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BY FAITH
By William M. Smith

An Exposition and Interpretation
Of Hebrews, Chapter 11

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CONTENTS

Introduction

- 01 -- The Definition Of Faith
- 02 -- Faith Demonstrated In History
- 03 -- The Power Of God's Word
- 04 -- A Notable Omission
- 05 -- The First Man Of Faith
- 06 -- Faith That Conquered Death
- 07 -- A Principle Stated
- 08 -- Faith That Saved The Race
- 09 -- The Father Of Many Nations
- 10 -- Faith Under Trial
- 11 -- Isaac Blessing His Sons
- 12 -- Faith Outlives Death
- 13 -- The Man Whose Bones Prophesied
- 14 -- The Faith Of Parents
- 15 -- Moses' Career Of Faith
- 16 -- Moses' Qualifications For Service
- 17 -- Some Of Moses' Excuses
- 18 -- Moses' Faith Saved The Firstborn
- 19 -- The Simplicity Of Salvation
- 20 -- Faith In The Physical Realm
- 21 -- Faith Breaks Down Walls
- 22 -- Faith Against Faith
- 23 -- The Abundance Of Material
- 24 -- Another Aspect Of Faith
- 25 -- The Endurance Of Faith
- 26 -- The World's Unworthies
- 27 -- The Better Things For Us
- 28 -- The Exhortation To Us
- 29 -- The Origin Of Faith
- 30 -- Preparing For The Race
- 31 -- The Great Exemplar Of Faith
- 32 -- The Stimulating Hope

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INTRODUCTION

By way of introduction it seems best to give a little attention to the purpose of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

When Jesus went away He had not given full instructions as to the purpose and operation of the church. Some of His last words to the disciples were, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." (John 10:12,13a).

What the Spirit later revealed is given in the Acts and Epistles. The converted Jews who remained in Jerusalem and Judea needed an Epistle of special instruction. The time was approaching when Jerusalem would be destroyed, and the Temple and its ordinances would be abolished. As stated in Hebrews 13:14, "Here have we no continuing city." It is not surprising that these converted Jews continued to observe the ordinances of the Temple. Peter and John, as stated in Acts 3:1, "went up together unto the Temple at the hour of prayer." It appears also, that the Temple was the center of the activities of the Apostles and the early church. Acts 5:42 speaks of their daily preaching and teaching in the Temple.

These converted Jews, who still remained in Jerusalem, and from Acts 21:20, there were, as Paul was told, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law."

The time was approaching when these converted Jews could no longer have the benefits of the Temple and its ordinances. The time had come when they must be weaned from the symbols and shadows to grasp by faith the realities of Christ's finished work. The transition from a religion that consisted of things seen and handled must give place to a religion that rested entirely on faith in things that the natural senses could not grasp. Unfortunately many people still put their trust for salvation in ordinances that can be seen and handled.

From the facts briefly stated it will be seen how important is this chapter on faith, which climaxes the argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

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01 -- THE DEFINITION OF FAITH

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews begins, very appropriately, with an inspired definition of faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." Things hoped for cannot be apprehended by any of the five senses; they are not yet in our possession. And yet we have a feeling of pleasure in anticipating the eventual possession of them. Our faith in things hoped for rests on what some one has said, and our anticipation of possessing them is more or less confident according to what we know of the veracity and ability of the one who has promised, at some future time, more or less definite, to give us something.

Millions of men all over the country work hard through the week, confidently believing that on pay day they will receive remuneration for what they have done. Their faith rests on what they know of the ability and integrity of the companies for which they work. They even make plans what they are going to do with the money before they get it. They go to the store and order groceries, hardware or furniture and promise the storekeeper they will pay on pay day; and the storekeeper believes them. Faith runs through all the domestic, social and business affairs of our civilization. What a confused world this would be if every one was suspicious of every one else! Workmen would not work unless paid in advance; no one would want to accept a check in payment of a bill; no one would accept a note, promising payment at some future date. Wills would be of no consequence; husbands and wives would live in constant suspicion of each other; family life would be disrupted; paper money would not be accepted, for it is a promise to pay.

Most business is transacted on promises, marital relations rest on promises, church membership rests on promises, insurance rests on promises, and when we believe the promises we have a sense of peace and satisfaction. And yet, these promises sometimes fail of realization, because of either the inability or the lack of integrity of the ones making the promises.

How strange it is that we so often believe the promises of fallible men, and yet find it so hard to believe the promise of God!

But there is another part of this definition of faith: "the evidence of things not seen." This deals, not with things in the future hoped for, but with things present, but not apprehended by the five senses. Our five senses do not reveal everything. There are realms that the senses never enter into. But these things are exceedingly important. As the Apostle says, "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (II Corinthians 4:18b). It is remarkable how many things we know that are not apprehended by the five senses. Love, for instance. While we say we feel love, we do not feel it with our sense of feeling in the physical: we do not feel it with our hands. It is in the realm of our sensibilities, and it affects the physical, but its origin and place is in the realm of the invisible. Other things could be mentioned, such as hope and fear, etc.

