeats his hope in the resurrection, both of the righteous to life, and the wicked to judgment (Acts 24:15; 21). Not knowing what to do with Paul or how to appease his accusers, Felix kept him in prison until, two years later he was succeeded by a new governor, Festus. Now the apostle was made a spectacle, being called to speak of his *foolish* belief before Festus and his guests, King Agrippa and his wife Bernice. Paul is not backward before this audience. Again he asserts, “ I am standing trial for this great hope, O King. Why should it seem unbelievable to you people, that God should raise the dead?” Later he would appear before Caesar where we can be sure, he did not hesitate to give the same testimony, even though it resulted in his death. But why should he fear death? He had already written *“Behold, I show you a **mystery**; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Cor 15:51-57).

This is not a new truth but a *mystery*. Whenever Paul writes about a mystery, he is referring to *a truth that has always been, but which is only now being revealed* (Rom 16:25,26). It was Jesus who first spoke about the mystery of the kingdom (Mark 13:11) but Paul uses this expression many times. A good theme for personal Bible Study would be to examine the following references: mystery of the ‘grafting in’ of the Gentiles (Rom 11:25); mystery of His will (Eph 1:9); mystery of Gentiles (Eph 3:3); mystery of marriage (Eph 5:32); mystery of the Gospel (Eph 6:19); mystery of Christ in you (Col 1:26,27); mystery of Christ Himself (Col 2:2); mystery of iniquity (2 Thes 2:7); mystery of the faith (1 Tim 3:9); mystery of godliness (1 Tim 3:16).

This mystery, this truth, this glorious hope of resurrection to eternal life, was first revealed to us in the testimony of Enoch.

### **Summary**

*“By faith, Enoch was translated.”* so that we might know this principle:

#### **1. We have a glorious hope - that of eternal life.**

This is not a New Testament doctrine, but has always been part of God’s purposes for His people.

## Chapter Eight

### NOAH

**Hebrews 11:7.** *"By FAITH Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."*

This story of Noah and the ark is found in Genesis 6: 5 - 7:24

Here we have an example of a man who found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord. *He was a righteous man, blameless among his generation, who walked with God. Gen.6:9.*

God *spoke* to Noah. (6:13). It is not hard to know what the Lord wants from you when He speaks to you. It was not hard to believe God. But Noah did more than just believe, he obeyed, doing all that God commanded him. This is faith, **belief demonstrated in obedient action.**

The instructions given to Noah were very strange but he still obeyed **all**. He had never seen a flood nor a boat, but at God's command, he started work and did not rest until the work was complete. We do not read that anyone, including his sons, helped Noah in this gigantic project, but they and their wives were to benefit from Noah's obedience. In all, eight people would owe their lives to God's grace and Noah's obedience.

What Biblical Principle can we learn from this example of faith?

One clear answer is given by Jesus Himself in Matt 24: 37 - 39 where He teaches the Jews concerning His return to set up His Messianic kingdom.

*As it was in the days of Noah so it shall be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

People will be mindless of the things of God so great judgment shall come upon them, only a few, a remnant being saved.

There is the principle of the certainty of a coming judgment upon this world.

However, another truth would be seen in the provision God has made for us through His Son, Jesus. He has prepared the means whereby we might be saved from the judgment coming on all who refuse to walk with Him. An ark has been prepared **in Jesus** and the invitation given for *'whosoever will'* to enter in. We thank the Lord that He was obedient to the Father's will, even though it meant the agony of Gethsemane and a cross on Golgotha's hill. Because of the Father's **grace** and the Son's **obedience**, all who enter in find salvation. As God closed the door of Noah's ark when all eight were inside (Gen.7:16) so He has *'sealed us'* in His Son by the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13). Not only is there security in our ark Jesus, but there we are blessed with



every spiritual blessing (Eph.1:3). Indeed, all of Ephesians chapter one, speaks of such blessings.

**In Him:**

- v 4 We are made holy and blameless.
- v 5 we are made God's children.
- v 6 we receive God's abundant grace.
- v 7 we have redemption (bought back from bondage).
- v 7 we have forgiveness of our sins.
- v 9 God shows us the mystery of His will.
- v 10 God will unite all creation.
- v 11 we are appointed to live for the praise of His glory.
- v 13 we are sealed with His Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2: 6 we have been raised up to be seated in heavenly places in Him, so that God might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Our security is not in our ability to build our own ark, nor in our good works. Our own righteousness will not avail. We cannot escape by our own inventions or schemings. It is all by grace, through faith. God has planned and prepared a way of salvation. He invites us to enter in. We may believe but if we are not obedient to His invitation, we shall not be saved. Saving faith requires obedient response.

Further, everyone who lived near to Noah would be aware of this amazing vessel he was building. All would know what he preached but none were willing to respond to his invitation. The world were condemned by their refusal to accept what was evident before their eyes. Similarly, the good news of salvation in Jesus is not hid from the world today, but men choose not to respond to the invitation. Hence the presence of the church is still a condemnation of the world

**Summary**

The story of Noah as an example of faith teaches us the following principles:

- 1. There is a judgement coming upon the world.**
- 2. God, in grace, has made a way of escape in His Son, Jesus, and salvation is found in none other.**
- 3. Grace is a fundamental attribute of God.**
- 4. Salvation demands obedient response to God's invitation. That is saving faith.**

## Chapter Nine

### ABRAHAM

**Hebrews 11:8 - 11** *By FAITH Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By FAITH he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

The classic example of the life of faith, used by Paul, James and the author of the book to the Hebrews, was the wanderer Abraham. His story is recorded in Genesis, chapters 11 to 25. The writer of Hebrews emphasises here the faith displayed by Abraham as a sojourner, one without any ties to his own possessions.

As we compare the verses of Hebrews above with the historic account found in Genesis 11:31 we see that, though God was calling Abram (later Abraham) to the promised land of Canaan, it was through his father Terah, that he left Ur of the Chaldees. God often leads his children through the decisions of others. It was not until he had left Haran that God spoke directly to Abram.. He was the chosen vessel through whom God would establish His people and their land.

Unlike Noah, Abram was not chosen because he was righteous - indeed he lived in an idolatrous country with little knowledge of God. Among the men who came before him there were many who worshipped God but none of these was chosen to be the Father of the great nation of God's people. Abel was good, - he offered sacrifices according to God's will but he offered for himself alone. He was not specially chosen. Enoch and Noah were also as individuals in their walk with God. All three worshipped the true God but none of them was specially chosen to start the recovery of what was lost by Adam. It was Abram whom God chose and he was an idolator! (Joshua 24:2). God called Abram because He had a special reason - Abram was to be the starting point of divine recovery from the fall. When we turn to the New Testament, the first words we read are *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.* God starts His good news (the Gospel) with Abraham!

When God spoke, Abram obeyed. He did not understand, nor did he stop to discuss plans with God. He just obeyed and 'went out'. He could have complained that he was already seventy five years old and too old to start wandering, but he did not. He went out not knowing where he was going. He had heard of a land, a kingdom that was to be his inheritance. He had heard the promise that his name would be great and that he would be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Though he had not known God before this time, there was planted a confidence in him to believe that the promises of God were sure. So he went out ...

God is looking for men and women today whose eyes are fixed on His kingdom and not the vanity fairs of this world. The hymnist declares,

*I am a stranger here within a foreign land,  
My home is far away upon a golden strand.  
Ambassador am I of things beyond the sky,  
I'm here on business for my King.*

Another has expressed it this way

*This world is not my home, I'm just a'passing through.  
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.  
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door,  
and I can't feel at home in this world any more!*

The apostle John exhorts us not to love the world, nor the things of the world. (1 Jn 2:15). Of course, we are to love the people of this world and its beauties which cause us to worship God. John is referring to the systems of men's makings; its politics and guile, its secular humanism and compromise, its vanity and materialism. Abraham had no interest in such things for he was a sojourner, one passing through, and his was a walk with God, a walk of faith.

