

A Study in Hebrews

Study Nine

Hebrews 11:11-31

Day One

11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age-and Sarah herself was barren-was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

vs.11&12 – Sarah and Abraham weren't just facing old age; Sarah was also unable to conceive. They had to "strikes" against them, but they had God's promise with them. And God's promises can overcome any human deficiency or weakness on their way to fulfillment. What is your focus? Your problem or your promise? If it's your problem, then you need to shift your focus. Consider what Paul wrote about Abraham:

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-since he was about a hundred years old-and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Romans 4:16-25).

How can you apply this passage to your life today?

Day Two

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

v. 13 – It is possible to die in faith, not receiving what you are believing for. I decided years ago that I would rather die in faith than live in un-faith or presumption. I figure that after I die, there is another age of the resurrection when God can “settle all faith accounts.” I am working hard on keeping my trust in God, since trust and faith are choices, not dependent on how I feel.

vs. 14-16 – We are citizens of a heavenly Kingdom, looking for something “better” than this earthly life can provide.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:12-14).

When you walk in faith, the ground rules for your life are different than the rules of un-faith. And you always have a choice to change allegiance. You can return at any time to your life of un-faith as a citizen of the kingdom of darkness and still go to church and sing hymns. But God is not ashamed to be called the God of those who endure the mocking and misunderstanding that a life of faith brings. God has prepared a place to live for those who have put their trust in Him.

I have seen many people get tired of having faith and look to return to a less stressful, more predictable lifestyle. Their salvation isn't in question, but their lifestyle is. Are you a bit weary right now, tired of not knowing where you are going or your source of provision? Dear reader, the answer is not less faith, but more! Put your faith in God today and every day. Wait for Him and His provision. He has never failed anyone and He will not ruin His perfect record on you! Keep looking for a better city and resist the temptation to return to the city from whence you came.

Day Three

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,

18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

vs. 17&18 – You may want to start today by reading Genesis 22—the account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. I was in Israel several years ago and saw a sculptor's rendition of this sacrifice that changed my way of viewing this story. I had always pictured Isaac bound and laying flat on an altar or rock with Abraham poised above Isaac,

ready to plunge a knife into his chest. But this sculptor depicted Abraham standing behind Isaac, ready to slit his throat. And that made sense to me, since Old Testament sacrifices had the blood drained from their bodies before being burned.

Can you imagine being ready to cut your only son's throat at God's command? I certainly cannot, but that's just what Abraham was ready to do in faith. Having received Isaac in faith, Abraham could not see the promises of God concerning Isaac be fulfilled in any way except ongoing faith. He could not protect His faith child in his own strength—he had to continue to put his trust in God, even if that meant giving back to God what God had given him.

You can see why Abraham is the father of anyone who has faith! He was not a perfect man, but he certainly was a man of faith.

God will test your faith. The word “test” here is not the word we use for school “exam.” The word test here is used in the context of testing metal to prove its purity. God tested Abraham by proving the reality and strength of his faith in God for all generations to see. When God tests you, it isn't to make you stumble. It is rather to show the reality of what He has done in your life. Think of a recent test you went through; then think of how you would have responded ten years ago. The fact that you kept your trust in God proves the validity of what God has done in your life! The test therefore proved God's faithfulness. You have no need to fear any test, for it is God even revealing to principalities and powers what He has put into you by your permission. Praise God!

v. 19 – You cannot give something to God in order to preserve that. You cannot say, “I will give this to God and that will preserve it for me.” Abraham did not know whether he would ever see Isaac again; Abraham simply put his trust in God. When you give something back to God, He may take and keep it! But He then will reward your faithfulness, perhaps in ways that you cannot imagine. Recently I “gave” God my reputation, and He took it! What's more, it has been tarnished in the taking! But I have put my trust in the One who is just and He is free to do with it whatever He wishes.

Day Four

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

v. 20 – The story in Genesis 27 is a fascinating one, outlining the intrigue and conniving that surrounded the blessing that Isaac gave Jacob that Isaac thought he was giving to Esau. The writer here attributed the blessing to faith, although it was mixed with human contrivance. I suppose that faith never exists in a perfect environment. We humans are all too frail and sinful for that. Yet our human imperfection doesn't prevent us from operating in faith, nor does it prevent God from using us for His faith purposes.

