

CHAPTER 11

The apostle having, in the close of the foregoing chapter, recommended the grace of faith and a life of faith as the best preservative against apostasy, he now enlarges upon the nature and fruits of this excellent grace.

I. The nature of it, and the honour it reflects upon all who live in the exercise of it (v. 1-3).

II. The great examples we have in the Old Testament of those who lived by faith, and died and suffered extraordinary things by the strength of his grace (v. 4-38). And,

III. The advantages that we have in the gospel for the exercise of this grace above what those had who lived in the times of the Old Testament (v. 39, 40).

~~811~~ HEBREWS 11:1-3

THE NATURE OF FAITH

Here we have,

I. A definition or description of the grace of faith in two parts.

1. *It is the substance of things hoped for.* Faith and hope go together; and the same things that are the object of our hope are the object of our faith. It is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that he has promised to us in Christ; and this persuasion is so strong that it gives the soul a kind of possession and present fruition of those things, gives them a subsistence in the soul, by the first-fruits and foretastes of them: so that believers in the exercise of faith *are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.* Christ dwells in the soul by faith, and the soul is filled with the fullness of God, as far as his present measure will admit; he experiences a substantial reality in the objects of faith.

2. *It is the evidence of things not seen.* Faith demonstrates to the eye of the mind the reality of those things that cannot be discerned by the eye of the body. Faith is the firm assent of the soul to the divine revelation and every

part of it, and sets to its seal that God is true. It is a full approbation of all that God has revealed as holy, just, and good; it helps the soul to make application of all to itself with suitable affections and endeavours; and so it is designed to serve the believer instead of sight, and to be to the soul all that the senses are to the body. That faith is but opinion or fancy which does not realize invisible things to the soul, and excite the soul to act agreeably to the nature and importance of them.

II. An account of the honour it reflects upon all those who have lived in the exercise of it (v. 2): *By it the elders obtained a good report* — the ancient believers, who lived in the first ages of the world. Observe,

1. True faith is an old grace, and has the best plea to antiquity: it is not a new invention, a modern fancy; it is a grace that has been planted in the soul of man ever since the covenant of grace was published in the world; and it has been practiced from the beginning of the revelation; the eldest and best men that ever were in the world were believers.

2. Their faith was their honour; it reflected honour upon them. They were an honour to their faith, and their faith was an honour to them. It put them upon doing *the things that were of good report*, and God has taken care that a record shall be kept and report made of the excellent things they did in the strength of this grace. The genuine actings of faith will bear to be reported, deserve to be reported, and will, when reported, redound to the honour of true believers.

III. We have here one of the first acts and articles of faith, which has a great influence on all the rest, and which is common to all believers in every age and part of the world, namely, the creation of the *worlds by the word of God*, not out of pre-existent matter, but out of nothing, v. 3. The grace of faith has a retrospect as well as prospect; it looks not only forward to the end of the world, but back to the beginning of the world. By faith we understand much more of the formation of the world than ever could be understood by the naked eye of natural reason. Faith is not a force upon the understanding, but a friend and a help to it. Now what does faith give us to understand concerning *the worlds*, that is, the upper, middle, and lower regions of the universe?

1. *That these worlds were* not eternal, nor did they produce themselves, but they were made by another.

2. That the maker of the worlds is god; he is the maker of all things; and whoever is so must be God.
3. That he made the world with great exactness; it was a *framed* work, in every thing duly adapted and disposed to answer its end, and to express the perfections of the Creator.
4. That God made the world by his word, that is, by his essential wisdom and eternal Son, and by his active will, saying, *Let it be done, and it was done*, ~~<BIB>~~Psalm 33:9.
5. That the world was thus framed out of nothing, out of no pre-existent matter, contrary to the received maxim, that “out of nothing nothing can be made,” which, though true of created power, can have no place with God, who can call *things that are not as if they were*, and command them into being. These things we understand by faith. The Bible gives us the truest and most exact account of the origin of all things, and we are to believe it, and not to wrest or run down the scripture-account of the creation, because it does not suit with some fantastic hypotheses of our own, which has been in some learned but conceited men the first remarkable step towards infidelity, and has led them into many more.

~~<BIB>~~ HEBREWS 11:4-31

EXEMPLARS OF FAITH

The apostle, having given us a more general account of the grace of faith, now proceeds to set before us some illustrious examples of it in the Old-Testament times, and these may be divided into two classes: —

1. Those whose names are mentioned, and the particular exercise and actings of whose faith are specified.
2. Those whose names are barely mentioned, and an account given in general of the exploits of their faith, which it is left to the reader to accommodate, and apply to the particular persons from what he gathers up in the sacred story. We have here those whose names are not only mentioned, but the particular trials and actings of their faith are subjoined.

I. The leading instance and example of faith here recorded is that of Abel. It is observable that the Spirit of God has not thought fit to say any thing here of the faith of our first parents; and yet the church of God has generally, by a pious charity, taken it for granted that God gave them repentance and faith in the promised seed, that he instructed them in the mystery of sacrificing, that they instructed their children in it, and that they found mercy with God, after they had ruined themselves and all their posterity. But God has left the matter still under some doubt, as a warning to all who have great talents given to them, and a great trust reposed in them, that they do not prove unfaithful, since God would not enroll our first parents among the number of believers in this blessed calendar. It begins with Abel, one of the first saints, and the first martyr for religion, of all the sons of Adam, one who lived by faith, and died for it, and therefore a fit pattern for the Hebrews to imitate. Observe,

1. What Abel did by faith: *He offered up a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, a more full and perfect sacrifice, **pleiona thysian**.* Hence learn,

(1.) That, after the fall, God opened a new way for the children of men to return to him in religious worship. This is one of the first instances that is upon record of fallen men going in to worship God; and it was a wonder of mercy that all intercourse between God and man was not cut off by the fall.

(2.) After the fall, God must be worshipped by sacrifices, a way of worship which carries in it a confession of sin, and of the desert of sin, and a profession of faith in a Redeemer, who was to be a ransom for the souls of men.

(3.) That, from the beginning, there has been a remarkable difference between the worshippers. Here were two persons, brethren, both of whom went in to worship God, and yet there was a vast difference. Cain was the elder brother, but Abel has the preference. It is not seniority of birth, but grace, that makes men truly honourable. The difference is observable in their persons: Abel was an upright person, a righteous man, a true believer; Cain was a formalist, had not a principle of special grace. It is observable in their principles: Abel acted under the power of faith; Cain only from the force of education, or natural conscience. There was also a very observable difference in their offerings: Abel brought a sacrifice of atonement, *brought of the firstlings of the flock*, acknowledging himself to

be a sinner who deserved to die, and only hoping for mercy through *the great sacrifice*; Cain brought only a sacrifice of acknowledgment, a mere thank-offering, *the fruit of the ground*, which might, and perhaps must, have been offered in innocency; here was no confession of sin, no regard to the ransom; this was an essential defect in Cain's offering. There will always be a difference between those who worship the true God; some will compass him about with lies, others will be faithful with the saints; some, like the Pharisee, will lean to their own righteousness; others, like the publican, will confess their sin, and cast themselves upon the mercy of God in Christ.

2. What Abel gained by his faith: the original record is in ~~Gen~~ Genesis 4:4, *God had respect to Abel, and to his offering*; first to his person as gracious, then to his offering as proceeding from grace, especially from the grace of faith. In this place we are told that he obtained by his faith some special advantages; as,

(1.) *Witness that he was righteous*, a justified, sanctified, and accepted person; this, very probably, was attested by fire from heaven, kindling and consuming his sacrifice.

(2.) God gave witness to the righteousness of his person, by testifying his acceptance of his gifts. When the fire, an emblem of God's justice, consumed the offering, it was a sign that the mercy of God accepted the offerer for the sake of the great sacrifice.

(3.) *By it he, being dead, yet speaketh*. He had the honour to leave behind him an instructive speaking case; and what does it speak to us? What should we learn from it?

[1.] That fallen man has leave to go in to worship God, with hope of acceptance.