I am reminded here of the prodigal son in the parable told by Jesus (Luke 15). He went out and wasted his portion of the inheritance on the pleasures of the world. Coming to his senses, he returned home in penitence saying. "Father, I am not worthy to be your son. Please make me as one of your servants." However, the father receives him warmly, clothing him with the best robes, putting shoes on his feet and arranging a party for him, much to the chagrin of the older brother. Though I recognise myself in the prodigal, knowing my guilt and acknowledging the love of the Father who still accepts me as His son, I see little in him to commend him - until I compare him with the elder son! The latter complains to the father about the treatment given to the prodigal. "He has brought shame to us, he has wasted his inheritance lusting after this world, while I have remained faithful at home. Why have you killed the fatted calf for him? You have never treated me that way!" What smug hypocrisy! The father replies, "My son, all the fatted calves belong to you! Your inheritance is all this farm!" Whereas the prodigal had lusted after the pleasures of this world, he had now come to his senses in penitent remorse. The elder son also lusted after things of this world - not wine, women and song, but his possessions. He owned the farm and didn't want anything to rob him of his inheritance. In truth **the farm owned him!**

It is not wrong to have possessions in this world but the walk of faith demands that, like Abraham, they do not own us! Hold on to them lightly so that, when the Lord calls you to go, nothing will be holding you back. It certainly is the reason why believers should never be in **debt**. When we owe someone some money and are unable to meet that obligation at a moment's call, we are in bondage to that person and not free to answer when the Lord calls us 'to go out'. In truth we are serving Mammon and not God at that moment. I would suggest that this is such a serious matter to the Lord that we should not even bring our tithes and offerings to His altar if another has something against us. ie; we are in debt to him. We should get out of debt even before giving our tithes to God. (Consider Matt.5: 23-26, noting, in particular, the last phrase).

Maybe this is what the Lord meant when He said "let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest" (Luke 22:26). The difference between the prodigal younger son and the older brother, was in their attitude to things of the world. The older brother was concerned lest his inheritance be wasted on a party for the prodigal returnee. He wanted no one to rock his boat, he was content with the status quo. His motto was, *Leave well alone!* Similarly, Esau would sell his birthright for a present, temporary satisfaction, while his younger brother Jacob, though a deceiver, was a wanderer who walked - and wrestled - with God. Like the prodigal, Jacob was brought to repentance but not Esau. One had his inheritance in God; the other in a "mess of pottage". It is striking that God would declare, "I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau" (Mal.1:3). It is further worthy of note that the promises given to the idolator Abram were repeated to the deceiver Jacob, and he also, was to become one of the three great patriarchs of the Jewish people, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God is looking for men and women like Abraham, willing to be led by the Lord, when and where He wants to lead them. To us He still says "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*" (Matt 6:23).

We shall consider Abraham again in a later chapter where we see more evidence of his faith walk with God, evidence also called up by James and Paul the apostles, in their writings.

### **Summary**

Abraham is presented to us in Hebrews 11 to teach us these principles:

- 1. God does not chose a man because of anything he might claim to be. Instead He chooses weak and foolish things, low and despised things, so that no man may boast. (1 Corinthians 1: 27-29)**
- 2. People of faith are those whose eyes and heart are fixed on a heavenly kingdom; whose attitude is that of the 'younger', having loose attachments to this world.**
- 3. God started the work of redemption in a man who would become the prime example of the walk of faith, demonstrated in obedient trust.**

## *Chapter Ten*

### **SARAH**

**Hebrews 11:11**      *"By FAITH Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."*

We read of Sarah in Genesis 18: 9 - 15 and of the birth of Isaac, her son, in Genesis 21: 1 - 7.

As we read the Genesis account we are struck by the apparent lack of belief that Sarah shows, and would certainly not regard her as a candidate for a great heroine of faith if such is to be equated with belief. Indeed, Sarah continually reveals her human nature as she plans and schemes with her husband. God had told Abraham that he would have an heir and would be the father of a great nation but Sarah is barren and reason would declare that the promise of God is vain. She, however, will have a child, even if it means giving her maid, Hagar, to be a sex partner for Abraham. The child is to belong to Sarah but, when she sees Hagar with the boy, human jealousy rises in her breast and Hagar is driven from the home.

From this son, Ishmael, the great Arab nations are to come and the world continues to reap their whirlwind. Note that it is God Himself who has raised up these nations but His covenant remains with the Children of the Promise. (18:20, 21). Do not be surprised at the ongoing enmity between the Arab nations and the Children of Israel. There will always be antagonism between the fruit of carnal humanity and the fruit of God's Promise. For example, Jesus told His disciples to *tarry in Jerusalem for (another) promise of His Father, - the baptism with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4,5)*. Isn't it amazing that the carnal outworking of this promise is so often discord and antagonism among God's people rather than the great power it should be to enable us to be the witnesses Christ has called us to be!! Ishmael was birthed out of human plans and schemes; Isaac was birthed 'by faith'. All the world's religions are founded upon the teachings and principles of carnal ingenuity, but the church of Jesus Christ comprises a people justified by faith.

We then see Sarah and Abraham scheming to deceive Abimelech, king of Gerar, by pretending that they were brother and sister. Abraham was afraid that the Gerites might kill him as Sarah's husband, so that Abimelech might take the widow as his wife. If the king thought they were siblings, he might still take Sarah but, at least, the life of Abraham would be spared! Does this read to you as people having great faith in God, if that is to be equated with trust? How striking that the heathen king, Abimelech, had more integrity of heart and fear of God than the man of faith! He restored Sarah to her husband, having not abused the sanctity of their marriage and

giving them many gifts as vindication before all the people. God honoured Abimelech and his household, but His hand was still on Abraham and Sarah to lead them in the deeds of faith.

By faith (the action or gift of God), Sarah was able to conceive, though over ninety years of age, and the child of promise, Isaac, was born. The couple came together in intercourse, God quickened both the sperm and ova so that conception took place and Sarah accepted that the morning sickness was evidence of God's faithfulness. Herein was her faith. She did not struggle against what was happening within her though it was contrary to everything she, or anyone she knew, had experienced at that age. Her body would not reject, nor would she abort what God was birthing within her. How often we reject the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives because we do not understand! How often we abort that gift or ministry God would birth within us because we are afraid to pay the price! Not so, Sarah.

What principles can we learn from Sarah's example?

Firstly that He is faithful to His promises, even when it seems to be an impossibility. Indeed, with Him, nothing is impossible!

Secondly, God is looking for a people of faith, led by Him, not political or scheming. The church today is so full of men's plans and organisation that there is no place for the Holy Spirit to move. Sarah produced one son by scheming. The result has been great sorrow for the people of God throughout the centuries since. Her other son was 'by faith', the son of promise. From him God has established His covenant people, through whom all nations of the earth will be blessed. They are to be the nation who brought us the Bible and the Messiah, our Saviour, Jesus.

### **God's work in God's way**

I am reminded of the time that King David would bring the *ark of the covenant* back to Jerusalem. The story is told for us in 1 Chronicles 13 & 15. To the Hebrews, the ark represented the presence of God among His people, but it had been out of the land for twenty years, after being taken in battle by the Philistines during the carnal priesthood of Eli. For seven months the Philistines had suffered greatly while the ark was in their land, so they had set it on a new cart drawn by milch cows which had never previously been yoked together. God allowed them to bring the ark safely back across the borders of Israel, no sickness or injury occurring on the journey. However, when David tried to use *the same method* to bring 'God's presence' back to Jerusalem, his trained oxen slipped and death resulted. David was very angry with God but soon had to repent when he read **God's method** for carrying the ark, recorded in Numbers 4. God had brought judgment upon His people *'because we did not care for it in the way that is ordained'* (15:13).

It is my opinion that the anointing of God's presence and power is sadly missing from so much of what we call church. Could this be because we are trying to build His church our way and not the way He has ordained? Indeed, could it be that we are not building His church at all, but our church? He has never promised to put His anointing on anything that is done in man's strength or wisdom. He said, *"I will build My church and the gates of Hell shall not overcome it"* (Matthew 16:18). Further, He will build His church on the rock, as exemplified in Peter! Which characteristic of Peter is the Master referring to? Surely not his impetuous, carnal behaviour! I suggest that the rock is FAITH such as the apostle demonstrated by his confession that Jesus as

the Christ. “You are blessed, Peter. My Father has revealed this to you.” said Jesus. Faith here is seen in revelation followed by confession; God’s initiative followed by man’s response. Isn’t it about time we returned to doing God’s work in God’s way?