Thus the Apostle would draw his fellow Christians of the Hebrew race from their confidence in shadows and symbols of good things to the invisible realities of the religion that does not rest on things seen or handled. May we also be drawn away from any reliance we have had on symbols, ordinances, and the like, to rest on the infallible words of God: those eternal things that, though not seen, are the real things.

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02 -- FAITH DEMONSTRATED IN HISTORY

The word faith is almost exclusively a New Testament word. It occurs only twice in the Old Testament. (Deuteronomy 32:20 and Habakkuk 2:4).

But the Apostle shows that faith was demonstrated in the Old Testament elders and ancients. He first makes a general statement that by faith "the elders obtained a good report." In the remainder of the chapter he goes into detail about the operation of faith in individuals of the Old

Testament. His evident purpose is to show the Hebrew Christians that faith is not some new thing never heard of before. These Old Testament characters demonstrated their faith before the Temple was built or the sacrificial system was ordained. And, even when it was in existence there were persons who, far away from the Temple and from Jerusalem, did exploits of faith. The evident purpose of the Apostle is to show that the Temple and its ordinances are not essential to the exercise of faith and fellowship with God.

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03 -- THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

As before suggested, faith is based on the word or promise of someone. Here we are told something to show the power of God's word. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." As stated in Psalm 33:6,9 "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth . . . for He spake, and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast."

There is a question as to the exact meaning of the term, "Through faith we understand." Does it mean that by our faith we understand that God framed the worlds? Or does it mean that God by an exercise of His own faith in His own word created the universe? Possibly the latter is the more exact meaning. God has faith in His own word and the exploits He does are by His faith. Since God existed before the material universe, it is evident they are all the work of Him. It is almost beyond the conception of the human mind to realize that there was a time when the only existing thing was God in the three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that all other things have been brought into being by His word, so that "things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." From this we are to believe that God can begin with nothing and do what He pleases in the creation of visible things. It is evident that the second Person of the Trinity was chiefly the agent in creation. Not only were the visible things created by Him, but, according to Hebrews 1:3, they are upheld "by the word of His power." That is to say, the continuance of these things is dependent on the constant exercise of His word.

We read in Ecclesiastes 8:4, "Where the word of a king is, there is power." And who is a greater King than our God? He has made numerous promises that are available on conditions. In a building that is well wired for electricity there is usually what is called an "outlet" in each room. By plugging into one of these outlets one can get power for light, to toast bread, to run a sweeper, an electric razor, and whatever appliance you have. In like manner God's promises are outlets of His power, and it is for us to "plug in" and get power for the need we have. Conditions are attached to each promise that usually involve obedience which is closely allied with faith. Let us search the Word of God and find the promise that we can plug into.

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04 -- A NOTABLE OMISSION

After the general statement that by faith the elders obtained a good report the Apostle takes up individual persons of the Old Testament who are notable because of the faith they exercised.

There is a notable exception that might have had his name in this roll of honor. Adam is omitted, and the reason is not far to seek. If Adam and Eve had believed God they would have obeyed Him. But they disbelieved God and pinned their faith to a statement of the serpent. Many people still doubt God and believe the devil.

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05 -- THE FIRST MAN OF FAITH

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Abel and Cain and their sacrifices are here contrasted. Faith and lack of faith are put in juxtaposition; likewise obedience and disobedience.

In considering why Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's rejected, it is evident that God gave an early revelation of His will concerning how he could be acceptably approached. Evidently both of these offerers knew this. Abel approached God in due order, but Cain despised God's way and substituted his own way. There is reason to believe that God undertook to get Cain to reconsider and bring the right kind of offering. God said to Cain (Genesis 4:7) "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" In other words, if Cain had been on right terms with God, his offering would have been accepted. There was a provision in the Levitical law, later written, for an offering of grain to be accepted from a person who had already made his peace with God by a bloody sacrifice. But Cain had not made peace with God. Abel and Cain were two sinners seeking the favor of God. Abel brought the right kind of offering, but Cain assumed he was all right with God, considering the offering he brought.

God further spoke to Cain, saying, "if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." There is reason to believe that God told Cain that a sin-offering lay at his door, and endeavored to get him to bring that and so make his peace with God. (Compare II Corinthians 5:21 and Hebrews 9:28). In these places it is evident the word "sin" means "sin offering." The Lord did not cut off Cain until He had used every reasonable endeavor to get him to bring the correct offering and so get right with Him. Cain may be said to be the first advocate of a bloodless religion, forerunner of Unitarians and Universalists, and their kin. But this advocate of a bloodless religion shed his brother's blood. Look out for these advocates of a bloodless religion. "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord." (Genesis 4:16).

But, to return to Abel -- "he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts," probably by fire on his altar. The place of worship for these early worshippers seems to have been at the gate of Eden where the cherubim with flaming sword were located.

Abel was the first martyr to give his life for his faith, and, we might also say, the first human being to go to heaven. His influence lives on, for, "he being dead, yet speaketh."

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06 -- FAITH THAT CONQUERED DEATH

The Apostle passes over several centuries to find another man who demonstrated faith in a notable manner. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death." Faith does not always operate in the same manner. Abel's act of faith brought him premature death. Enoch's faith delivered him from ever experiencing death. He is an early example and forerunner of that host that some day will be raptured to heaven and never see death. There is a suggestion that Enoch's relatives hunted for him, but, "he was not found, because God had translated him."