[2.] That, if our persons and offerings be accepted, it must be through faith in the Messiah.

[3.] That acceptance with God is a peculiar and distinguishing favour.

[4.] That those who obtain this favour from God must expect the envy and malice of the world.

[5.] That God will not suffer the injuries done to his people to remain unpunished, nor their sufferings unrewarded. These are very good and

useful instructions, and yet *the blood of sprinkling speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

[6.] That God would not suffer Abel's faith to die with him, but would raise up others, who should obtain like precious faith; and so he did in a little time; for in the next verse we read,

II. Of the faith of Enoch, v. 5. He is the second of those elders that through faith have a good report. Observe,

1. What is here reported of him. In this place (and in ~~1052~~Genesis 5:22, etc.) we read,

(1.) *That he walked with God*, that is, that he was really, eminently, actively, progressively, and perseveringly religious in his conformity to God, communion with God, and complacency in God.

(2.) *That he was translated, that he should not see death*, nor any part of him be found upon earth; for God took him, soul and body, into heaven, as he will do those of the saints who shall be found alive at his second coming.

(3.) *That before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.* He had the evidence of it in his own conscience, and the Spirit of God witnessed with his spirit. Those who by faith walk with God in a sinful world are pleasing to him, and he will give them marks of his favour, and put honour upon them.

2. What is here said of his faith, v. 6. It is said that *without this faith it is impossible to please God*, without such a faith as helps us to walk with God, an active faith, and that we cannot come to God unless we *believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.*

(1.) He must believe that God is, and that he is what he is, what he has revealed himself to be in the scripture, a Being of infinite perfections, subsisting in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Observe, The practical belief of the existence of God, as revealed in the word, would be a powerful awe-band upon our souls, a bridle of restraint to keep us from sin, and a spur of constraint to put us upon all manner of gospel obedience.

(2.) *That he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.* Here observe,

[1.] By the fall we have lost God; we have lost the divine light, life, love, likeness, and communion.

[2.] God is again to be found of us through Christ, the second Adam.

[3.] God has prescribed means and ways wherein he may be found; to with, a strict attention to his oracles, attendance on his ordinances, and ministers duly discharging their office and associating with his people, observing his providential guidance, and in all things humbly waiting his gracious presence.

[4.] Those who would find God in these ways of his must *seek him diligently*; they must seek early, earnestly, and perseveringly. *Then shall they seek him, and find him, if they seek him with all their heart*; and when once they have found him, as their reconciled God, they will never repent the pains they have spent in seeking after him.

III. The faith of Noah, v. 7. Observe,

1. The ground of Noah's faith — a warning he had received from God of things as yet not seen. He had a divine revelation, whether by voice or vision does not appear; but it was such as carried in it its own evidence; he was *forewarned of things not seen as yet*, that is, of a great and severe judgment, such as the world had never yet seen, and of which, in the course of second causes, there was not yet the least sign. This secret warning he was to communicate to the world, who would be sure to despise both him and his message. God usually warns sinners before he strikes; and, where his warnings are slighted, the blow will fall the heavier.

2. The actings of Noah's faith, and the influence it had both upon his mind and practice.

(1.) Upon his mind; it impressed his soul with a fear of God's judgment: he was *moved with fear*. Faith first influences our affections, then our actions; and faith works upon those affections that are suitable to the matter revealed. If it be some good thing, faith stirs up love and desire; if some evil thing, faith stirs up fear.

(2.) His faith influenced his practice. His fear, thus excited by believing God's threatening, moved him to prepare an ark, in which, no doubt, he met with the scorns and reproaches of a wicked generation. He did not

dispute with God why he should make an ark, nor how it could be capable of containing what was to be lodged in it, nor how such a vessel could possibly weather out so great a storm. His faith silenced all objections, and set him to work in earnest.

3. The blessed fruits and rewards of Noah's faith.

(1.) Hereby himself and his house were saved, when a whole world of sinners were perishing about them. God saved his family for his sake; it was well for them that they were Noah's sons and daughters; it was well for those women that they married into Noah's family; perhaps they might have married to great estates in other families, but then they would have been drowned. We often say, "It is good to be akin to an estate;" but surely it is good to be akin to the covenant.

(2.) Hereby he judged and condemned the world; his holy fear condemned their security and vain confidence; his faith condemned their unbelief; his obedience condemned their contempt and rebellion. Good examples will either convert sinners or condemn them. There is something very convincing in a life of strict holiness and regard to God; it commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and they are judged by it. This is the best way the people of God can take to condemn the wicked; not by harsh and censorious language, but by a holy exemplary conversation.

(3.) Hereby *he became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

[1.] He was possessed of a true justifying righteousness; he was *heir to it*: and,

[2.] This his right of inheritance was through faith in Christ, as *a member of Christ, a child of God*, and, if a child, then an heir. His righteousness was relative, resulting from his adoption, through faith in the promised seed. As ever we expect to be justified and saved *in the great and terrible day of the Lord*, let us now prepare an ark, secure an interest in Christ, and in the ark of the covenant, and do it speedily, before the door be shut, for there is not salvation in any other.

IV. The faith of Abraham, the friend of God, and father of the faithful, in whom the Hebrews boasted, and from whom they derived their pedigree and privileges; and therefore the apostle, that he might both please and profit them, enlarges more upon the heroic achievements of Abraham's

faith than of that of any other of the patriarchs; and in the midst of his account of the faith of Abraham he inserts the story of Sarah's faith, whose daughters those women are that continue to do well. Observe,

1. The ground of Abraham's faith, the call and promise of God, v. 8.

(1.) This call, though it was a very trying call, was the call of God, and therefore a sufficient ground for faith and rule of obedience. The manner in which he was called Stephen relates in ~~400~~ Acts 7:2, 3, *The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia — And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I will show thee.* This was an effectual call, by which he was converted from the idolatry of his father's house, ~~400~~ Genesis 12:1. This call was renewed after his father's death in Charran. Observe,

[1.] The grace of God is absolutely free, in taking some of the worst of men, and making them the best.

[2.] God must come to us before we come to him.

[3.] In calling and converting sinners, God appears as a God of glory, and works a glorious work in the soul.

[4.] This calls us not only to leave sin, but sinful company, and whatever is inconsistent with our devotedness to him.

[5.] We need to be called, not only to set out well, but to go on well.

[6.] He will not have his people take up that rest any where short of the heavenly Canaan.

(2.) The promise of God. God promised Abraham that the place he was called to he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, after awhile he should have the heavenly Canaan for his inheritance, and in process of time his posterity should inherit the earthly Canaan. Observe here,

[1.] God calls his people to an inheritance: by his effectual call he makes them children, and so heirs.

[2.] This inheritance is not immediately possessed by them; they must wait some time for it: but the promise is sure, and shall have its seasonable accomplishment.

[3.] The faith of parents often procures blessings for their posterity.

2. The exercise of Abraham's faith: he yielded an implicit regard to the call of God.

(1.) *He went out, not knowing whither he went.* He put himself into the hand of God, to send him whithersoever he pleased. He subscribed to God's wisdom, as fittest to direct; and submitted to his will, as fittest to determine every thing that concerned him. Implicit faith and obedience are due to God, and to him only. All that are effectually called resign up their own will and wisdom to the will and wisdom of God, and it is their wisdom to do so; though they know not always their way, yet they know their guide, and this satisfies them.

(2.) *He sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country.* This was an exercise of his faith. Observe,

[1.] How Canaan is called the land of promise, because yet only promised, not possessed.

[2.] How Abraham lived in Canaan, not as heir and proprietor, but as a sojourner only. He did not serve an ejection, or raise a war against the old inhabitants, to dispossess them, but contented himself to live as a stranger, to bear their unkindnesses patiently, to receive any favours from them thankfully, and to keep his heart fixed upon his home, the heavenly Canaan.