It is time we got back to being people of the book, basing our work and walk on its principles and precepts. I am convinced that when we do God's work in God's way, we shall receive the anointing of His quickening upon our efforts. For example, we have many plans and schemes to evangelise the people around us. We use 'Four Spiritual laws' or 'The Roman Road'; we learn A-B-C tactics like salesmen and plan 'seeker-sensitive services'. We write many tracts and put on evangelistic programs. All of these are good but are they God's way? I challenge you to pull one single sheet out of your Bible that you give away as a gospel tract. Can you find one scheme that the early church developed which we could emulate today? Surely the Holy Spirit could have moved another of the disciples, say Andrew or Philip, who could have produced a book made up of “Tracts sure to succeed” or “Fifty ways to win your friends to Jesus” if that were the Spirit's plan of Salvation! We could have printed it as the last book in the Bible with 'pull-out' sheets for convenience.

However, I am convinced that the Bible does contain God's plan for salvation. Indeed, though we cannot pull out one page to give away as a gospel tract, we can pull out entire books which emphasise **His method**. It is the Unity of His people!

*Father I pray that they may be one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me; so that the world may know that you have loved them even as you love me. (The prayer of Jesus in John 17 - a prayer He is still praying!)*

All our plans and schemes will produce some fruit, for He is a God of grace, but a full harvest will never come until we do it God’s way. He wants to build His church, to give us the nations, people as numerable as sand upon the sea shore, but He will only do it His way. His way is the way of faith and, one way this is demonstrated is by our unity in the Spirit.

### **Summary**

The example of Sarah, the schemer who laughed at God, is given to us to teach us the following principles:

- 1. With God all things are possible.**
- 2. Human reasoning and faith are contradictory.**
- 3. God’s destiny for us will only be achieved by faith.**
- 4. We must do God’s work in God’s way!**

## *Chapter Eleven*

### **THE CONFESSION OF FAITH**

**Hebrews 11:13 - 16**      *"All these died in FAITH not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return . But as it is, they desire a better country, that is an heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city."*

It would appear that the writer of this book, is referring to the 'many' of verse 12, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah who died before the coming of Jesus, their Messiah. In their times of faith and trust in Yahweh, they acknowledged their need of Him , 'confessing that they were strangers and exiles on the earth'. Whether in Egypt, the wilderness or Babylon, the Children of Israel would know a deep longing in their hearts for home, that place promised them in God's words to Abraham. Few of them could ever put down roots anywhere other than in Canaan or Palestine.

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion  
On the willows there we hung up our harps, for there our captors required of us songs and our tormentors, mirth, saying 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion'.  
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1-4)*

They could have stayed in the country of their birth but the heart of a sojourner was in them. This is characteristic of all true descendants of Abraham, that they do not feel at home in this world. There has been birthed within them a hunger for higher things, a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. It is God who has placed this longing in them by His initiating act of faith. People of faith will always respond to that yearning.

In his teaching on FAITH found in Romans 4: 1-12, the apostle Paul says, "What shall we say about Abraham?" He believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. To one who does not work but trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. At that time Abraham was not a circumcised Jew so he was reckoned as righteous even before he became a child of the (Jewish) covenant. This was so that he might be the Father, not only of the circumcised (Jew) but also of all those who are declared righteous outside the (Jewish) covenant. It is not the keeping of the Law (or any good works) that makes one righteous; it is only by FAITH. Abraham is therefore considered as the Father of all those justified by FAITH. So, even to us who are Gentiles walking by faith, God's promise based on grace, is sure. We shall inherit the earth!

*"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them".*



How attached to this world are you? Do you find your value in how much of its wealth or fame you can amass? Do you need its popularity and affirmation to give you self esteem? Or are you one whom Jesus would call the 'greatest' in **His** kingdom?

On one occasion the disciples of Jesus were doing what many of us enjoy. They were having an interesting discussion. One would like to think it was about something important such as *eternal security* or *pre-tribulation rapture* but that would be to give more credit than is due. They were, in fact, arguing about which of them was the greatest!! (see Mark 9:33-34). Then Jesus began to teach them what it means to be great in His kingdom, here on earth and in the city He has prepared for them.

- a) They are to be servants, even slaves. (Mark 10:42-45)
- b) They must be willing to be last and least (Mark 9:35 and Luke 9:48)
- c) They must become humble like a little child.(Matt 18:4)
- d) They must have the attitude of the younger (Luke 22:26)

How contrary this is to the power structures of this world and, sadly, to much of what we see in church leadership today. Where are the *servant leaders*, who seek no prominence and honour for themselves but who delight to be the *last and least* when others receive the fame and acclaim? Where are the believers who, *like a little child*, are transparent, cannot long deceive, hold no grudges and take no offense? Where are the *younger* in whom the world has no attachments, and who has little interest in demanding his rights or maintaining his power base? Where are the people who walk by faith, those of whom He is **not ashamed**?

Though these people were considered as sojourners in this world, they did know three things:  
They knew that God had made a promise to their father, Abraham.  
They knew that He would fulfill that promise.  
They knew that they had a glorious **destiny**, to dwell in the City of God.

I am reminded of the verse in John 13:3 where Jesus, *knowing the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God* ...got up and washed His disciples feet! It only becomes easy to be a servant when one knows his standing before God. Can you look back to a place where God began His work of faith in you as He brought you to the cross? Do you look forward knowing that He will bring you into a glorious destiny He has planned for you? Are you now walking the walk of faith that leads to that destiny, a walk not in your own power but by His prompting within you? Faith demands that we have a vision of God's promises and a desire for God's presence.

### **Summary**

- 1. People of faith will never feel at home in this world. They are pilgrims and therefore live accordingly.**
- 2. They never want to return to the ways of the world, its scheming and politics, its methods and prizes, its pleasures and promises.**

- 3. The King declares as great those who have the attitude of the servant, the child, the last, the least and the younger.**
- 4. As spiritual descendants of Abraham, the Father of the children of Faith, we have a great destiny. We shall 'inherit the earth'.**
- 5. The great promises of God only come to those who have died to themselves.**
- 6. God is not ashamed of us!**

## *Chapter Twelve*

### **ABRAHAM TESTED**

**Hebrews 11:17 - 19**      *"By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." He considered that God was able to raise men, even from the dead; hence speaking figuratively, he did receive him back."*

This time the example is made of Abraham's obedience when told by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The original story is found in Genesis 22. God spoke and Abraham obeyed. He knew the promises of God regarding his seed and assumed that this promise would be fulfilled through Isaac, but the word had come and Abraham obeyed. That is faith! He did not understand why God should ask him to do this awful thing; he did not ask to understand, but simply obeyed. He knew that what God had promised, God would have to fulfill. If therefore God had promised to bless all the nations of the world through the son of promise Isaac, and if he was to put Isaac to death, God would have to do the impossible - raise him back to life. Paul declares in Romans 4:3 that *"Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness."* James says in his book, Ch.2:21, *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was working with the works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scriptures were fulfilled which says "And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness."* The apostle continues to say that *faith without works is dead*. There is no such things as faith unless it is made manifest in works!

As with all the other examples of Hebrews 11, here we have a type to teach us truths about God and His purposes in us. Here, once again, is clear teaching regarding **resurrection** and **God's faithfulness**. God has made a promise and is able to fulfill it.

However, there are other truths to be gleaned from these verses. There will come times when God will test His people. He doesn't do this so that He might learn something from the results for He knows the outcome even before the testing. Nor does He test us by allowing temptations to come. That is the work of the enemy, Satan, using our own carnal desires to lead us astray. Indeed, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *"Father, lead us not into temptation"* knowing that is never in the will of God. However testing is in His will, for it is by testing us that He purifies us and conforms us more and more to the image of His son, Jesus.