There was a reason why God translated Enoch -- "for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Faith will not operate except in an atmosphere pleasing to God: in a life that is obedient to His known will. There is no faith without obedience.

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07 -- A PRINCIPLE STATED

Before speaking concerning another Old Testament character, the Apostle pauses to state a principle and give an exhortation based on the case of Enoch, "without faith it is impossible to please Him." Do you think that friend of yours, who has promised to do something for you, would be pleased if you told him you did not believe him, or act in such a way that it was evident you did not believe him? No more can one please God without faith in Him and His revealed Word and will.

Then the reason is stated -- "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is." No one ever goes to a person he does not believe exists. We must believe God is -- not because we see Him with our natural eyes, hear Him with our natural ears, or sense His presence by some other of our five senses, but because He says, "I AM."

We must believe something else also -- "that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." God evidently delights in a person who believes Him. He has rewards also for diligent seekers. Note that word diligently. The casual seeker for God or His rewards goes away disappointed. God is not bestowing His gifts on people who do not particularly desire them. He listens to the earnest soul who desires Him and His gifts supremely. A wise parent is not likely to give valuable gifts to a child who does not take care of them and treasure them.

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08 -- FAITH THAT SAVED THE RACE

The one verse devoted to a description of Noah's faith is rich in great truths. There was a reason why God selected Noah for the work he did. We find the reason in Genesis 6:9 -- "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." At a time when all the remainder of mankind were wicked and their imaginations only evil continually, here was a man that kept his family clean, and by his faith saved a remnant of the race to re-populate the earth. Every person on the earth, down to our own time, has reason to thank God for Noah's faith, for without that faith we would never have been born.

But let us look at the description of his faith in its various aspects.

First of all we note he was "warned of God." That is the foundation of faith: what God says and reveals. There is no other foundation for our faith concerning things that pertain to God and His service. In undertaking any enterprise it is necessary, if we want success in what we do, to inquire, Does God have anything to say about this matter? Can we rely on God to see us through?

Next we observe that what God revealed to Noah was concerning "things not seen as yet." Here we are introduced into the realm of faith. None nor all of Noah's five senses, or any of his reasoning powers, would have apprehended what God told Him of the future. The faith of the Christian pertains mostly to things not yet seen. The great stimulant of the Christian's faith is what he will sometime enjoy at the right hand of God. Faith deals with the unseen things, and as stated in the initial definition, is, "the substance of things hoped for."

The things that Noah saw by faith in things yet future had a present effect on him. He was "moved with fear." Here we have the exercise of faith: it stirs men up to do something. It is doubtful if any sinner is saved until he is moved with fear of the consequences of his sins. People sometimes say to the preacher that they are not scared by his statement regarding the consequences of sin. If they do not get scared before they die, they will sincerely wish they had gotten frightened and been moved with that fear to do something about the salvation of their souls. Fear is a legitimate result of a genuine faith.

Noah's fear of the coming flood of which God told him, stirred him up to go to work. He "prepared an ark". Here we have the work of faith. Any supposed faith that does not set people to work may be considered a spurious faith. There are many people who will admit that it is a good thing to have salvation, they believe it is a good thing, but they do nothing whatever about it. Their belief is not the faith that sets people to work.

Noah received rich benefits from the fact that his faith put him to work. It resulted in blessing to himself and his family. He himself was saved and his work was, "to the saving of his house." Having faith in God is not all hard work: there are blessings to follow in the case of persons who are exercised by their faith. Noah's conduct as a result of his faith convinced his wife, his three sons, and his three daughters-in-law that his preaching was true, and they all were saved in the ark. Noah's 120 years of preaching did not have much effect, but in some of his exhortations three young women were convinced he was right and consented to marry his three sons, and thus identify themselves with what was doubtless a despised and ridiculed family. Faith makes people dare to break with the customs of the world and be different. Noah's movement was not a popular one. The real thing is not popular today. Just as soon as a religious movement gets popular its power begins to wane.

But this was not all of the results of Noah's exercise of faith. By his faith "he condemned the world." Preaching has two opposite effects. If the preaching is believed the believer is saved. If it is not believed it leaves the unbeliever without excuse and justifies God in condemning him to the threatened punishment. In the 120 years while the ark was preparing possibly the message of

Noah reached all the world, and left every one without excuse. They saw the folly of their unbelief when the flood came and destroyed them all. They then knew that Noah's testimony was true.

The final statement concerning Noah is, he "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Genesis 7:1 gives God's estimate of Noah -- "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I found righteous before Me in this generation." That was a wonderful testimony, that a man could be righteous before God in the kind of generation in which Noah lived. All that is included in being heir of the righteousness that is by faith we may only faintly understand.

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09 -- THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS

We now come to the patriarch Abraham, concerning whose faith more is said than of any of the other worthies of this chapter. Not only here but in other places in the Bible, notably Romans chapter four, is Abraham's faith spoken of favorably.

The first thing here mentioned about his faith is his leaving his country by faith -- "By faith Abraham, when he was called." Here we have again the foundation of faith, the word of God, that came to Abraham in the nature of a call from God. The call was to go out into a place not yet revealed. It was to eventually become his inheritance.