[3.] He dwelt in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. He lived there in an ambulatory moving condition, living in a daily readiness for his removal: and thus should we all live in this world. He had good company with him, and they were a great comfort to him in his sojourning state. Abraham lived till Isaac was seventy-five years old, and Jacob fifteen. Isaac and Jacob were heirs of the same promise; for the promise was renewed to Isaac (¹²⁸³Genesis 26:3), and to Jacob, (¹²⁸³Genesis 28:13). All the saints are heirs of the same promise. The promise is made to believers and their children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call. And it is pleasant to see parents and children sojourning together in this world as heirs of the heavenly inheritance.

3. The supports of Abraham's faith (v. 10): *He looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* Observe here,

(1.) The description given of heaven: it is a city, a regular society, well established, well defended, and well supplied: it is a city that hath

foundations, even the immutable purposes and almighty power of God, the infinite merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promises of an everlasting covenant, its own purity, and the perfection of its inhabitants: and it is a city whose builder and maker is God. He contrived the model; he accordingly made it, and he has laid open a new and living way into it, and prepared it for his people; he puts them into possession of it, prefers them in it, and is himself the substance and felicity of it.

(2.) Observe the due regard that Abraham had to this heavenly city: he looked for it; he believed there was such a state; he waited for it, and in the mean time he conversed in it by faith; he had exalted and rejoicing hopes, that in God's time and way he should be brought safely to it.

(3.) The influence this had upon his present conversation: it was a support to him under all the trials of his sojourning state, helped him patiently to bear all the inconveniences of it, and actively to discharge all the duties of it, persevering therein unto the end.

V. In the midst of the story of Abraham, the apostle inserts an account of the faith of Sarah. Here observe,

1. The difficulties of Sarah's faith, which were very great. As,

(1.) The prevalency of unbelief for a time: she laughed at the promise, as impossible to be made good.

(2.) She had gone out of the way of her duty through unbelief, in putting Abraham upon taking Hagar to his bed, that he might have a posterity. Now this sin of hers would make it more difficult for her to act by faith afterwards.

(3.) The great improbability of the thing promised, that she should be the mother of a child, when she was of sterile constitution naturally, and now past the prolific age.

2. The actings of her faith. Her unbelief is pardoned and forgotten, but her faith prevailed and is recorded: *She judged him faithful, who had promised*, v. 11. She received the promise as the promise of God; and, being convinced of that, she truly judged he both could and would perform it, how impossible soever it might seem to reason; for the faithfulness of God will not suffer him to deceive his people.

3. The fruits and rewards of her faith.

(1.) *She received strength to conceive seed.* The strength of nature, as well as grace, is from God: he can make the barren soul fruitful, as well as the barren womb.

(2.) *She was delivered of a child,* a man-child, a child of the promise, and comfort of his parents' advanced years, and the hope of future ages.

(3.) From them, by this son, sprang a numerous progeny of illustrious persons, *as the stars of the sky* (v. 12) — a great, powerful, and renowned nation, above all the rest in the world; and a nation of saints, the peculiar church and people of God; and, which was the highest honour and reward of all, *of these, according to the flesh, the Messiah came, who is over all, God blessed for evermore.*

VI. The apostle proceeds to make mention of the faith of the other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, and the rest of this happy family, v. 13. Here observe,

1. The trial of their faith in the imperfection of their present state. They had not received the promises, that is, they had not received the things promised, they had not yet been put into possession of Canaan, they had not yet seen their numerous issue, they had not seen Christ in the flesh. Observe,

(1.) Many that are interested in the promises do not presently receive the things promised.

(2.) One imperfection of the present state of the saints on earth is that their happiness lies more in promise and reversion than in actual enjoyment and possession. The gospel state is more perfect than the patriarchal, because more of the promises are now fulfilled. The heavenly state will be most perfect of all; for there all the promises will have their full accomplishment.

2. The actings of their faith during this imperfect state of things. Though they had not received the promises, yet,

(1.) They saw them afar off. Faith has a clear and a strong eye, and can see promised mercies at a great distance. Abraham saw Christ's day, when it was afar off, and rejoiced, ⁴¹⁸⁶John 8:56.

(2.) They were persuaded of them, that they were true and should be fulfilled. Faith sets to its seal that God is true, and thereby settles and satisfies the soul.

(3.) They embraced them. Their faith was a faith of consent. Faith has a long arm, and can lay hold of blessings at a great distance, can make them present, can love them, and rejoice in them; and thus antedate the enjoyment of them.

(4.) They *confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth.*
Observe,

[1.] Their condition: *Strangers and pilgrims.* They are strangers as saints, whose home is heaven; they are pilgrims as they are travelling towards their home, though often meanly and slowly.

[2.] Their acknowledgment of this their condition: they were not ashamed to own it; both their lips and their lives confessed their present condition. They expected little from the world. They cared not to engage much in it. They endeavoured to lay aside every weight, to gird up the loins of their minds to mind their way, to keep company and pace with their fellow-travellers, looking for difficulties, and bearing them, and longing to get home.

(5.) Hereby they declared plainly that they sought another country (v. 14), heaven, their own country. For their spiritual birth is thence, there are their best relations, and there is their inheritance. This country they seek: their designs are for it; their desires are after it; their discourse is about it; they diligently endeavour to clear up their title to it, to have their temper suited to it, to have their conversation in it, and to come to the enjoyment of it.

(6.) They gave full proof of their sincerity in making such a confession.
For,

[1.] They were not mindful of that country whence they came, v. 15. They did not hanker after the plenty and pleasures of it, nor regret and repent that they had left it; they had no desire to return to it. Note, Those that are once effectually and savingly called out of a sinful state have no mind to return into it again; they now know better things.

[2.] They did not take the opportunity that offered itself for their return. They might have had such an opportunity. They had time enough to return.

They had natural strength to return. They knew the way. Those with whom they sojourned would have been willing enough to part with them. Their old friends would have been glad to receive them. They had sufficient to bear the charges of their journey; and flesh and blood, a corrupt counsellor, would be sometimes suggesting to them a return. But they stedfastly adhered to God and duty under all discouragements and against all temptations to revolt from him. So should we all do. We shall not want opportunities to revolt from God; but we must show the truth of our faith and profession by a steady adherence to him to the end of our days. Their sincerity appeared not only in not returning to their former country, but in desiring a better country, that is, a heavenly. Observe, *First*, The heavenly country is better than any upon earth; it is better situated, better stored with every thing that is good, better secured from every thing that is evil; the employments, the enjoyments, the society, and every thing in it, are better than the best in this world. *Secondly*, All true believers desire this better country. True faith draws forth sincere and fervent desires; and the stronger faith is the more fervent those desires will be.

(7.) They died in the faith of those promises; not only lived by the faith of them, but died in the full persuasion that all the promises would be fulfilled to them and theirs, v. 13. That faith held out to the last. By faith, when they were dying, they received the atonement; they acquiesced in the will of God; they quenched all the fiery darts of the devil; they overcame the terrors of death, disarmed it of its sting, and bade a cheerful farewell to this world and to all the comforts and crosses of it. These were the actings of their faith. Now observe,

3. The gracious and great reward of their faith: *God is not ashamed to be their God, for he hath prepared for them a city*, v. 16. Note,

(1.) God is the God of all true believers; faith gives them an interest in God, and in all his fullness.

(2.) He is called their God. He calls himself so: *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*; he gives them leave to call him so; and he gives them the spirit of adoption, to enable them to cry, *Abba, Father*.

(3.) Notwithstanding their meanness by nature, their vileness by sin, and the poverty of their outward condition, God is not ashamed to be called *their God*: such is his condescension, such is his love to them; therefore

let them never be ashamed of being called his people, nor of any of those that are truly so, how much soever despised in the world. Above all, let them take care that they be not a shame and reproach to their God, and so provoke him to be ashamed of them; but let them act so as to be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.