When metallic ore is processed in order to produce the pure metal, it undergoes severe testing in the furnace and pressing mills. The ore is heated until it is all melted and the dross is skimmed away. When no impurities remain, the molten metal glows with a pure light and, when poured out, shows a perfect reflection in its surface. That is why the Lord would test us so that we might reflect His glory and image.

For many years I was a school teacher in a system that assessed its students by annual exams and periodical tests. Of course, few students liked that system and many parents complained so that, today, there is relatively little testing done in schools and students can often graduate without ever having been examined as to the knowledge or understanding they may have gained. One of the major complaints against exams is that they always produces *failures*. Contrary to popular opinion, I am one who believes that failing can become a valuable stepping stone to success. It enables us to know what our strengths are, where we need to make more effort, where we could more efficiently direct our energies. In other words, the result of the exam can help us to focus in better on the pathway ahead of us. When I was a schoolboy I failed some of my public exams, to no one's great surprise. I then focused on those in which I had been successful, finally proceeding to an honours degree in university. No one ever considered me a failure just because I was unable to pass a certain measuring mark in a couple of subjects!

And God **never** counts us as a failure if we do not pass His present testing.

As we wrote in an earlier chapter, one of the tests that the Lord allows to come into believer's lives, is the testing of **offenses**. Jesus said that they will surely come and we had better learn how to deal with them. (Luke 17:1).

Another test is that of the **closed door**. I have experienced the disappointment of God closing a door before me when I had anticipated walking through into a marvelous, new opportunity. The embarrassment was intense as I had spoken freely about this wonderful opportunity God had placed before me, only to find that, when the time came, instead of leading me on He closed the door. How I wished I had not spoken so freely, for now I felt very foolish. I questioned God as to His reasons and must confess that it took some time before I could yield to His will in this matter. It was to be another ten years before I could see just why He closed that door, in order to prepare an even better way for me. I tell this story in greater detail in my other book *Stepping Stones*.

A third test we may experience is concerning those things which may hinder us in being led by the Lord. These would involve our **personal strengths, our relationships and our possessions**. Like Abraham we may be asked to give up what is most precious to us. God doesn't do this to hurt us - that is never His intention. He does it to set us free from any trust we may have in our own abilities. So often we will find, that when we lay down our possessions before Him, He invites us to take them back up to use them in service for Him. I think of Rob, a friend, who was the lead singer in a rock & roll band when He came to the Lord. His conversion was very real and he soon found that singing in the night clubs was so unsatisfying. He lay aside his guitar, as the only music he knew how to play was unsuitable for the new songs he wanted to sing. It was four years before he believed that the Lord would have him take up the instrument again, at which time he began to sing new songs. Today, Rob is in a full-time music ministry for the Saviour.

Moses had to lay down his shepherd's staff, a sign of his occupation and authority. (Exodus 4:3). Then he was instructed to take it up again, but this time it was called the *rod of God* with which he was to do mighty deeds such as open a way across the Red Sea. (Ex 4:17).

Gideon had to give up his army so that God might win a great victory over the Midianites. (Judges 7).

We may be called to give up relationships, family and home. Let me remind you of the promise of Jesus, that “there is not one who, having given up family and home, for the sake of the kingdom, will not receive many times as much in this life and the life to come. (Luke 18:29,30).

Whenever I read the story of Abraham and Isaac, I feel something of the pain in the father’s heart. What an agonising time it must have been, as he led his son up the mountain knowing the intentions in his head. He still clung to the hope that God would somehow change the outcome, even speaking prophetically that “*God would provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering*” (Gen 22:8). He had no idea how true that would be for it was on that same mountain, several centuries later, that another father would watch His only-begotten Son die as the lamb slain for the sins of the world. How our heavenly Father’s heart must have sorrowed, yet He was determined that His Son would die. This was to be the only way that justice could be met by mercy, so that we might be redeemed from our sinful and lost state.

### **Summary**

God was not being cruel or insensitive to the feelings of Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice his only son - the son of promise. He had a great destiny for His servant, but it was necessary to try him in the furnace first. The following principles are revealed in this portion of Hebrews 11:

- 1. God is faithful in our testing times.**
- 2. When God calls us to lay something down in sacrifice, it is that we might take it up again in power.**
- 3. God only allows testing to come in our lives so that He might make us pure.**
- 4. His plan of redemption is to ‘provide Himself a lamb’.**
- 5. Again we see the principle of resurrection life. Our Hebrew author declares this to be a ‘type’.**

## *Chapter Thirteen*

### **ISAAC & JACOB**

**Hebrews 11: 20, 21**                    *"By FAITH, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By FAITH, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff."*

I have brought these two together as they teach us the same principle.

The story of Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau is found in Genesis 27 while that of Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph is in Genesis 48.

There is little to commend Jacob, the deceiver and thief. It was the decision of Esau to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup but it was the scheming of Jacob, encouraged by his mother, that stole the blessing one expects to be given to the first-born. I'm sure he did not understand the Biblical principle God was going to teach through his deceit. I call it the principle of the **second-born**. Half a century later, Jacob is involved again as he blesses the two sons of Joseph. Joseph leads his two sons toward his blind father, making sure that the older boy, Manasseh is in front of Jacob's right hand, the hand of primary blessing, The other son, Ephraim, is on Jacob's left. The old man however, though outwardly blind, has an inner light directing him to cross his arms and to pronounce the greater blessing on the second born. For some reason, God is directing the old man to do such an unheard-of thing. Joseph protests but to no avail. Jacob will obey the inner directive. I repeat that there is nothing to indicate that he understands why he should cross his arms; this is declared to be "by faith .."

What is the principle of the second born ?

Let us consider those the Bible records as such.

Cain was the elder, Abel the younger. God honoured the latter above the former.

Esau was the elder, Jacob the younger. God said, "Esau I have hated but Jacob I have loved"!

Manasseh was the elder, Ephraim the younger. Ephraim is blessed the greater.

Adam was the first created, Jesus came as the *second Adam.*, the second born.

*"For by one man came death, so by one man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor 15:21).*

Even in the Old Testament days, God foreshadows the day when His second 'Adam' will come to counter the death that has come upon all men because of the disobedience of the first Adam. He, 'the son of promise' will conquer death by his obedience to the directive will of God. He will be the progenitor of a new race of people, those "born twice", once by water (the natural birth) and also by the Spirit (new birth). It has been truly said that *if you are born once, you will die twice (ie; natural and eternal death); if you are born twice, you will die but once.*

The blessings of God are pronounced upon the children of the second born.

Here then is the principle of the **new birth** without which 'it is impossible to see the kingdom of God', leave alone to enter it. Adam, the first man, is the progenitor of those 'born of the flesh'. Jesus, the second man is the progenitor of those, 'born of the Spirit'. (John 3:6)

*For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding Word of God.* (1 Peter 1:23)

In an earlier chapter we saw that greatness in the kingdom of Heaven is accredited to those who are as 'the younger' (Luke 22:26). So in the actions of both Isaac and Jacob in blessing the second born, God is again presenting the principle later taught by Jesus. Their actions of 'faith' were designed to show us the kind of persons we should be as 'twice-born'.

Let us look further at the attributes of the second-born or the younger. The younger son has no claim on the inheritance from his earthly father. His is the position of little fame and honour. He is the 'hand-me-down' child receiving the clothes and toys discarded by his brother. At school he may be known as *so-and-so's brother*, without an identity of his own. His achievements are measured in comparison to the elder son. As the prodigal son, he can leave home with all his earthly possession in a bag slung over his shoulder, while his older brother stays to look after his inheritance, the farm. The younger son is not interested in the status quo and does not work politically to maintain his possessions. He is a **rebel** as far as the systems of this world are concerned. I remember when the Living Bible was being produced. Each book of the Bible was published separately, each with a characteristic title. The Gospel of Mark, concerning Jesus as the servant, was titled, *Jesus - Rebel With a Cause*. His mother proclaimed prophetically, that He would *scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts, put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalt those of low degree. He would fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty.* (Magnificat - Luke 1:52, 53). That is a declaration of war for the systems of this world! He has come to establish His kingdom, and He calls His people, the twice-born, not to be satisfied with the society of this world but to live a counter-culture Christianity.