When Abraham got the call, or at least when he was fully convinced he had heard from God, he "obeyed." Here again we find the close relation of faith and obedience. It is certain if we do not believe God's commands sufficiently to obey them, it is impossible to believe and act on His promises. Every promise has its conditions plainly stated, or clearly implied.

"He went out, not knowing whither he went." Here we have again the realm of faith, out where our senses and reasoning powers cannot operate. In the opinion of men that was a very unwise thing to do. There is evidence that Abraham left a comfortable home to become a wanderer the remainder of his life, but his wanderings were ordained of God. It was "after" that he was to receive that land as an inheritance.

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise." He did not become a dweller there, but a sojourner, moving from place to place in it. There is no record that he ever built a house there. It was to him, "as in a strange country." All that Abraham believed for has not yet been realized; much of it is in the region of "things hoped for," as our definition in verse one says.

Abraham and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, dwelt "in tabernacles", or tents in the land of promise. They were, as it says, "heirs with him of the same promise." This great man of faith passed blessings on to his posterity, and their faith was stimulated by what they saw in him. For Abraham's sake God has ever been favorable to the Jews. In Leviticus 26:40-42 is a passage worthy of consideration in this connection. Here God promises certain things if the Jews will confess their sin and the sin of their fathers, referring to their later ancestors who sinned, including, very likely, the great sin of their fathers in crucifying His Son. But, if they do so confess, God promises, "Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and

also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land." From this we see that the faith of Abraham reaches out to things not yet realized, but what will surely come to pass in God's due time. The long reach of Abraham's faith is referred to in verse 10 -- "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." This is very likely the same city that John in apocalyptic vision saw coming down from heaven, (Revelation 21:10), a city for which we still wait to come down. Faith leaps the centuries and enjoys things not seen as yet. As the singer says, these worthies, "saw the victory from afar, by faith they brought it nigh." Death is but an incident in the life of faith, for it lives on immortally. Centuries after these three patriarchs were buried God said to Moses, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Note the "I am," not "I was" (Exodus 3:6). Jesus used this passage (Matthew 22:32) and said, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

It is a great stimulant to the faith and devotion of a Christian to realize that the most of his treasures are beyond the portals of this transient life here on earth. How it should stabilize our faith and faithfulness as we hope for the things not seen as yet, but certain as the promises of God!

Verse eleven shows how important was the faith of Sarah. If she had not, as here written, "judged Him faithful Who had promised," Isaac would not have been born, and what a disaster that would have been! But because she judged God would be true to His promise she received "strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age." What multitudes have sprung from that son who was born of faith! Every person who traces his ancestry to Abraham, (and what multitudes there have been, how many there are now, and how many more there will be), has reason to thank God for the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

Now the Apostle interrupts his biographical sketches, in verses 13-16, to draw some lessons from what he has written about these ancient persons of faith. They all died, with the exception of Enoch, but they "all died in faith." "Not having received the promises," that is they had not received the things promised up to the time of their death. But they had "seen them afar off," in the realm of things hoped for where faith operates. "They were persuaded of them," that is they believed them to be sure. "and embraced them." They held them tight to the last breath. In their lifetime they also had a confession "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They were not at home here: they were on their way home. Too many of God's professed children seem to be dwellers on the earth.

Their confession, or testimony, made it plain to all who heard them or saw them, that they were only crossing this world to seek another country that lies beyond. It was of their own free will that they did as they did, for, as stated in verse 15, "if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." Too many people who start with the Lord continually look longingly at the things they have left, and many of them do return to what they once left to walk with God in service or ministry. It takes more than burning the bridges behind one: the want to must be taken out of the heart. The goal of faith must be more attractive than the things left behind. The land of promise must be more in mind than the flesh-pots of Egypt.

The reason these men and women of faith did not go back was because, "they desire a better country," than the one they left behind, and that country is "an heavenly" country. What high

regard God has for these people -- "God is not ashamed to be called their God." Alas, we fear God is ashamed of many people who profess His name. What do you think God thinks of you? Can He point to you and say, "There is a person of whom I am not ashamed"?

And God "has prepared for them a city." They sought a better country, and God is doing better: He is preparing a city; that city previously referred to, to which God's people of all ages have looked forward to and anticipated. Their reason for seeking that city is stated in Hebrews 13:14 -- "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

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10 -- FAITH UNDER TRIAL

In verse 17 we return to consider more about Abraham. His faith is put under severe trial. To obey God appears on the surface to destroy the only heir Abraham has. Faith and obedience seem to contradict each other. Back of the test was the question whether Abraham's faith for the promised numerous posterity was seated in Isaac or in the Lord's promise. A study of Abraham's history reveals the fact that he had made many plans as to how God was to make of him the "great nation" promised in Genesis 12:2. It appears, after reading all the history of Abraham in Genesis, that God called Abraham some time before he actually started to go to the land of promise. It seems also, that he was called before he married Sarah, his half-sister, and that his marriage was a crutch to his faith; for how could God make a great nation of him unless he was married? But the plan was doomed to failure, for Sarah was barren.