(4.) As the proof of this, God has prepared for them a city, a happiness suitable to the relation into which he has taken them. For there is nothing in this world commensurate to the love of God in being the God of his people; and, if God neither could nor would give his people anything better than this world affords, he would be ashamed to be called their God. If he takes them into such a relation to himself, he will provide for them accordingly. If he takes them into such a relation to himself, he will provide for them accordingly. If he takes to himself the title of their God, he will fully answer it, and act up to it; and he has prepared that for them in heaven which will fully answer this character and relation, so that it shall never be said, to the reproach and dishonour of God, that he has adopted a people to be his own children and then taken no care to make a suitable provision for them. The consideration of this should inflame the affections, enlarge the desires, and excite the diligent endeavours, of the people of God after this city that he has prepared for them.

VII. Now after the apostle has given this account of the faith of others, with Abraham, he returns to him again, and gives us an instance of the greatest trial and act of faith that stands upon record, either in the story of the father of the faithful or of any of his spiritual seed; and this was his offering up Isaac: *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son,* v. 17. In this great example observe,

1. The trial and exercise of Abraham's faith; he was tried indeed. It is said (⁽¹²¹⁾Genesis 22:1), *God in this tempted Abraham;* not to sin, for so God tempteth no man, but only tried his faith and obedience to purpose. God had before this tempted or tried the faith of Abraham, when he called him away from his country and father's house, — when by a famine he was forced out of Canaan into Egypt, — when he was obliged to fight with five kings to rescue Lot, — when Sarah was taken from him by Abimelech, and in many other instances. But this trial was greater than all; he was commanded to offer up his son Isaac. Read the account of it, ⁽¹²²⁾Genesis 22:2. There you will find every word was a trial: *“Take now thy son, thine*

only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. Take thy son, not one of thy beasts or slaves, thy only son by Sarah, Isaac thy laughter, the child of thy joy and delight, whom thou lovest as thine own soul; take him away to a distant place, three days' journey, the land of Moriah; do not only leave him there, but offer him for a burnt offering." A greater trial was never put upon any creature. The apostle here mentions some things that very much added to the greatness of this trial.

(1.) He was put upon it after he had received the promises, that this Isaac should build up his family, that in him his seed should be called (v. 18), and that he should be one of the progenitors of the Messiah, and all nations blessed in him; so that, in being called to offer up his Isaac, he seemed to be called to destroy and cut off his own family, to cancel the promises of God, to prevent the coming of Christ, to destroy the whole world, to sacrifice his own soul and his hopes of salvation, and to cut off the church of God at one blow: a most terrible trial!

(2.) That this Isaac was his only-begotten son by his wife Sarah, the only one he was to have by her, and the only one that was to be the child and heir of the promise. Ishmael was to be put off with earthly greatness. The promise of a posterity, and of the Messiah, must either be fulfilled by means of this son or not at all; so that, besides his most tender affection to this his son, all his expectations were bound up in him, and, if he perished, must perish with him. If Abraham had ever so many sons, this was the only son who could convey to all nations the promised blessing. A son for whom he waited so long, whom he received in so extraordinary a manner, upon whom his heart was set — to have this son offered up as a sacrifice, and that by his own hand; it was a trial that would have upset the firmest and the strongest mind that ever informed a human body.

2. The actings of Abraham's faith in so great a trial: he obeyed; he offered up Isaac; he intentionally gave him up by his submissive soul to God, and was ready to have done it actually, according to the command of God; he went as far in it as to the very critical moment, and would have gone through with it if God had not prevented him. Nothing could be more tender and moving than those words of Isaac: *My father, here is the wood, here is the fire; but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?* little

thinking that he was to be the lamb; but Abraham knew it, and yet he went on with the great design.

3. The supports of his faith. they must be very great, suitable to the greatness of the trial: *He accounted that God was able to raise him from the dead*, v. 19. His faith was supported by the sense he had of the mighty power of God, who was able to raise the dead; he reasoned thus with himself, and so he resolved all his doubts. It does not appear that he had any expectation of being countermanded, and prevented from offering up his son; such an expectation would have spoiled the trial, and consequently the triumph, of his faith; but he knew that God was able to raise him from the dead, and he believed that God would do so, since such great things depended upon his son, which must have failed if Isaac had not a further life. Observe,

(1.) God is able to raise the dead, to raise dead bodies, and to raise dead souls.

(2.) The belief of this will carry us through the greatest difficulties and trials that we can meet with.

(3.) It is our duty to be reasoning down our doubts and fears, by the consideration of the almighty power of God.

4. The reward of his faith in this great trial (v. 19): he received his son from the dead in a figure, in a parable.

(1.) He received his son. He had parted with him to God, and God gave him back again. The best way to enjoy our comforts with comfort is to resign them up to God; he will then return them, if not in kind, yet in kindness.

(2.) He received him from the dead, for he gave him up for dead; he was as a dead child to him, and the return was to him no less than a resurrection.

(3.) This was a figure or parable of something further. It was a figure of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, of whom Isaac was a type. It was a figure and earnest of the glorious resurrection of all true believers, whose life is not lost, but hid with Christ in God. We come now to the faith of other Old-Testament saints, mentioned by name, and by the particular trials and actings of their faith.

VIII. Of the faith of Isaac, v. 20. Something of him we had before interwoven with the story of Abraham; here we have something of a distinct nature — that by faith he blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau, *concerning things to come*. Here observe,

1. The actings of his faith: He *blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come*. He blessed them; that is, he resigned them up to God in covenant; he recommended God and religion to them; he prayed for them, and prophesied concerning them, what would be the condition, and the condition of their descendants: we have the account of this in Genesis 27. Observe,

(1.) Both Jacob and Esau were blessed as Isaac's children, at least as to temporal good things. It is a great privilege to be the offspring of good parents, and often the wicked children of good parents fare the better in this world for their parents' sake, for things present are in the covenant; but they are not the best things, and no man knoweth love or hatred by having or wanting such things.

(2.) Jacob had the precedency and the principal blessing, which shows that it is grace and the new birth that exalt persons above their fellows and qualify them for the best blessings, and that it is owing to the sovereign free grace of God that in the same family one is taken and another left, one loved and the other hated, since all the race of Adam are by nature hateful to God — that if one has his portion in this world, and the other in the better world, it is God who makes the difference; for even the comforts of this life are more and better than any of the children of men deserve.

2. The difficulties Isaac's faith struggled with.

(1.) He seemed to have forgotten how God had determined the matter at the birth of these his sons, ⁽¹²³⁾Genesis 25:23. This should have been a rule to him all along, but he was rather swayed by natural affection, and by general custom, which gives the double portion of honour, affection, and advantage, to the first-born.

(2.) He acted in this matter with some reluctance. When he came to pronounce the blessing, *he trembled very exceedingly* (⁽¹²³⁾Genesis 27:33); and he charged Jacob that he had subtly taken away Esau's blessing, v. 33, 35. But, notwithstanding all this, Isaac's faith recovered itself, and he ratified the blessing: *I have blessed him yea, and he shall be blessed*.

Rebecca and Jacob are not to be justified in the indirect means they used to obtain this blessing, but God will be justified in overruling even the sins of men to serve the purposes of his glory. Now, the faith of Isaac thus prevailing over his unbelief, it has pleased the God of Isaac to pass by the weakness of his faith, to commend the sincerity of it, and record him among the elders, *who through faith have obtained a good report*. We now go on to,

IX. The faith of Jacob (v. 21), who, *when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff*. There were a great many instances of the faith of Jacob; his life was a life of faith, and his faith met with great exercise. But it has pleased God to single two instances out of many of the faith of this patriarch, besides what has been already mentioned in the account of Abraham. Here observe,

1. The actings of his faith here mentioned, and they are two: —

(1.) *He blessed both the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh*; he adopted them into the number of his own sons, and so into the congregation of Israel, though they were born in Egypt. It is doubtless a great blessing to be joined to the visible church of God in profession and privilege, but more to be so in spirit and truth.

[1.] He made them both heads of different tribes, as if they had been his own immediate sons.

[2.] He prayed for them, that they might both be blessed of God.

[3.] He prophesied that they should be blessed; but, as Isaac did before, so now Jacob prefers the younger, Ephraim; and though Joseph had placed them so, that the right hand of his father should be laid on Manasseh, the elder, Jacob wittingly laid it on Ephraim, and this by divine direction, for he could not see, to show that the Gentile church, the younger, should have a more abundant blessing than the Jewish church, the elder.