As I consider other Biblical characters who were noted for being the younger or the least or the last, I am drawn to the shepherd boy, David. He was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse (1 Samuel 16). Who could have foreseen such a future for him when the prophet Samuel came to anoint him to be king over Israel? The only experience he had had was tending sheep, but he had not been wasting his time! He had practised with the sling, doing his work faithfully, protecting his father's sheep from a lion and a bear.

Though he was last in the hand-me-down line he never showed resentment but learned to accept his position and to wait his turn. The Lord chose him to be king because He knew his heart. To Samuel, God had said, "*Man looketh on the outward appearance but I look at the heart.*" David had learned to trust in God, even when the circumstances seemed like giants before him. He never fastened his gaze on the problems but kept his eyes on the Lord. His confidence was in the Lord and in the sling he had proved, not in the Saul's armour which he had not proved. What have you proved? God's word? His name? They will stand the test.

When David entered Saul's palace, he would not force God's timetable. He had learned **to wait!** Do not rush ahead of God; you will only walk in your own shadow! Though there were opportunities when it seemed that God was presenting the throne before him, David still would wait, saying, "*I will not lay my hand against the Lord's elect.*" There was to be no politicking with him. That is the way of the world - it is not the way of the people of the Kingdom. And God knew David's heart!

### **Summary**

To the writer of Hebrews 11, the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob were led by God to pronounce blessings on the second born. This was even through the deceit of Jacob. The Biblical principles that the Lord would teach us are:

- 1. Blessed is the man or woman who has been born twice.**
- 2. Our blessings are through the second-born Adam who has redeemed us from the curse of the first-born Adam.**
- 3. Children of the second-born are to be counter-culture Christians, loving not the systems of this world and displaying 'younger' characteristics..**



## Chapter Fourteen

### JOSEPH

**Hebrews 11:22**      *“By FAITH Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial.”*

The brief account of Joseph's forgiveness on the brothers who had treated him so badly is found in the last chapter of Genesis, 50. There we find that wonderful statement, *“You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”* Though the enemy would often bring about attacks on the people of God, our Father is able to turn them to good, both for us and for the honour of His name.

It seems surprising that the author of Hebrews did not refer to the valleys and mountains through and over which Yahweh had led Joseph, when writing about faith, but instead, he chooses what seems to be an insignificant reference closing the first book of the Bible.

*“I am about to die, but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (50:24)* Then he took an oath of his brothers that when God visited them, they were to take his bones with them to the land that was promised.

It would be another 400 years before this prophecy of Joseph would come to pass under the leadership of Moses. For the fulfillment of his request see Exodus 13: 19, *Moses took the bones of Joseph with him*, and Joshua 24:32, *And the bones of Joseph they buried in Shechem*. Joseph had an inner revelation from God which he confessed with his mouth, much as Peter the apostle would do on the lower slopes of Hermon over 2000 years later. Therein is his faith.

What can we learn from this verse?

Firstly, we see the similarity between his situation and that of his father and grandfather. Like Isaac and Jacob, he was a stranger, a sojourner in a foreign land. All three men died without having entered into the promise which God had made, the promise of the Promised Land and of greatness to the nation of Israel. Isaac remained a nomad and a wanderer; Jacob was still in exile in the land of Egypt; Joseph had reached the giddy heights of prominence, but it was still the greatness of a stranger in a foreign land. Yet to all three, God gave the witness that His promise would not fail. They died in hope not despair.

Whatever our station in life, we are called to walk the same path as these patriarchs - the walk of faith. We also may rise to prominence in this world but we must never forget that we are citizens of another, higher kingdom. Most of us will never experience the greater promises of God, but each one of us must live in such a way that we will bring the day nearer when others can rejoice in them. Jesus made a wonderful promise that the Gospel must be preached in the whole world to all nations *and then the end shall come* (Matt.24:14). He will finally put an end to sin and usher in His kingdom of righteousness. As you live in the world today, you may believe that His

coming is yet a long way off. Nevertheless, the example of Joseph is given to teach us that we are to constantly look forward to the certainty of the fulfillment of the promise and live a life of such expectancy. We are to live each day in the light of eternity.

Over the years Joseph has come to know the faithfulness of God and his language has changed. No longer does he speak of dreams in which **he will rule** over his family. He does not say, "Go and tell my father of **all my glory** in Egypt". The writer of Hebrews has chosen the example of his dying days to teach us. Joseph is nearing the end of his earthly glory and has realised that all the glories and honours of this world are nothing to a dying man. They may satisfy for a season, but, in the end they are as a bursting bubble. Life is a fleeting thing. "*What is your life?*" says James, "*It is but a vapour that appears for a while and then passes away.*" (James 4:14).

God stirs faith in the old man so that he now sees where his real inheritance lies. It is in a future land and the coming of a future deliverer. One would think that he would want his descendants to remain in this land of Egypt which has been so good to him. Why shouldn't he want his body to remain here where he could be remembered? Maybe they would build him a great memorial, a large tomb in a prominent place, or perhaps name a great edifice after him. His name would be known forever. Indeed he could have a temple built to Yahweh and name it *The First Joseph benJacob Memorial Church*. In that way he could bring honour to God without losing any of his own glory!! However, God will not share His glory with man, nor with any of His creation. I'm being cynical of course, but isn't it amazing how many notable '*men of God*' in our days, have clung on tenaciously when their honour or reputation is at stake in the battle for integrity and faithfulness to God's work. Isn't it amazing how easily believers can be manipulated to *do this work* or *give to that cause*, when there are rewards or prominence associated. Instead, we are called to be as dead men, claiming no rights of our own and seeking no prominence in this world. God has not called us to be famous or successful; He has called us to be faithful.

Like Joseph, our theme should be the coming of our deliverer and our gathering together to Him. Jesus is our deliverer and He is coming soon. He has already delivered us from the penalty of sin; - we call that justification, wholeness for our spirits. He is presently delivering us from the power of sin - sanctification, wholeness for our souls. He will soon come to deliver us from the presence of sin - glorification, wholeness for our bodies! I am convinced that, unlike Joseph, we do not have to wait over 400 years, but that '*soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.*' As I look at this world with its growing problems of over population, famines, natural disasters, breakdown of family and social structures; as I look at the church with its great expansion and missions programs in most parts of the world; I am convinced **He is coming soon** As I consider the polarisation within the church between those faithful to His Word and its more liberal members, I am not dismayed but recognise that He is now preparing and **purifying His bride** If we are alive when He comes, we shall go to that inheritance *incorruptible and that fadeth not away*, but if we fall asleep, we shall not be left behind. So, in Joseph's words, uttered by faith, we see in figure, the living and the dead going together from the place of bondage.

*The dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17)

Surely the glory and tinsel of this world fades as we look forward to that glad day, so soon to take place. Are we making this our daily theme? Maybe we need to come again to our 'deathbed' at the foot of the cross where our vision will be changed. Dead men do not have regard for the things of this world.

**Summary:**

On his deathbed, Joseph was given the faith to look into the future and see the deliverer, Moses who would come to lead God's people out of Egypt and take them to their inheritance. Though he was a successful man in Egypt, faith revealed that there was a better land and a better future for the Children of Israel.