The next plan of Abraham appears to be the adoption of his nephew Lot, whose father was dead. But Lot had plans of his own, and that plan was also doomed to failure. Next we read in Genesis 15:2-4 evidence of another plan. God had appeared to Abraham after his conflict with and victory over the nations that had captured the cities of the plain and carried away Lot. Abraham took advantage of the opportunity to ask God about His promise about the great nation. The occasion is thus described -- "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, This shall not be thine heir: but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." From this it appears that Abraham had counted on his trusted servant Eliezer to be the one that by some means would be the channel of God's blessing. But God definitely sets him aside, and gives a promise that must have helped Abraham's faith.

Again Abraham had a plan. This time Sarah suggested the plan that Abraham took up. It would be true to what God had said, the heir would be from his own bowels. So Hagar, the Egyptian maid that they had brought back from their unfortunate trip to Egypt, was brought in to help out in the family. This seemed to satisfy Abraham, but it evidently did not please God. Comparison of the last verse of chapter 16 with the first verse of chapter 17 shows that a period of silence lasting thirteen years is indicated. It seems God left Abraham to enjoy his little son Ishmael, and nothing happened in those thirteen years worth putting in the Bible.

At last God breaks the silence in the 17th chapter and promises a son from Sarah. Isaac has been born and perhaps grown to young manhood when God put Abraham to the test mentioned in Hebrews 11:17, and more detailed in the 22nd chapter of Genesis. There was more in God's promise than Abraham had yet grasped. His faith was pinned to Isaac as the beginning of that great nation that was to inhabit the earth and bless all nations.

Abraham obeyed God. The story is familiar to all Bible students: how he took Isaac to the place appointed, built an altar, laid the wood in order, bound Isaac and put him on the altar, and raised his knife to sacrifice his only son, wonderful type of God giving His only begotten Son. When God saw that obedience was complete He halted the hand of Abraham and substituted a ram that was caught by its horns in a thicket.

Now observe what God says in Genesis 22:15-18 -- "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy Seed shall possess the gate of His enemies; and in thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast obeyed My voice." Again we see how closely obedience and faith are connected.

Let us analyze the verses just quoted. They contain a remarkable prophecy. Notice that the word seed is used in three different ways. Abraham is told that his seed shall be as the stars of heaven, possibly referring to his heavenly seed, the church; it shall be as the sand on the sea shore, possibly referring to his earthly seed, Israel, the Jews; and finally there will be a Seed that will possess the gate of His enemies. Notice regarding this last mention of Seed that it is singular, whereas the other two are plural. This is proven by the singular number of the pronoun His.

Notice Paul's comment on this passage in Galatians 3:16 -- "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of One, And to thy Seed, which is Christ." It is evident that here, for the first time, Abraham saw the full extent of God's promise that in his Seed all nations should be blessed. Jesus evidently refers to this occasion in John 8:56 -- "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it and was glad." May it not have been at this time, when he had sacrificed his son, that Abraham looked down the ages and saw the day of Christ? His faith took a leap across the ages and saw Jesus Christ, the Seed above all other seeds, on the cross, and eventually ruling, as He will "possess the gate of His enemies.

Abraham was surely put in what we may call a tight place when God asked him to sacrifice his son. From the time Abraham left his home in Ur the goal before him had been a posterity as God had promised him. This had been realized in Isaac. And now God says to sacrifice him! It would be interesting to know the operation of Abraham's mind during those three days he was journeying toward the place God had told him of. He, of course, would be meditating on how God was going to make good His promise that in Isaac his seed should be called, when He had ordered him to sacrifice him. We are told the conclusion to which he seems to have eventually come -- "Accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

There was an objective behind God's instruction to Abraham to sacrifice his son. God does not unnecessarily order His children to do things just to see if they will obey and stand the test. Abraham's faith seems to have been bound up in Isaac, and God saw that he must be brought to the place of absolute dependence, not on Isaac, but on Himself. Abraham's hope in Isaac died and he was thrown back entirely upon God and His promises. There is ever the danger of God's people putting their faith and hope in the gifts of God and place them before God if they are not careful. God calls a person to the ministry or to some work, and then, when it seems to be just about to enter on a great era of prosperity, God says to put it on the altar of sacrifice. It looks like the ruin of a lifetime of service, and yet it is the way to real prosperity in the work of God. Isaac was more to Abraham after this test than he was before, and Abraham by standing the test entered into a rest of faith he had not known before. God wanted Abraham's faith to have its seat in His promises, instead of on Isaac, His gift to him. It pleases God for His people to put their whole trust in Him and His word. It is not so much the blessing we need, as it is God Himself, the source of all blessing. If we have Him we have all the blessings.

By way of illustration, it is an inferior motive for a woman to desire to marry a man just because she thinks it will be a good way to get her living and material things she wants. No, the motive should be that she wants him for her husband, not for what money he has, not for the reputation he has, not for anything or any reason than that she wants him because it is he, just as he is, wealth or poverty, sickness or health, a cottage or a mansion, or even a shack or tent. So our motive for wanting Jesus as our prospective Bridegroom must not rest on the inferior motive of wanting Him for His blessings or gifts, or because He will give us an easy time or bless our business or even our health. But He wants us because we are precious to Him, and we should seek Him instead of His blessings, which will follow in due time and in due order. Fall in love with Him, and that will give perfect satisfaction. Much seeking at the altar is from a wrong motive. Seekers are persistent in their desires for God's blessings, some feeling that will be pleasant. Whereas what God desires is, as expressed in the Bible -- "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." (Matthew 22:37). A wholehearted surrender of all we have and are into the hands of God, trustfully leaving our plans and future all with Him to work out at His pleasure, is the right way to seek. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." -- Psalm 37:5.