(2.) *He worshipped, leaning on his staff*; that is, he praised God for what he had done for him, and for the prospect he had of approaching blessedness; and he prayed for those he was leaving behind him, that religion might live in his family when he was gone. He did this *leaning on the top of his staff*; not as the papists dream, that he worshipped some image of God engraven on the head of his staff, but intimating to us his great natural weakness, that he was not able to support himself so far as to

sit up in his bed without a staff, and yet that he would not make this an excuse for neglecting the worshipping of God; he would do it as well as he could with his body, as well as with his spirit, though he could not do it as well as he would. He showed thereby his dependence upon God, and testified his condition here as a pilgrim with his staff, and his weariness of the world, and willingness to be at rest.

2. The time and season when Jacob thus acted his faith: when he was dying. He lived by faith, and he died by faith and in faith. Observe, Though the grace of faith is of universal use throughout our whole lives, yet it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its greatest work to do at last, to help believers to finish well, to die to the Lord, so as to honour him, by patience, hope, and joy — so as to leave a witness behind them of the truth of God's word and the excellency of his ways, for the conviction and establishment of all who attend them in their dying moments. The best way in which parents can finish their course is blessing their families and worshipping their God. We have now come to,

X. The faith of Joseph, v. 22. And here also we consider,

1. What he did by his faith: *He made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones.* The passage is out of ^(KJB)Genesis 50:24, 25. Joseph was eminent for his faith, though he had not enjoyed the helps for it which the rest of his brethren had. He was sold into Egypt. He was tried by temptations, by sin, by persecution, for retaining his integrity. He was tried by preferment and power in the court of Pharaoh, and yet his faith held out and carried him through to the last.

(1.) He made mention by faith of the departing of the children of Israel, that the time should come when they should be delivered out of Egypt; and he did this both that he might caution them against the thoughts of settling in Egypt, which was now a place of plenty and ease to them; and also that he might keep them from sinking under the calamities and distresses which he foresaw were coming upon them there; and he does it to comfort himself, that though he should not live to see their deliverance, yet he could die in the faith of it.

(2.) He gave commandment concerning his bones, that they should preserve them unburied in Egypt, till God should deliver them out of that house of bondage, and that then they should carry his bones along with

them into Canaan and deposit them there. Though believers are chiefly concerned for their souls, yet they cannot wholly neglect their bodies, as being members of Christ and parts of themselves, which shall at length be raised up, and be the happy companions of their glorified souls to all eternity. Now Joseph gave this order, not that he thought his being buried in Egypt would either prejudice his soul or prevent the resurrection of his body (as some of the rabbis fancied that all the Jews who were buried out of Canaan must be conveyed underground to Canaan before they could rise again), but to testify,

[1.] That though he had lived and died in Egypt, yet he did not live and die an Egyptian, but an Israelite.

[2.] That he preferred a significant burial in Canaan before a magnificent one in Egypt.

[3.] That he would go as far with his people as he could, though he could not go as far as he would.

[4.] That he believed the resurrection of the body, and the communion that his soul should presently have with departed saints, as his body had with their dead bodies.

[5.] To assure them that God would be with them in Egypt, and deliver them out of it in his own time and way.

2. When it was that the faith of Joseph acted after this manner; namely, as in the case of Jacob, when he was dying. God often gives his people living comforts in dying moments; and when he does it is their duty, as they can, to communicate them to those about them, for the glory of God, for the honour of religion, and for the good of their brethren and friends. We go on now to,

XI. The faith of the parents of Moses, which is cited from ~~Exo~~ Exodus 2:3, etc. Here observe,

1. The acting of their faith: they hid this their son three months. Though only the mother of Moses is mentioned in the history, yet, by what is here said, it seems his father not only consented to it, but consulted about it. It is a happy thing where yoke-fellows draw together in the yoke of faith, as heirs of the grace of God; and when they do this in a religious concern for the good of their children, to preserve them not only from those who

would destroy their lives, but from those who would corrupt their minds. Observe, Moses was persecuted betimes, and forced to be concealed; in this he was a type of Christ, who was persecuted almost as soon as he was born, and his parents were obliged to flee with him into Egypt for his preservation. It is a great mercy to be free from wicked laws and edicts; but, when we are not, we must use all lawful means for our security. In this faith of Moses's parents there was a mixture of unbelief, but God was pleased to overlook it.

2. The reasons of their thus acting. No doubt, natural affection could not but move them; but there was something further. They *saw he was a proper child, a goodly child* (⁽¹¹²⁾Exodus 2:2), *exceedingly fair*, as in ⁽⁴¹²⁾Acts 7:20, *asteios to Theo* — *venustus Deo* — *fair to God*. There appeared in him something uncommon; the beauty of the Lord sat upon him, as a presage that he was born to great things, and that by conversing with God his face should shine (⁽¹³⁹⁾Exodus 34:29), what bright and illustrious actions he should do for the deliverance of Israel, and how his name should shine in the sacred records. Sometimes, not always, the countenance is the index of the mind.

3. The prevalency of their faith over their fear. They were not afraid of the king's commandment, ⁽¹¹²⁾Exodus 1:22. That was a wicked and a cruel edict, that all the males of the Israelites should be destroyed in their infancy, and so the name of Israel must be destroyed out of the earth. But they did not so fear as presently to give up their child; they considered that, if none of the males were preserved, there would be an end and utter ruin of the church of God and the true religion, and that though in their present state of servitude and oppression one would praise the dead rather than the living, yet they believed that God would preserve his people, and that the time was coming when it would be worth while for an Israelite to live. Some must hazard their own lives to preserve their children, and they were resolved to do it; they knew the king's commandment was evil in itself, contrary to the laws of God and nature, and therefore of no authority nor obligation. Faith is a great preservative against the sinful slavish fear of men, as it sets God before the soul, and shows the vanity of the creature and its subordination to the will and power of God. The apostle next proceeds to,

XII. The faith of Moses himself (v. 24, 25, etc.), here observe,

1. An instance of his faith in conquering the world.

(1.) He *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*, whose foundling he was, and her fondling too; she had adopted him for his son, and he refused it. Observe,

[1.] How great a temptation Moses was under. Pharaoh's daughter is said to have been his only child, and was herself childless; and having found Moses, and saved him as she did, she resolved to take him and bring him up as her son; and so he stood fair to be in time king of Egypt, and he might thereby have been serviceable to Israel. He owed his life to this princess; and to refuse such kindness from her would look not only like ingratitude to her, but a neglect of Providence, that seemed to intend his advancement and his brethren's advantage.

[2.] How glorious was the triumph of his faith in so great a trial. He *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter* lest he should undervalue the truer honour of being a son of Abraham, the father of the faithful; *he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter* lest it should look like renouncing his religion as well as his relation to Israel; and no doubt both these he must have done if he had accepted this honour; he therefore nobly refused it.

(2.) He chose *rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*, v. 25. He was willing to take his lot with the people of God here, though it was a suffering lot, that he might have his portion with them hereafter, rather than to enjoy all the sensual sinful pleasures of Pharaoh's court, which would be but for a season, and would then be punished with everlasting misery. Herein he acted rationally as well as religiously, and conquered the temptation to worldly pleasure as he had done before to worldly preferment. Here observe,

[1.] The pleasures of sin are and will be but short; they must end in speedy repentance or in speedy ruin.

[2.] The pleasures of this world, and especially those of a court, are too often the pleasures of sin; and they are always so when we cannot enjoy them without deserting God and his people. A true believer will despise them when they are offered upon such terms.

[3.] Suffering is to be chosen rather than sin, there being more evil in the least sin than there can be in the greatest suffering.

[4.] It greatly alleviates the evil of suffering when we suffer with the people of God, embarked in the same interest and animated by the same Spirit.