- 1. A deliverer, Jesus, has come to take us from our bondage and to lead us to His promised kingdom.**
- 2. Faith causes us to look forward with the eyes of men who are dead to this world.**
- 3. Our destiny is not found in our possessions or position; it is found in His promise.**
- 4. We need to live each day in the light of His Second Coming.**
- 5. This life is but a fleeting moment.**

## Chapter Fifteen

### MOSES

**Hebrews 11:23** *"By FAITH, Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By FAITH, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. By FAITH he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By FAITH he kept the passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the destroyer of the first-born might not touch them. By FAITH the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned."*

Here begins a summary of the life of Moses, the friend of God. The full story covered by the brief above is found in Exodus 2 - 14. After his birth in Egypt, the Pharaoh reigning over that land issued an edict that all male infants must be put to death, being afraid that the Jews might one day become too numerous and would rise up in power against Egypt. The midwives, however, feared God so they did not do as Pharaoh commanded. God blessed them for this action and the Jewish people grew very strong. One Hebrew family, having a young son, hid him in the bulrushes, *by faith*, until the time when God revealed the hidden child to a daughter of Pharaoh. (Ex 1 and 2). It was God who led this Levite and his wife to hide their child in the place where God would ordain he would be found by the princess. Their faith is revealed in that they obeyed this inner compulsion.

v27 When Moses had grown up he was led by God to become a shepherd in the land of Midian. There he remained until the age of eighty, tending sheep for his father in law, Jethro. This is recorded in Exodus 2:11 - 3:1. The natural account of events tells us that Moses fled in fear from Pharaoh for he had killed a man! Though brought up in Pharaoh's home, he had been taught by Hebrew servants, his own mother among them, and knew himself to be a child of the Hebrew people. He felt an inner drawing to the people of his birth, even though he was surrounded by the trappings and riches of Egypt. Such longing erupted into the violence of murder and the loneliness of flight. I do not believe the Scriptures to be contradictory so we must read the account in Hebrews 11 as expressing God's leading in Moses' life so that he would not experience the wrath of Pharaoh, 'being afraid' being the experiencing of that wrath. The writer to the Hebrews is looking at the events in retrospect and he can see, in all the events of Moses' life, the clear hand of God leading. **He is preparing a man for a mission.** Subsequent history shows why God took him from Pharaoh's household, though the causative act was one of Moses' own violence.

"What a waste of a life!" we might say as we watch this man, trained in the household of Pharaoh, skilled to hold his own in any company of the elite. Instead, we find him working as a

shepherd, tending sheep. This he did for forty wasted years! But nothing is waste when God is in control. What better training could there be for the mission God was arranging. He wanted a man, who knew the ways of the courts of Pharaoh and who could lead millions of bleating, two-legged sheep for forty years in the wilderness! Every change of direction in Moses' life had been ordained by God. He was preparing a special man for a special purpose, and He had chosen the right man, for He knew this man's heart and that he could be trusted to follow God's leading, *by faith*.

First, however, there had to be the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), where God had great difficulty in persuading His servant to have more confidence in His ability and leading. (Ex.3:11; 4:1, 10, 13 and more). Note 4:14 - God was angry because of Moses' lack of 'belief'!

v28 Moses obeyed when told to celebrate the Passover by sprinkling blood on the doorposts of each Hebrew home in Egypt (Ex 12). He could have questioned God on this *ridiculous* command but did not do so. This is faith.

v29 Now he begins to show more confidence and trust in God (ex.14:13) but the emphasis of the verse is that God opened the sea and God caused the Egyptians to drown, not because Moses had 'believed' it into being. He just obeyed when told what to do, after crying to God in his despair. He put his rod into the waters of the Red Sea so that the waters parted and the Hebrews could cross on dry land. (Ex 14) He could have questioned God on this *ridiculous* command but did not do so. This is faith.

No wonder Moses was called 'the friend of God'. His whole life is an example of the walk of faith, "*without which it is impossible to please God*".

What principle can we learn from the example of Moses? Surely, that the Lord is walking before His people when they are walking in faith. He directs them so that He might use them for the praise of His glory. He will bring them to the place of destiny He has planned for them. Sometimes He leads through valley experiences, sometimes His ways are uncomfortable and apparently without reason, but "*He knows the way that we take*".

When God wants to drill a man  
and thrill a man  
and skill a man;  
When God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part;  
When He yearns with all His heart to create so great and  
bold a man that all the world shall be amazed,  
Watch His methods! Watch His ways!  
How He ruthlessly perfects - those He royally elects;  
How He hammers him and hurts him  
and with mighty blows converts him into trial lumps  
of clay which only God can understand!  
While his tortured heart is crying and he lifts beseeching hands!  
How He bends, but never breaks those whose good He undertakes;  
How He uses those He chooses and with loving purpose fuses,  
by burdened soul induces him to try God's riches out.  
God knows what He's about!

(Author unknown

)

### *The two rocks*

The one act recorded in the life of Moses where he was not obedient to the Divine command is found in Numbers 20, and this cost him his greatest desire - to enter the Promised Land. It is worth considering this in more detail as, at first glance it seems to be a very petty act by a God who calls Himself, Moses' friend!

In **Exodus 17**, shortly after the Children of Israel had left Egypt, they began to complain that they did not have sufficient water to drink. God said to him, "*Behold I stand before you there on the rock. Take your rod and smite the rock and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink.*"

Moses obeyed and the people were able to drink.

Nearly forty years later at the entrance to Canaan, a similar event occurs with embarrassing and painful results for Moses. In **Numbers 20** the people are complaining again that they have no water. God's instructions to Moses this time are that he *take Aaron's rod (the rod that had been placed in the tabernacle) and speak to the rock*. Instead, Moses first chastised the people for their grumbling and then, turning to the rock, smote it with the rod. No water came out! In his embarrassment, he smote it again and God showed grace in allowing the water to flow. However, this act of disobedience caused Him to declare, "*Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me in the presence of the people, you shall not bring this assembly into the land I have promised them!*" Though Moses would plead with God that he might be forgiven and have the thrill of entering Canaan, it was not to be. (Deuteronomy 3:23-26)

Some would say that Moses was judged because he lost his temper with the people. I do not believe so. God is far bigger than to judge his friend for that! It is only as we study a little deeper that we discover the wonderful truth the Lord wanted Moses to portray to us - a picture he marred by his disobedience.

We need to consider the **two rocks** and the **two rods** in the references above. In the Exodus reference, the Hebrew word for rock is *tsoor*, a sharp or cutting stone. It was as a rock of flint, a small piece of which could be sharpened to be a knife. Such a stone would be used to kill and divide the sacrificial animals. When God made His covenant with Abraham, it was by cutting animals in two, setting them apart so that a divine flaming torch passed between them (Gen.15). Even today, when some African tribes make a tribal agreement, they use the expression of '*cutting a covenant*'. The picture of Exodus 17 is of God standing at the place of the sharp stone bearing in His body the beating of the rod of Moses, the Lawgiver. What **a type** foreshadowing the day when our Saviour God cut an eternal covenant for us by bearing the beating of the Law in His own body on Calvary's tree! The water of life flowed from that broken body; water that causes those who drink *to never thirst again*.

In the Numbers reference, the Hebrew word for rock is *selah* which is a fortress, a high cliff, a stronghold. The rod is to be Aaron's rod, the rod of the High Priest. The **type** this time is of a Saviour, high and lifted up, to whom we come with the authority of priests. We speak to the rock in prayer and intercession, thanksgiving and worship, and water flows. It was this picture that Moses failed to present by his disobedience.

Peter the apostle wrote “*For Christ died for our sins **once for all**, the just for the unjust...*” and now He is “*at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and all authorities being subject to Him.*” (1 Peter 3:18,22)

Praise God, the work is the cross is a complete work. Jesus does not need to be put to death again. Now He reigns on high and we come to Him with uplifted eyes, to worship as kings and priests before our God - and He continues to pour out His living water.

We should note in passing that Moses did enter the Promised Land, not in the life of flesh but in the glorified life of God’s friend. See Mark 9. The end of the journey for all who walk in faith, is that they shall be with their Saviour, glorified in His presence. Though the Lord might chastise us, it is only for a season, in order that He might mold us to be His image. The future glory is sure for all condemnation and judgment has been passed from us to the Saviour!