Too often I have been guilty of expecting perfection from others and myself. I have adjusted my expectations as I have gotten older. I won't see perfection this side of the Lord's return and I have had to get used to the fact that God will use people with less than perfect motives and character.

v. 21 – For some reason, the Holy Spirit chronicled Jacob's entire life for us to study and learn from. We follow his exploits, failures and development from birth to death. At death, he blessed his grandsons in faith (see Genesis 47 and 48). Prior to that, he connived and plotted his way to wealth and bigamy. In spite of all his weaknesses, God identifies Himself as the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." That should give us all hope—hope that God can reach, use and change anyone. And God doesn't "distance" Himself from less-than-perfect people. If God doesn't do that, why do we? Can the Church be more "particular" than God Himself when it comes to fellowship?

v. 22 – Here we see Joseph, Abraham's great grandson, operating in faith. This is the fourth generation including Abraham that was speaking in faith. That's quite an impressive chain of faith. Someone once said that we are only successful when we have built something in and for God that lasts beyond our own lifetime. If that is true, then Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did something right, for they were part of a multi-generational faith movement. I hope my family will bless God to the fourth generation, don't you?

Day Five

23 By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

v. 23 – What did Moses' parents see? No newborn is that good looking, even though the parents think it is. As stated previously, I believe they saw the purpose of God on their son. Even though the law of the land was to that all male babies were to be thrown into the Nile (see Exodus 2), they resisted this immoral edict and preserved the eventual savior of their people. What faith! They lived under tremendous pressure, probably even from other parents who had complied and drowned their sons. Yet they had faith where their son was concerned and God used their faith to preserve His chosen leader. Moses' parents were more afraid of God than Pharaoh; they had their priorities in order.

v. 24 – Did you notice that everyone in this Hebrews 11 faith list did something with their faith? Go back and see what they did. Abraham offered, Isaac blessed, Jacob blessed and worshiped, Moses' parents hid and now Moses refused. This reminds me of what James wrote: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:16-17). Faith without action is absolutely, positively worthless. Faith isn't right doctrine; it is action that springs from right doctrine.

In this verse, faith required that Moses deny all the comforts and connections of being the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter to identify with the low estate of his people's slavery in Egypt.

v. 25 – I have a friend who has a ministry to young people through which he talks about drug abuse. He can do this because he abused drugs and that abuse contributed to him taking the life of another person. In his presentation, he says that drugs do give something, but what they take is not worth what they give. I think there is wisdom in this perspective. Too often the Church has acted like sin is without pleasure and must be avoided. The problem is that there is pleasure in sin and to deny or ignore that is to lose a chance to identify with the audience to whom we are preaching. This verse says that there *is* pleasure in sin, but that it is passing or fleeting.

Moses chose to endure mistreatment instead of passing pleasure. That is often the price of leadership for anyone and it certainly was for Moses. But he made the choice and that choice helped shape him into one of the world's most famous leaders. What price are you paying for leadership? What choices are you making today that will make you a better leader tomorrow? Every morning I begin my day by writing this Bible study. I choose to not do something else so I can do this and leadership is made up of a series of similar decisions.

I urge you today to make good choices and deny some gratification today that will lead to greater effectiveness tomorrow.

Day Six

26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

v. 26 – It is of note that the writer equated Moses decision not to be known as Pharaoh's nephew as disgrace for the sake of Christ, and this some 1700 years prior to Christ's birth! Somehow God had made know to Moses His plan to send a Messiah from among Moses' people. This revelation was so clear that Moses focused His whole life and his decisions based on the truth of what God had shown him.

If Moses could focus his entire life and "career" on the reality of Christ, how much more should we do the same? When you think of it, Moses did choose his "career" on the reality of Christ. Are you doing the same? Have you made decisions about your future that were based on what was best for you, or have you made those decisions based on what Jesus would have you do?