(3.) He accounted *the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt*, v. 26. See how Moses weighed matters: in one scale he put the worst of religion — *the reproaches of Christ*, in the other scale the best of the world — *the treasures of Egypt*; and in his judgment, directed by faith, the worst of religion weighed down the best of the world. The reproaches of the church of God are *the reproaches of Christ*, who is, and has ever been, the head of the church. Now here Moses conquered the riches of the world, as before he had conquered its honours and pleasures. God's people are, and always have been, a reproached people. Christ accounts himself reproached in their reproaches; and, while he thus interests himself in their reproaches, they become riches, and greater riches than the treasures of the richest empire in the world; for Christ will reward them with a crown of glory that fades not away. Faith discerns this, and determines and acts accordingly.

2. The circumstance of time is taken notice of, when Moses by his faith gained this victory over the world, in all its honours, pleasures, and treasures: *When he had come to years* (v. 24); not only to years of discretion, but of experience, to the age of forty years — when he was great, or had come to maturity. Some would take this as detracting from his victory, that he gained it so late, that he did not make this choice sooner; but it is rather an enhancement of the honour of his self-denial and victory over the world that he made this choice when he had grown ripe for judgment and enjoyment, able to know what he did and why he did it. It was not the act of a child, that prefers counters to gold, but it proceeded from mature deliberation. It is an excellent thing for persons to be seriously religious when in the midst of worldly business and enjoyments, to despise the world when they are most capable of relishing and enjoying it.

3. What it was that supported and strengthened the faith of Moses to such a degree as to enable him to gain such a victory over the world: *He had respect unto the recompense of reward*, that is, say some, the deliverance

out of Egypt; but doubtless it means much more — the glorious reward of faith and fidelity in the other world. Observe here,

(1.) Heaven is a great reward, surpassing not only all our deservings, but all our conceptions. It is a reward suitable to the price paid for it — the blood of Christ; suitable to the perfections of God, and fully answering to all his promises. It is a recompense of reward, because given by a righteous Judge for the righteousness of Christ to righteous persons, according to the righteous rule of the covenant of grace.

(2.) Believers may and ought to have respect to this recompense of reward; they should acquaint themselves with it, approve of it, and live in the daily and delightful expectation of it. Thus it will prove a land-mark to direct their course, a load-stone to draw their hearts, a sword to conquer their enemies, a spur to quicken them to duty, and a cordial to refresh them under all the difficulties of doing and suffering work.

4. We have another instance of the faith of Moses, namely, in forsaking Egypt: *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, v. 27.* Observe here,

(1.) The product of his faith: *He forsook Egypt*, and all its power and pleasures, and undertook the conduct of Israel out of it. Twice Moses forsook Egypt:

[1.] As a supposed criminal, when the king's wrath was incensed against him for killing the Egyptian (^{<0214>}Exodus 2:14, 15), where it is said he feared, not with a fear of despondency, but of discretion, to save his life.

[2.] As a commander and ruler in Jeshurun, after God had employed him to humble Pharaoh and make him willing to let Israel go.

(2.) The prevalency of his faith. It raised him above the fear of the king's wrath. Though he knew that it was great, and levelled at him in particular, and that it marched at the head of a numerous host to pursue him, yet he was not dismayed, and he said to Israel, *Fear not*, (^{<0243>}Exodus 14:13. Those who forsook Egypt must expect the wrath of men; but they need not fear it, for they are under the conduct of that God who is able to make the wrath of man to praise him, and restrain the remainder of it.

(3.) The principle upon which his faith acted in these his motions: *He endured, as seeing him that was invisible.* He bore up with invincible

courage under all danger, and endured all the fatigue of his employment, which was very great; and this by seeing the invisible God. Observe,

[1.] The God with whom we have to do is an invisible God: he is so to our senses, to the eye of the body; and this shows the folly of those who pretend to make images of God, whom no man hath seen, nor can see.

[2.] By faith we may see this invisible God. We may be fully assured of his existence, of his providence, and of his gracious and powerful presence with us.

[3.] Such a sight of God will enable believers to endure to the end whatever they may meet with in the way.

5. We have yet another instance of the faith of Moses, in keeping *the passover and sprinkling of blood*, v. 28. The account of this we have in ~~Exodus~~ Exodus 12:13-23. Though all Israel kept this passover, yet it was by Moses that God delivered the institution of it; and, though it was a great mystery, Moses by faith both delivered it to the people and kept it that night in the house where he lodged. The passover was one of the most solemn institutions of the Old Testament, and a very significant type of Christ. The occasion of its first observance was extraordinary: it was in the same night that God slew the first-born of the Egyptians; but, though the Israelites lived among them, the destroying angel passed over their houses, and spared them and theirs. Now, to entitle them to this distinguishing favour, and to mark them out for it, a lamb must be slain; the blood of it must be sprinkled with a bunch of hyssop upon the lintel of the door, and on the two side-posts; the flesh of the lamb must be roasted with fire; and it must be all of it eaten that very night with bitter herbs, in a travelling posture, their loins girt, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand. This was accordingly done, and the destroying angel passed over them, and slew the first-born of the Egyptians. This opened a way for the return of Abraham's posterity into the land of promise. The accommodation of this type is not difficult.

(1.) Christ is that Lamb, he is our Passover, he was sacrificed for us.

(2.) His blood must be sprinkled; it must be applied to those who have the saving benefit of it.

(3.) It is applied effectually only to the Israelites, the chosen people of God.

(4.) It is not owing to our inherent righteousness or best performances that we are saved from the wrath of God, but to the blood of Christ and his imputed righteousness. If any of the families of Israel had neglected the sprinkling of this blood upon their doors, though they should have spent all the night in prayer, the destroying angel would have broken in upon them, and slain their first-born.

(5.) Wherever this blood is applied, the soul receives a whole Christ by faith, and lives upon him.

(6.) This true faith makes sin bitter to the soul, even while it receives the pardon and atonement.

(7.) All our spiritual privileges on earth should quicken us to set out early, and get forward, in our way to heaven.

(8.) Those who have been marked out must ever remember and acknowledge free and distinguishing grace.

XIII. The next instance of faith is that of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea under the conduct of Moses their leader, v. 29. The story we have in Exodus, Hebrews 14. Observe,

1. The preservation and safe passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, when there was no other way to escape from Pharaoh and his host, who were closely pursuing them. Here we may observe,

(1.) Israel's danger was very great; an enraged enemy with chariots and horsemen behind them; steep rocks and mountains on either hand, and the Red Sea before them.

(2.) Their deliverance was very glorious. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; the grace of faith will help us through all the dangers we meet with in our way to heaven.

2. The destruction of the Egyptians. They, presumptuously attempting to follow Israel through the Red Sea, being thus blinded and hardened to their ruin, were all drowned. Their rashness was great, and their ruin was grievous. When God judges, he will overcome; and it is plain that the destruction of sinners is of themselves.

XIV. The next instance of faith is that of the Israelites, under Joshua their leader, before the walls of Jericho. The story we have ⁽¹⁶⁶⁵⁾Joshua 6:5, etc. Here observe,

1. The means prescribed to God to bring down the walls of Jericho. It was ordered that they should compass the walls about once a day for seven days together and seven times the last day, that the priests should carry the ark when they compassed the walls about, and should blow with trumpets made of rams' horns, and sound a longer blast than before, and then all the people should shout, and the walls of Jericho should fall before them. Here was a great trial of their faith. The method prescribed seemed very improbable to answer such an end, and would doubtless expose them to the daily contempt of their enemies; the ark of God would seem to be in danger. But this was the way God commanded them to take, and he loves to do great things by small and contemptible means, that his own arm may be made bare.

2. The powerful success of the prescribed means. The walls of Jericho fell before them. This was a frontier town in the land of Canaan, the first that stood out against the Israelites. God was pleased in this extraordinary manner to slight and dismantle it, in order to magnify himself, to terrify the Canaanites, to strengthen the faith of the Israelites, and to exclude all boasting. God can and will in his own time and way cause all the powerful opposition that is made to his interest and glory to fall down, and the grace of faith is mighty through God for the pulling down of strong-holds; he will make Babylon fall before the faith of his people, and, when he has some great thing to do for them, he raises up great and strong faith in them.