**Summary:** It is in the life of Moses that I see the clearest example of a life of faith. Throughout his life God had directed the circumstances that would mold a man after His own heart and for His own purposes. This truly is a man who would be *to the praise of His glory* (Eph 1:12)

- 1. All things work together for good to them that are walking by faith.**
- 2. Friends of God are those who walk by faith.**
- 3. God is looking for men and women He can mold into vessels of His glory.**
- 4. The process of molding is the work of faith.**
- 5. Faith does not deliver us from the chisel or hammer of the Divine sculptor.**

## Chapter Sixteen

### RAHAB

**Hebrews 11:30**      *"By FAITH the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days. By FAITH Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace."*

The story of Jericho and Rahab is found in Joshua 2, 3 and 6:22f.

Jericho was the first fortified city that the Children of Israel came upon once they had crossed the river Jordan into Canaan. How were they to conquer this city seeing that they had no weapons of warfare? Joshua, the new leader of God's people, sends two spies to consider this problem. They enter the house of Rahab which was evidently set upon the wall of the city. She is recorded to be a harlot though some commentators suggest that this means nothing more than that she ran a boarding house. The people of Jericho were well aware of the approaching Israelites and had heard stories of the amazing things that their god had done for them, so when two strangers came to town, it was a natural assumption that they were spies. Rahab decides to deceive her people, hiding the spies from their searching and telling the enquirers that the two men had left the city soon after their arrival. We do not commend her for her deceit and lies, but history is to show that God had a destiny for Rahab far above anything she may have deserved.

The spies return to Joshua with the encouraging news that the city inhabitants are full of fear and that *"the Lord has given all the land into our hands."*

Joshua gives his people what seems to be some ridiculous instructions, but he has heard them from God and dare not disobey. He had had a good teacher in Moses! They are to march around the city once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day! The people could have questioned him, they could have argued, but by now they were becoming more aware of the ways of God. Faith is not *opposed* to reason; it is *above* reason. On the seventh day, after circling the city seven times, the priests blew trumpets, the people shouted and the walls fell down!

Was it the great belief of Joshua that did this? It is striking that his name isn't even mentioned in our verse above! If our author had wanted to point out Joshua's great belief in God he could have used the example of Joshua and Caleb returning from spying out the land (Numbers 14). Their ten fellow spies were full of fear and would not venture further, causing Caleb and Joshua to be angry with them, declaring, *"The Lord is with us; fear them not!"* They believed in God, but the writer to the Hebrews is not trying to show us their great trust, but rather, God's actions *by faith*. Faith does not need a man to understand and believe. It needs anyone who will obey - even when he does not understand, or believe! "O Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). It requires one to be obedient to God's word, either heard, or still and small. Obedience was evident and the walls fell down, *by faith*. God had spoken, the people had



obeyed and God pushed the walls down. If He had told them to speak to the mountain and they had obeyed, He would have moved the mountain.

What a strange example of faith Rahab seems to be at first reading! Here is a woman who is a liar, a deceiver, a traitor to her own people. Yet both the writer to the Hebrews and the apostle James record her as an example of faith. Wherein is her faith revealed? It was by faith that she did not perish. God kept her alive because of her response to His witness within her. She said to the spies hidden on her rooftop, *"I know the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of you. .... our hearts melted and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; for **the Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath**".* All her neighbours believed the same as she did but they still clung to their empty hope that somehow they could deflect the judgment of God from themselves. They believed that their gods still had some power to stand against Him. Unlike her, they would not make confession of what they knew to be true, for theirs was a knowledge of the head based on the stories and rumours they had heard. Hers was a knowledge of the heart much like Peter's when he declared on Mount Hermon, *"Thou art the Christ!"* She had a conviction **and** a confession.

How wrong the people of Jericho were! - just like the multitudes today who believe that the Lord will not carry out His stated intention to judge this world for its sin and refusal to accept His (only) means of escape, the salvation found at the cross of Jesus. In the story of Rahab, God paints another picture of that cross, in requiring Rahab to hang a crimson thread from her window so that the attacking armies will recognise it as her guarantee of deliverance. The crimson thread has always been our means of deliverance; that stream of blood which still flows from the wounds of Calvary. When the walls fell, Rahab and her family were delivered as she had been promised, because she trusted that the crimson thread in her window would be honoured. Similarly, God is committed to honour all those who come to Him by way of the blood. There is no other way! *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him"* (John 3:36) *"You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold .... but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."* (1 Peter 1:18,19)

Rahab was a idolator, brought up to worship other gods. The light she had might not have been very great - her advantages had been few - but she followed the gleam of that inner light, she believed *actively*, and was delivered. Here is the true principle of faith.

In Matthew 1 we find the genealogy of Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham. The apostle's purpose is to show his Jewish readers, the great and royal heritage from which Jesus has come. He is fully a Jew, as son of Abraham; he is fully a king by male descent, as son of David. But notice the name honoured there in verse 5. Rahab the harlot, delivered by faith, is the great great grandmother of David the king. She is recorded as a direct ancestor of the Saviour!!

My daughter Corinne is much involved in tracing our family tree. This was very interesting to me at first, but as she began to dig deeper I became a little anxious. I had been reading a *Time Life* book on the *Pirates of the Caribbean* in the eighteenth century, and was startled to find that

some of the most notorious were Welshmen, like myself! I dreaded the day when Corinne would announce, with a smug look on her face, that one of my ancestors was an infamous pirate. When the Holy Spirit directed the apostles to write the Gospel, He did not hide from our view that Jesus was descended from harlots, deceivers, murderers and womanisers. Indeed, His mother Mary could not have found it easy bearing the suspicious looks of her neighbours when it became evident she was with child outside of wedlock! Nothing is told us of her parents, the grandparents of the Saviour. Could that be because they found it very difficult to accept the shame such a pregnancy would bring upon them? After all, how could they be expected to believe that their daughter was still a virgin when it was evident she was pregnant!

If I had been God, I would have done it differently! I would have had my son born in the finest hospital in Jerusalem, tended by the finest doctors. I would have chosen a royal princess, the most beautiful, talented, educated woman in the world, for his mother and I would have surrounded him with all the trappings of wealth and glory that he was accustomed to. I would announce to all the world by a voice like thunder from heaven, that my son had been born. Instead, God chose that Jesus should be born in a barn, a dirty smelly place occupied by cattle. His father would be embarrassed and his mother lonely, rejected by her friends (and family?) with the taunts of 'harlot' in her ears. His announcement was heard only by some humble shepherds tending their sheep. God's PR man really blew it, didn't he!

**Herein is love!** There is no way that Jesus would draw men to follow Him because of His status, wealth or pedigree. He will not allow these things to rob you of your right to choose. The only thing He requires of you is your *love* and that cannot be forced from you. He would not manipulate you to follow Him. The mighty men of this world have their followers who hang on because of the status it gives them. When a new President is elected, we watch our TV set with interest to see those who he will gather around him. Jesus offers His followers nothing of this world's wealth and power. Instead, He identifies Himself with the lowest of people so that all may feel they can draw close to Him. Are you misunderstood, rejected, beaten down, accused? He can empathise because He was treated the same way. Are you poor, of little esteem, having little of which to boast? He understands for He has walked that same road. Napoleon Bonaparte is reputed to have said, *"At the age of thirty three Alexander the Great conquered the known world. At the same age, I have conquered the known world. We both conquered by the power of the sword. At thirty three years of age Jesus also conquered the whole world, but He conquered by the power of love - and He has conquered me!"*

God chose a harlot, by *faith*, knowing that, from her would come the Saviour of the World, His own precious Son, Jesus. This is grace!- unmerited love!

### **Summary**

Both the writer to the Hebrews and James the apostle, give Rahab as an example of faith at work. As the Children of Israel drew near to Jericho, God was working out His purposes. He would pick out a woman who was to become an antecedant of Jesus, a harlot from a heathen people. Little did she know her destiny when she hid the spies!