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11 -- ISAAC BLESSING HIS SONS

The Old Testament account of how Isaac wanted to bless Esau, and Rebekah wanted Jacob to have the blessing, and the scheming of all four to have their way, does not look like a very fertile field in which faith could manifest itself. The Apostle devotes but a single verse to Isaac's faith, but notice it says that "Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Here again we see the realm of faith, "things to come," the realm of faith in the region of things hoped for, but not yet come to pass. How often we are reminded in this chapter of where faith operates! Things came to pass as Isaac in his blessing said they would. Though Isaac trembled when he found he had blessed Jacob thinking it was Esau, yet he said, "yea, and he shall be blessed." (Genesis 27:38b).

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12 -- FAITH OUTLIVES DEATH

A great wealth of material was at the Apostle's hand when he came to Jacob, but he confines his remarks to a single incident in the life of the man who said of himself -- "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." (Genesis 47:9). Someone who has carefully gone over the record of Jacob says that God in the Bible calls Himself the "God of Jacob" more times than

He calls Himself the God of any other character. Jacob's faith seemed to shine brighter "when he was a dying," than at any other time. While mention is made only of his blessing on the two sons of Joseph, one may read the 49th chapter of Genesis with profit, where the record is given of the blessings he gave his sons also when he was on his death-bed. Some one has remarked that young men have visions of the future, but that old men are dreaming of their past. This does not work in Jacob's ease, for in his blessings, both on Joseph's sons and on the twelve sons he talks about the future. When his vision of earthly things was fading, his faith shone bright and clear as he spoke of the future of his posterity for centuries to come. Much of what his faith saw has not yet come to pass, but it will eventually be history. Death cannot annul what faith foresees. It is appointed to men to die, but death is not the end. The grave is not a dead-end street, but the door to things not seen as yet.

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13 -- THE MAN WHOSE BONES PROPHESED

The last verse of Genesis ends with the somber statement concerning Joseph, "they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." But that was not the end. "When he died made mention of the departing of the children of Israel." His faith saw things ahead and he relied on them. "Ye shall carry up my bones from hence," he told his survivors as he died. When the Israelites departed from Egypt in haste Moses remembered the charge of Joseph about his bones, and, "took the bones of Joseph with him." (Exodus 13:19). Joseph evidently believed in the resurrection, and wanted to come up from the grave in the Promised Land. Somewhere in the soil of the Land of Israel those bones are awaiting the day of which the patriarchs and prophets have prophesied by faith.

Wherever the Israelites wandered during the forty years of their wilderness travels, the bones of Joseph were carried, a silent witness that Israel would eventually enter the land of promise. We may imagine Caleb and Joshua, in times of weary wandering those years, looking at that coffin and reminding each other that they would eventually get to the land where Joseph ordered his bones to be buried.

The record of Joseph's bones is concluded in the Bible by the statement in the book of Joshua 24:32 -- "And the bones of Joseph which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem." But those bones have a future known as yet only by faith.

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14 -- THE FAITH OF PARENTS

The beginning of the history of that remarkable man of faith, Moses, begins with a statement about the faith of his parents. Moses was born in the period of time when the law of Egypt was that all boy babies should be thrown in the river and drowned. Moses' parents saw that "he was a proper child," and they did what some people might say was inconsistent with faith -- he "was hid three months." If they had faith, some might say, why hide him, would not God take care of him? Precaution is not inconsistent with faith. Notice in this connection that when Joseph was warned of an angel to take Jesus and His mother to Egypt, "he took the young child and His mother by night." (Matthew 2:14). There is an extreme attitude some people take by which faith gives way to presumption.

To get the entire story about how Moses' parents cared for him, read Exodus 2:1-10. Some say that planning is inconsistent with faith. But the mother of Moses had a plan, and it is evident she planned by faith just as she hid him by faith. The faith of Moses' parents was the beginning of a chain of events that resulted in the deliverance of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage. While Pharaoh's senators were planning the further bondage and servitude of the Israelites, the mother of Moses with some bulrushes, slime and pitch was starting something that would eventually defeat all the plans of the wise men of Egypt. Women may now think that the way to make the country better is to have the vote and hold a political office. Moses' mother never stepped out of the place of wife and mother, and in that place she started something that changed history. She was not afraid to get her hands dirty with slime and pitch. Faith was the impulse that directed her actions.