XV. The next instance is the faith of Rahab, v. 31. Among the noble army of believing worthies, bravely marshalled by the apostle, Rahab comes in the rear, to show *that God is no respecter of persons*. Here consider,

1. Who this Rahab was.

(1.) She was a Canaanite, a *stranger to the commonwealth of Israel*, and had but little help for faith, and yet she was a believer; the power of divine grace greatly appears when it works without the usual means of grace.

(2.) She was a harlot, and lived in a way of sin; she was not only a keeper of a public house, but a common woman of the town, and yet she believed

that the greatness of sin, if truly repented of, shall be no bar to the pardoning mercy of God. Christ has saved the chief of sinners. *Where sin has abounded, grace has superabounded.*

2. What she did by her faith: *She received the spies in peace*, the men that Joshua had sent to spy out Jericho, ~~10:16~~ Joshua 2:6, 7. She not only bade them welcome, but she concealed them from their enemies who sought to cut them off, and she made a noble confession of her faith, v. 9-11. She engaged them to covenant with her to show favour to her and hers, when God should show kindness to them, and that they would give her a sign, which they did, a line of scarlet, which she was to hang forth out of the window; she sent them away with prudent and friendly advice. Learn here,

(1.) True faith will show itself in good works, especially towards the people of God.

(2.) Faith will venture all hazards in the cause of God and his people; a true believer will sooner expose his own person than God's interest and people.

(3.) A true believer is desirous, not only to be in covenant with God, but in communion with the people of God, and is willing to cast in his lot with them, and to fare as they fare.

3. What she gained by her faith. She escaped perishing with those that believed not. Observe,

(1.) The generality of her neighbours, friends, and fellow-citizens, perished; it was an utter destruction that befell that city: man and beast were cut off.

(2.) The cause of the people of Jericho's destruction — unbelief. They believed not that Israel's God was the true God, though they had evidence sufficient of it.

(3.) The signal preservation of Rahab. Joshua gave a strict charge that she should be spared, and none but she and hers; and she taking care that the sign, the scarlet thread, should be hung out, her family were marked out for mercy, and perished not. Singular faith, when the generality are not only unbelievers, but against believers, will be rewarded with singular favours in times of common calamity.

HEBREWS 11:32-40

EXEMPLARS OF FAITH

The apostle having given us a classis of many eminent believers, whose names are mentioned and the particular trials and actings of their faith recorded, now concludes his narrative with a more summary account of another set of believers, where the particular acts are not ascribed to particular persons by name, but left to be applied by those who are well acquainted with the sacred story; and, like a divine orator, he prefaces his part of the narrative with an elegant expostulation: *What shall I say more? Time would fail me*; as if he had said, “It is in vain to attempt to exhaust this subject; should I not restrain my pen, it would soon run beyond the bounds of an epistle; and therefore I shall but just mention a few more, and leave you to enlarge upon them.” Observe,

1. After all our researches into the scripture, there is still more to be learned from them.
2. We must well consider in divine matters what we should say, and suit it as well as we can to the time.
3. We should be pleased to think how great the number of believers was under the Old Testament, and how strong their faith, though the objects thereof were not then so fully revealed. And,
4. We should lament it, that now, in gospel times, when the rule of faith is more clear and perfect, the number of believers should be so small and their faith so weak.

I. In this summary account the apostle mentions,

1. Gideon, whose story we have in ^(xli)Judges 6:11, etc. He was an eminent instrument raised up of God to deliver his people from the oppression of the Midianites; he was a person of mean tribe and family, called from a mean employment (threshing wheat), and saluted by an angel of God in this surprising manner, *The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of war*. Gideon could not at first receive such honours, but humbly expostulates with the angel about their low and distressed state. The angel of the Lord delivers him his commission, and assures him of success, confirming the assurance by fire out of the rock. Gideon is directed to offer sacrifice, and,

instructed in his duty, goes forth against the Midianites, when his army is reduced from thirty-two thousand to three hundred; yet by these, with their lamps and pitchers, God put the whole army of the Midianites to confusion and ruin: and the same faith that gave Gideon so much courage and honour enabled him to act with great meekness and modesty towards his brethren afterwards. It is the excellency of the grace of faith that, while it helps men to do great things, it keeps them from having high and great thoughts of themselves.

2. Barak, another instrument raised up to deliver Israel out of the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, Judges 4, where we read,

(1.) Though he was a soldier, yet he received his commission and instructions from Deborah, a *prophetess of the Lord*; and he insisted upon having this divine oracle with him in his expedition.

(2.) He obtained a great victory by his faith over all the host of Sisera.

(3.) His faith taught him to return all the praise and glory to God: this is the nature of faith; it has recourse unto God in all dangers and difficulties, and then makes grateful returns to God for all mercies and deliverances.

3. Samson, another instrument that God raised up to deliver Israel from the Philistines: his story we have in Judges 13, 14, 15, and 16, and from it we learn that the grace of faith is the strength of the soul for great service. If Samson had not had a strong faith as well as a strong arm, he had never performed such exploits. Observe,

(1.) By faith the servants of God shall overcome even the roaring lion.

(2.) True faith is acknowledged and accepted, even when mingled with many failings.

(3.) The believer's faith endures to the end, and, in dying, gives him victory over death and all his deadly enemies; his greatest conquest he gains by dying.

4. Jephthah, whose story we have, Jud. 11, before that of Samson. He was raised up to deliver Israel from the Ammonites. As various and new enemies rise up against the people of God, various and new deliverers are raised up for them. In the story of Jephthah observe,

(1.) The grace of God often finds out, and fastens upon, the most undeserving and ill-deserving persons, to do great things for them and by them. Jephthah was the son of a harlot.

(2.) The grace of faith, wherever it is, will put men upon acknowledging God in all their ways (^{<small>Heb 11:11</small>): *Jephthah rehearsed all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh.*}

(3.) The grace of faith will make men bold and venturous in a good cause.

(4.) Faith will not only put men upon making their vows to God, but paying their vows after the mercy received; yea, though they have vowed to their own great grief, hurt, and loss, as in the case of Jephthah and his daughter.

5. David, that great man after God's own heart. Few ever met with greater trials, and few ever discovered a more lively faith. His first appearance on the stage of the world was a great evidence of his faith. Having, when young, slain *the lion and the bear*, his faith in God encouraged him to encounter the great Goliath, and helped him to triumph over him. The same faith enabled him to bear patiently the ungrateful malice of Saul and his favourites, and to wait till God should put him into possession of the promised power and dignity. The same faith made him a very successful and victorious prince, and, after a long life of virtue and honour (though not without some foul stains of sin), he died in faith, relying upon the everlasting covenant that God had made with him and his, ordered in all things and sure; and he has left behind him such excellent memoirs of the trials and acts of faith in the book of Psalms as will ever be of great esteem and use, among the people of God.

6. Samuel, raised up to be a most eminent prophet of the Lord to Israel, as well as a ruler over them. God revealed himself to Samuel when he was but a child, and continued to do so till his death. In his story observe,

(1.) Those are likely to grow up to some eminency in faith who begin betimes in the exercise of it.

(2.) Those whose business it is to reveal the mind and will of God to others had need to be well established in the belief of it themselves.

7. To Samuel he adds, *and of the prophets*, who were extraordinary ministers of the Old-Testament church, employed of God sometimes to

denounce judgment, sometimes to promise mercy, always to reprove sin; sometimes to foretell remarkable events, known only to God; and chiefly to give notice of the Messiah, his coming, person, and offices; for in him the prophets as well as the law center. Now a true and strong faith was very requisite for the right discharge of such an office as this.

II. Having done naming particular persons, he proceeds to tell us what things were done by their faith. He mentions some things that easily apply themselves to one or other of the persons named; but he mentions other things that are not so easy to be accommodated to any here named, but must be left to general conjecture or accommodation.