We should learn the following principles:

- 1. Joshua believed God and obeyed. He is not even named in our verse because faith does not bring honour to man; its purpose is to bring honour to God.**
- 2. Rahab's conviction became a confession.**
- 3. God's promises to us are contingent on the application of the crimson thread (the blood).**
- 4. God has a mighty destiny for all who walk by faith.**
- 5. Grace reaches to the lowest and raises them to the heights of royalty.**

## Chapter Seventeen

### WHAT MORE SHALL I SAY?

**Hebrews 11:32-40** *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through FAITH conquered kingdoms, wrought righteousness, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

*And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

The nine verses that end the chapter clearly bear out my premise. By faith, many did great deeds and saw great miracles; by faith, others were put through great pain and anguish. Surely, not because they believed, but because it was God's good intention that even through suffering He would be glorified in His people. They were willing because they had that **inner witness of reality**, that would not let them escape the sorrow and pain. They could have done so, if they had denied their Lord as their persecutors demanded.

The sacred writer has made his point in the previous examples of this chapter. Now he just groups a lot of names together, not even in chronological order, but that will not bother his readers for they are well aware of the histories of each new name recorded. We might lose the impact of these names and deeds as they are fired at us so quickly, but to the Jews, each phrase would bring a vivid memory. Josephus, the early historian, used the same Greek phrase as our author when telling how David *conquered kingdoms*. The Septuagint, the Greek version of our Old Testament, uses the same words to tell how David *wrought righteousness*; how faith *stopped the mouths of lions* for Daniel; how faith *quenched raging fires* for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The reference to *escaping the edge of the sword* would turn the readers' thoughts to the deliverance of Elija and Elisha from Jezebel and the Syrians. Further examples are taken from the lives of the faithful not recorded in our Old Testament, but probably well known to readers of the apocryphal books, especially the second book of Maccabees. Certainly the phrases *being mighty in war* and *putting alien armies to flight* would immediately cause them to think of the unforgettable glories of Maccabean days.

However, the stories of faith are not always victorious when seen through mortal eyes. If the chapter stopped at verse 34 we would be tempted to believe that only *good things* happen to those who have *faith* in God - *health, wealth and prosperity*. But death, persecution and suffering - can this be by faith? Yes! Yes! Yes! - if God will be glorified in it. And He has

been glorified through the suffering of His people. As I read the Gospel of John I find many times that Jesus speaks about His coming glory. What do you think of when you read that word, *glory*? I have tried to define **glory** and finally concluded it to be something like this: “*all the fullness of God, revealed.*” Jesus said in John 17:1 “*Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify You.*” - and He went to the cross. Indeed, every reference to *glory* in John’s gospel is associated with the death of Jesus! Glory comes through suffering!

Maccabean history was full of records of the suffering and martyrdom of faithful Jewish people during the evil days of the Syrian, Antiochus Epiphanes, stories which Hebrew readers could well relate to the phrases above. Church history, since the times of the apostles and the writer of Hebrews, has many similar accounts.

**We could write,** *By FAITH Stephen was put to death, crying, ‘Father, do not lay this sin to his charge!’* By this act of faith, he released Saul of Tarsus from the condemnation of God, thereby opening the way for God to call Saul into his great ministry as Paul the Apostle. If Stephen had reacted to his anguish by calling God’s wrath down on Saul (as I confess I would have been tempted to do!), I wonder if Saul would ever have become the great apostle.

*By FAITH Paul was imprisoned in Rome* so that he would have the time to write the great epistles which have become such a source of encouragement and guidance for countless believers.

*By FAITH the early believers were persecuted* so that the gospel would spread throughout the Roman world as they fled their persecutors.

*By FAITH, Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer were burned at the stake* in the middle of the sixteenth century, so that a “light might be lit in England that would never be put out.”

*By FAITH the missionaries were ordered out of China* in the middle of the twentieth century so that a pure church of believers might grow within the Chinese culture - not an imitation of the western church. That’s a hard one for many of us who have the contorted view that only the western concept of church is acceptable to God. In my travels I have almost come to the cynical position that our ‘western’ church is the least acceptable to God! Some will not accept that the church in China has grown to multiplied millions since the missionaries left. Let me add here, lest I am misunderstood, that I strongly believe in missions and missionaries. Sometimes, however, our methods and lack of unity I find hard to accept. Thank the Lord, this is becoming less evident in recent missions history.

*By FAITH five young American men died in the jungles of Ecuador on January 8th 1956* so that the Auca Indians might also become inheritors with us of the riches of the Gospel. The world’s editorials called this a great waste of young American lives, but as one of them, Jim Elliott, had written in his diary just hours before his death, “***He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose!***” That should become the motto of all who would ‘walk by Faith’.

The names of Pete Fleming, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully, Nate Saint and Jim Elliott, together with their wives', are well known in Heaven and in Hell, for through the death and anguish they suffered, a wide breach was made in the prison walls that had kept the Auca Indians in the captivity of sin. Today, we can rejoice that many thousands of those precious people have walked through into the freedom found only in Christ.

Should my reader not know of this event, I encourage you to read "Through Gates of Splendour" by Elizabeth Elliott, Jim's widow.

Truly we can concur with the statement that *the death of martyrs has been the life-blood of the church*. Today, in the twentieth century, there is possibly more martyrdom and more persecution than at any time in history, but the church is not defeated and continues to grow at an exponential rate.

*Some through the waters, some through the flood,  
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;  
Some through great sorrow but God gives a song,  
in the night season and all the day long.*

(G.A.Young)

Might we not also write that by *FAITH*, \_\_\_\_\_ (*put in your own name*) went into the latest valley of pain because the Father wants to make him/her more like His other child, JESUS?

### **verses 39, 40**

All these men and women of faith are recorded as an example to us. They did not receive any reward in this life for their faithfulness. They had faith in God. They trusted Him and obeyed the word He spoke to them and within them. However, they had not received the 'something better' that is ours today. The reward for their faithfulness is found in the Saviour, Christ, who will give to every man as he deserves - not for his greatness in the eyes of the world or the church, but **for his faith**. Further, we have been given the indwelling Holy Spirit, the *promise of the Father* (Acts 1:4) - "Christ in us, the hope of glory", who will lead us into truth. It is His inner witness that enables us to walk in faith as we yield to His inner revelation. It is He has brought us into saving faith, and He will produce the fruit of faith in us as we stand by the streams of living water. As we drink deeply of the rivers of living water, we shall produce fruit in due season.

*"Oh Lord, I long to walk in your will. As the deer pants for the waters so my heart longs after you. Lead me in your will. I do not ask to know your will nor to be happy in it. Should you lead me through deep valleys I am willing to go, for you shall be my comforter even in the valley of the shadow of death. I know how foolish and stubborn I can be so whenever I step out of your will, I give you full permission to whip me back into line. All I ask is that at the end of this journey, I will hear you say, 'well done! good and faithful servant.'"*

The picture I have of faith is that I am but a child holding on to my heavenly Father's hand. I do not know if today He will take me to places of pleasure such as the 'sweetshop' of life, or instead to the pain of the 'dentist'. I do know that He will find it necessary to take me to the latter if I go often to the former!

I do not know if tomorrow He will lead me into a deep valley but I do know that, in my past, such valleys have always been there before He takes me to mountain tops with Himself.

I do not know what His will is for me (other than what Scripture reveals for all of us) but I do know that He knows the path ahead.

**I do not know what tomorrow holds but I do know who holds tomorrow!** - and He is holding my hand!

I want my life to be all filled with praise to Thee,  
My precious Lord divine Who died for me.  
Let all my will be Thine, controlled by love divine,  
Live out in me Thy life, O mighty Saviour.

Chorus:

Thy precious will divine, with joy I make it mine,  
My heart shall be Thy throne, and Thine alone.  
Choose thou the path I tread, and wither I am led,  
Help me to follow on, O mighty Saviour.

A pilgrim born anew, a stranger going through,  
Not of this world am I since I am Thine.  
Weaned from its passing show, transformed Thy love to know,  
Hold thou my hand in Thine, O mighty Saviour.

When evil foes assail and almost would prevail,  
In that dark hour be Thou my strength and shield.  
Lend then Thy strong embrace, uphold me by Thy grace,  
In weakness be my strength, O mighty Saviour.

Yea, choose the path for me, although I may not see,  
The reason Thou dost will to lead me so.  
I know the toilsome way will lead to realms of day,  
Where I shall dwell with Thee, O mighty Saviour.

(H.Tee) – permission sought.