Moses was put in the river, the place of death for other boy babies, and eventually delivered future babies from death. In this he was typical of Jesus, Who went to death to deliver the race. Read in this connection Hebrews 2:14, 15 -- "Forasmuch then as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who, through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

The plan of Moses' mother worked because it was by faith. She had observed the habit of Pharaoh's daughter in coming to the river for her bath, and placed the ark in which she had hidden Moses where she would likely see it. Tactfully she did not stand near to watch, but little Miriam was put where she could watch. Tradition says that the daughter of Pharaoh had been bereaved of a child. So, when baby Moses cried, her mother instinct responded, and she wanted to save the baby for her own. In childlike simplicity, little Miriam thrusts herself into the picture, and suggests that a Hebrew nurse might be called. There is a tradition that Pharaoh's daughter had asked Egyptian nurses to care for the child, but little Moses would have nothing to do with them. So Miriam's suggestion that a Hebrew nurse be called fits into the story. The result was that Moses' mother had the pleasure of having her dear little baby boy back again, and was paid wages by the Egyptian government for caring for him. What marvels faith accomplishes!

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15 -- MOSES' CAREER OF FAITH

The time came when Moses' mother had to relinquish her son into the hands of Pharaoh's daughter, as stated in Exodus 2:10 -- "she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter." Neither Exodus nor Hebrews eleven tells us how the time of Moses was spent in Egypt. The gap is filled in by what Stephen says in his speech before the Sanhedrin, (Acts 7:22) -- "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds."

Moses was evidently patiently subject to his foster mother until "he was come to years," which Stephen says was when he was forty years of age. This is a splendid example of subjection to those who have the rule over us. It appears that, in those days, young people became "of age" as we now say, when they were forty years of age, and were then on their own responsibility. When this time arrived Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," and by doing so relinquished his possibility of some day being the king of Egypt.

The method by which Moses came to his decision is detailed in verses 24-27, which we will best understand if studied in the reverse order. The effect, Moses refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, is traced back to the cause, starting with verse 27. There are four stages that Moses considered in coming to his final decision. Let us study each of these stages.

I. Moses' Vision. Verse 27 is the inception of what follows -- "he endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." It is true that he saw Egypt during those years when he was studying the learning of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds, but he saw something besides that overshadowed all the earthly glory. Here we see where many young people of our own times miss the best in life. They see the material, but are blind to the spiritual. They do not have, as our original text says, the evidence of things not seen. No proper determination as to what course in life to take can be safe that ignores the things that are unseen, and yet very real.

II. Moses' Estimate. He made an estimate -- "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." The worst thing about the things of God, "the reproach," was better than the best things Egypt could offer. The crown of eternal life was better to him than the crown of a Pharaoh that he might have received. The reason for his estimate in favor of God is given -- "he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." The reward may be a long time in the future, but he was prepared to wait for it. Too many people want their reward right now. Esau-like they trade a birthright to heaven for a mess of pottage that serves for the day and is gone. Like Esau they will with tears seek what they bartered away, but it will be of no avail. It is legitimate to look for rewards. God holds out rewards as an incentive to seek salvation. The problem with us now is which reward are we seeking? Most people look for their reward in this life, while the few, like Moses, have respect unto the reward that God offers. No proper estimate can be made without the vision Moses had of Him Who is invisible.

III. Moses' Choice. After Moses had carefully made his estimate, comparing the rewards of Egypt with the rewards of God, he was in good shape to make a choice. Life is made up of a series of choices. Some choices are of minor importance, and have to do with things of little consequence, such as which kind of pie you will eat when you are a guest at someone's table. But there are choices that determine all the future of one's life: the selection of a life companion; the selection of an occupation; and most important of all, the decision to be or not to be a Christian.

IV. Moses' Refusal. It takes more than a vision to go right. Too many visions fade with the morning sun. People are visionary, always thinking of what they are going to do, but never coming to the place where they do it. Estimates are necessary, but too many people are always estimating and re-estimating, but never coming to the point of choice. They are always turning over in their minds. One day they think they will do this way, and the next day think they will do the other way. Unstable people they are, undependable. No one can depend on what they will do, for they change their minds so often. Moses could keep his vision secret, and he did not need to reveal to anyone the process of estimating that was going on in his mind. He could make a choice and yet say nothing about it. But there came a day when the vision, the estimate, and the choice must result in action, or all would fade in thin air, like a dream in the night. There came a day when Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Then things began to happen, that resulted in Moses fleeing to the land of Midian. It did look unappreciative of all Pharaoh's daughter had done for Moses, for him to refuse to longer be called her son, but he had come to years, and was his own boss, as the saying is, and no one could compel him to do what he no longer could do with a good conscience.

Notice the future of Moses' career rested on his ability to say NO with emphasis. Unfortunately there are many people today who seem not to have the backbone to say NO to the world's allurements, the invitations of companions to questionable things, and, rather than take their stand go along with the crowd, for "everybody is doing it." It is a fine art to know to what to say NO and to what to say YES. But it is likely that most people know what they ought to do, but do not have the courage to say NO and YES at the proper time about the things they have to decide. We need an army of young people who get the vision, make their estimate, determine their choice, and put in action their right choices.

Forty years Moses kept his father-in-law's sheep. He was not as successful a contriver as Jacob was, who in twenty years got possession of a great herd of cattle and flock of sheep, that he got away from his father-in-law. Moses was not seeking the wealth of this world. Since Moses was human it is not unlikely that the devil often tempted him to doubt the wisdom of his giving up the position he held and was in prospect of holding. But he could always say that he was seeing Him Who is invisible and stick to his determination. It looks to the ordinary man that if Moses had consented to have been Pharaoh of Egypt, he could have freed the Israelites from their bondage by an edict. But that was not God's way. There was a compromise in such a plan. God's way may often seem the long and hard way, but it is the best way, and will be so proven in due time.