1. *By faith they subdued kingdoms*, v. 33. Thus did David, Joshua, and many of the judges. Learn hence,

- (1.)** The interests and powers of kings and kingdoms are often set up in opposition to God and his people.
- (2.)** God can easily subdue all those kings and kingdoms that set themselves to oppose him.
- (3.)** Faith is a suitable and excellent qualification of those who fight in the ways of the Lord; it makes them just, bold, and wise.

2. They *wrought righteousness*, both in their public and personal capacities; they turned many from idolatry to the ways of righteousness; they believed God, and it was imputed to them for righteousness; they walked and acted righteously towards God and man. It is a greater honour and happiness to work righteousness than to work miracles; faith is an active principle of universal righteousness.

3. They *obtained promises*, both general and special. It is faith that gives us an interest in the promises; it is by faith that we have the comfort of the promises; and it is by faith that we are prepared to wait for the promises, and in due time to receive them.

4. They *stopped the mouths of lions*; so did Samson, ^{<0745>}Judges 14:5, 6, and David, ^{<073>}1 Samuel 17:34, 35, and Daniel, 6:22. Here learn,

- (1.)** The power of God is above the power of the creature.
- (2.)** Faith engages the power of God for his people, whenever it shall be for his glory, to overcome brute beasts and brutish men.

5. They *quenched the violence of the fire*, v. 34. So Moses, by the prayer of faith, quenched the fire of God's wrath that was kindled against the people of Israel, ^{<4110>}Numbers 11:1, 2. So did the three children, or rather mighty champions, ^{<2177>}Daniel 3:17-27. Their faith in God, refusing to worship the golden image, exposed them to the fiery furnace which Nebuchadnezzar had prepared for them, and their faith engaged for them that power and presence of God in the furnace which quenched the violence of the fire, so that not so much as the smell thereof passed on them. Never was the grace of faith more severely tried, never more nobly exerted, nor ever more gloriously rewarded, than theirs was.

6. They *escaped the edge of the sword*. Thus David escaped the sword of Goliath and of Saul; and Mordecai and the Jews escaped the sword of Haman. The swords of men are held in the hand of God, and he can blunt the edge of the sword, and turn it away from his people against their enemies when he pleases. Faith takes hold of that hand of God which has hold of the swords of men; and God has often suffered himself to be prevailed upon by the faith of his people.

7. *Out of weakness they were made strong*. From national weakness, into which the Jews often fell by their unbelief; upon the revival of their faith, all their interest and affairs revived and flourished. From bodily weakness; thus Hezekiah, believing the word of God, recovered out of a mortal distemper, and he ascribed his recovery to the promise and power of God (^{<2185>}Isaiah 38:15, 16), *What shall I say? He hath spoken it, and he hath also done it. Lord by these things men live, and in these is the life of my spirit*. And it is the same grace of faith that from spiritual weakness helps men to recover and renew their strength.

8. They *grew valiant in fight*. So did Joshua, the judges, and David. True faith gives truest courage and patience, as it discerns the strength of God, and thereby the weakness of all his enemies. And they were not only valiant, but successful. God, as a reward and encouragement of their faith, *put to flight the armies of the aliens*, of those who were aliens to their commonwealth, and enemies to their religion; God made them flee and fall before his faithful servants. Believing and praying commanders, at the head of believing and praying armies, have been so owned and honoured of God that nothing could stand before them.

9. *Women received their dead raised to life again*, v. 35. So did the widow of Zarepath (^{<1172>}1 Kings 17:23), and the Shunamite, ^{<1176>}2 Kings 4:36.

(1.) *In Christ there is neither male nor female*; many of the weaker sex have been strong in faith.

(2.) Though the covenant of grace takes in the children of believers, yet it leaves them subject to natural death.

(3.) Poor mothers are loth to resign up their interest in their children, though death has taken them away.

(4.) God has sometimes yielded so far to the tender affections of sorrowful women as to restore their dead children to life again. Thus Christ had compassion on the widow of Nain, ~~4172~~Luke 7:12, etc.

(5.) This should confirm our faith in the general resurrection.

III. The apostle tells us what these believers endured by faith.

1. They *were tortured, not accepting deliverance*, v. 35. They were put upon the rack, to make them renounce their God, their Saviour, and their religion. They bore the torture, and would not accept of deliverance upon such vile terms; and that which animated them thus to suffer was the hope they had of *obtaining a better resurrection*, and deliverance upon more honourable terms. This is thought to refer to that memorable story, 2 Macc. 7, etc.

2. They endured *trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, and bonds and imprisonment*, v. 36. They were persecuted in their reputation by *mockings*, which are cruel to an ingenuous mind; in their persons by *scourging*, the punishment of slaves; in their liberty by *bonds and imprisonment*. Observe how inveterate is the malice that wicked men have towards the righteous, how far it will go, and what a variety of cruelties it will invent and exercise upon those against whom they have no cause of quarrel, except in the matters of their God.

3. They were put to death in the most cruel manner; some *were stoned*, as Zechariah (~~4221~~2 Chronicles 24:21), *sawn asunder*, as Isaiah by Manasseh. *They were tempted*; some read it, *burnt*, 2 Macc. 7:5. *They were slain with the sword*. All sorts of deaths were prepared for them; their enemies clothed death in all the array of cruelty and terror, and yet they boldly met it and endured it.

4. Those who escaped death were used so ill that death might seem more eligible than such a life. Their enemies spared them, only to prolong their

misery, and wear out all their patience; for they were forced to *wander about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented; they wandered about in deserts, and on mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth*, v. 37, 38. They were stripped of the conveniences of life, and turned out of house and harbour. They had not raiment to put on, but were forced to cover themselves with the skins of slain beasts. They were driven out of all human society, and forced to converse with the beasts of the field, to hide themselves in dens and caves, and make their complaint to rocks and rivers, not more obdurate than their enemies. Such sufferings as these they endured then for their faith; and such they endured through the power of the grace of faith: and which shall we most admire, the wickedness of human nature, that is capable of perpetrating such cruelties on fellow creatures, or the excellency of divine grace, that is able to bear up the faithful under such cruelties, and to carry them safely through all?

IV. What they obtained by their faith.

1. A most honourable character and commendation from God, the true Judge and fountain of honour — that *the world was not worthy* of such men; the world did not deserve such blessings; they did not know how to value them, nor how to use them. Wicked men! The righteous are not worthy to live in the world, and God declares the world is not worthy of them; and, though they widely differ in their judgment, they agree in this, that it is not fit that good men should have their rest in this world; and therefore God receives them out of it, to that world that is suitable to them, and yet far beyond the merit of all their services and sufferings.
2. They *obtained a good report* (v. 39) of all good men, and of the truth itself, and have the honour to be enrolled in this sacred calendar of the Old-Testament worthies, God's witnesses; yea, they had a witness for them in the consciences of their enemies, who, while they thus abused them, were condemned by their own consciences, as persecuting those who were more righteous than themselves.
3. They obtained an interest in the promises, though not the full possession of them. They had a title to the promises, though they received not the great things promised. This is not meant of the felicity of the heavenly state, for this they did receive, when they died, in the measure of a part, in one constituent part of their persons, and the much better part; but it is

meant of the felicity of the gospel-state: they had types, but not the antitype; they had shadows, but had not seen the substance; and yet, under this imperfect dispensation, they discovered this precious faith. This the apostle insists upon to render the faith more illustrious, and to provoke Christians to a holy jealousy and emulation; that they should not suffer themselves to be outdone in the exercise of faith by those who came so short of them in all the helps and advantages for believing. He tells the Hebrews that God had *provided some better things for* them (v. 40), and therefore they might be assured that he expected at least as good things from them; and that since the gospel is the end and perfection of the Old Testament, which had no excellency but in its reference to Christ and the gospel, it was expected that their faith should be as much more perfect than the faith of the Old-Testament saints; for their state and dispensation were more perfect than the former, and were indeed the perfection and completion of the former, for without the gospel-church the Jewish church must have remained in an incomplete and imperfect state. This reasoning is strong, and should be effectually prevalent with us all.