Moses was looking ahead to his reward. Are you making decisions on what is best for you now or what is best for you in the long run, the future? While I am not opposed to politics, if you define politics as “getting things done through people,” I am opposed to politics that cause anyone to take moral shortcuts for the expediency of a promotion, raise or related benefits. Moses “put it all on the line” for Jesus; can we do any less?

v. 27 – Faith always affects what you see. Moses looked through the anger and threats of the king he could see, because he saw the reality of the King that he could not see. Moses based his decisions not on the shifting sands of the seen, but on the solid rock of faith, the unseen. What are you looking at today? Are you looking at what anyone can see or what only a few can see through the eyes of faith? Dear reader, I implore you to join with Moses and make your decisions today and every day based on your unwavering focus on Jesus. Don’t be swayed by what others say they see; you walk in the reality of what God is showing you. Don’t be afraid of news reports, family pressures or common wisdom concerning your job, ministry or professional development.

v. 28 – The first Passover is described in Exodus 12. Most families put their trust in the continuation of their family line and name in the oldest son, who when he is born represents the future. The Egyptians worshipped this firstborn (especially the firstborn of Pharaoh who was considered a god) as they did most of creation (the plagues came to shake the Egyptian confidence in all their so-called gods). Moses and the Jews did not put their trust in this most important family milestone of the firstborn, but rather they put their trust in God! The judgment of God came against all those in Egypt who put their trust in anything or anyone but Him.

I am so glad I have applied the blood of the Lamb to the doorpost of my home. We have tried to live within the safety and protection of that blood. I have not put my faith in a doctrine, denomination or my own determination. I have put my faith in God just like Moses did. And He is faithful. Is that your testimony as well?

Day Seven

29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

v. 29 – No one can imitate faith. The Egyptians did not know God and tried to imitate the faith of the Jews. They were drowned in their own presumption. It is one thing to be optimistic and confident, but if your confidence isn’t in God, then it is just an exercise in futility. When you are walking through dangerous territory, you had better base your confidence not on the words of your government, your church or your family. You had better base your confidence on God’s word.

When I was in Afghanistan last year, I experienced more pressure and spiritual warfare than usual, as would be expected. I had to know every day that I was hearing from God and putting my faith in what I thought He was saying to me. I really believe that my ability to do so saved my life; it wasn't just a matter of convenience.

v. 30 – How many times did Joshua and Israel walk around Jericho? If you said seven times, you are incorrect! (see Joshua 6). They walked around once a day for six days, then they walked around the city seven times on the seventh day. That makes 13 times! What a “silly” strategy. Plus they weren't permitted to talk to one another as they walked. Maybe that was so they wouldn't discuss the foolishness of what they were doing and undermine one another's faith.

God can show you strategies of how your business can prosper, ministry can expand or opposition be defeated. But first you must have faith that He can and will do this. Then you must have faith to carry those strategies out, even when they seem crazy to you and to others. When I was a pastor, whenever I would meet with someone in my church, I would usually ask, “What is the Lord saying?” I wanted to know what they thought they were sensing and hearing; then I based my counsel on what that. God is a great communicator. He knows every language, can speak through circumstances, His word, other believers, non-believers and even a donkey! What is “God saying” to you today? Are you being faithful to what you think it is? May the walls of your Jericho come down as you carry out in faith the plans that God has for you.

v. 31 – How did Rahab know who the spies were? (See Joshua 2 and 6). There was only one way—God “told” her. There are some that don't think Rahab was a harlot, but rather an innkeeper. But whatever her occupation, God revealed His plan to her *before* she had a change of lifestyle. She put her trust in God and she and her whole family were saved. What's more, Rahab became a part of Jesus' family tree (See Matthew 1:5). Thus she was a precursor of the faith that would be made available to the Gentiles in Christ.

God delights in revealing Himself to people who don't appear to be likely candidates for such a revelation. The Church has not always delighted, however, in this aspect of God's character of mercy and grace. How do you feel when someone that you don't think is worthy of God finds God? I remember when I was doing a lot of prison ministry. I found myself ministering to a new convert who was in prison for murdering his parents in a drug-crazed frenzy. There he was, sitting at my feet, “clothed and in his right mind.” I was angry that this man had found Jesus and I struggled ministering to him. Then I thought, “If Jesus doesn't have a problem with this man, then I shouldn't either.”

The Church gets angry when homosexuals, child abusers, prostitutes, persecutors, and drug dealers find Jesus. But the message of Rahab is that God reveals Himself to whomever He chooses and doesn't ask anyone's permission to do so. Is there some unlikely candidate to whom God wants to reveal Himself today, using you in the process? If so, will you cooperate or have a bad attitude? I hope you will cooperate and spread the good news of Jesus to any and all. Remember, Jesus didn't come for the well but for the

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sick and wants to make us outreach doctors in His image. I hope you will be up to the task.