Moses had a long schooling. It takes much training to be able for responsible positions. First was his training in the schools of Egypt for forty years. Then forty years dealing with sheep, which are more like people than any other animal. God allowed him to deal with the sheep as dummies of people, and learn the patience it was going to take to deal with the Israelites in all their murmurings.

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It is instructive to go to the Old Testament and note the qualifications Moses had for the work the Lord was preparing him to do. These qualifications are noted in his history as told in the third chapter of Exodus. There are reasons for God's selection of certain individuals for service. Let us look at some reasons why Moses would be the man to serve God in the capacity of leader of His people.

I. Industry. He was diligent in his shepherding of the sheep put in his care. Pasture was scant, and he led the sheep away to the backside of the desert to find some grass. God is not likely to call a lazy man to any particularly important job. Jesus called four of His disciples from their industry as fishermen, and another from the custom house desk.

II. Belief in the Supernatural. When he saw the flame on the bush, and the bush was not consumed, he went aside to see. There was something supernatural about that. Some thoughtless person might have looked at the burning bush and passed it by as just a bush burning. Perhaps, if Moses had not turned aside to investigate the bush he might not have had any further revelation from God. We need to watch for God's providences, for He may be trying to get our attention. People who do not believe in the supernatural need not expect a call from God.

III. Veneration. When God said to remove his shoes because the ground was holy ground, Moses did not hesitate to do so. To be in favor with God we must reverence His Bible, His house, His day, and all that is His. There is still a tendency, in some quarters, to make the house of God a house of merchandise. Others make it a play house. People who are never late to their job, are sometimes habitually late to Sunday School and church services. They will get their children off to the day school five days a week on time, and let them be late on the Lord's day one day in a week, perhaps two hours later in the day than they take the school bus.

IV. Bible Knowledge. There was, of course, no written Bible in Moses' time, but there were certain traditions handed down from generation to generation, and with these Moses was well acquainted. This is indicated from the fact that when God said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," (Exodus 3:6) Moses knew what God was talking about. One great preparation for God's service is a good acquaintance with His words as recorded in the Bible. Yet there are persons posing as ministers of the Gospel, who know little of the contents of the Bible, and, instead of revering it, criticize it. If you want a call from God to service know and reverence the Bible.

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17 -- SOME OF MOSES' EXCUSES

Human nature has not changed much from the days of Moses until now. It is strange that the average person who has a call from God to the ministry or missionary work undertakes to tell God that He has made a mistake in calling them, thus setting up their judgment against God. Moses was not free from this disposition, and for that reason a study of the inspired record of his conversation with God on the subject of his call will be enlightening, for very similar excuses are made today by people God selects for service. Let us consider these excuses, of which there are five.

Undoubtedly some readers of these pages may recognize these excuses as very much like their own.

I. No Reputation. -- "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11) It was a stupendous undertaking. Yet Moses had known long before that he might have this to do, when he had killed the Egyptian, as recorded in Exodus 2:11, 12. Stephen says (Acts 7:25), "For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them." But forty years had somewhat cooled his ardor, and it took time to stimulate it again to action. How reassuring were the words of God in response to Moses! -- "Certainly I will be with thee." This reminds us of what Jesus said when He gave the great commission to evangelize the world -- "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20). God does not send His servants out to do exploits in their own names or by their own power.

II. No Message. -- "What shall I say unto them?" (Exodus 3:13) That was a very natural question to ask, and it is still one of the problems of the young minister, and sometimes of the older minister. But this man Moses had been mighty in words. Why should he lack for something to say? God responds to Moses' question with a very detailed set of instructions, and He will also help the embarrassed preacher in time of need. It was not a long speech that God put in Moses' mouth, but it was right to the point. Do not hesitate young man called to the ministry because you wonder what you can say to your congregation for a half-hour. God will have a message for you if you are diligent in the study of His Word.

III. No Hearing. -- "They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." (Exodus 4:1). Yes, there will be people who will tell you that you have not been called to preach. They said to Moody one time that he better never try to preach again. But he out-distanced his critics for he knew he was called of God to preach. It is very discouraging indeed for a preacher to realize, or think, that people do not believe his message. Then God gave to Moses two signs to prove the Lord was with him. God will vindicate the message of his called ministers.

IV. No Eloquence. -- "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, not since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." (Exodus 4:10). This bothers some young preachers yet. They want to make a powerful impression, and get the idea they must be eloquent in their sermons. Eloquence too often attracts the hearers to the preacher rather than to his message. People need the water of life. When a person is thirsty he does not pay too much attention to the cup from which he drinks. It is the water that gets his attention. Paul truly said to Timothy, and it is intended for us also, "preach the Word."

V. No Confidence. -- "O my Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of whom Thou wilt send." (Exodus 4:13). In other words Moses meant, as many still mean, "Send someone else." God had borne patiently with Moses' questionings, but when he virtually said that he did not want to go, God's anger was kindled, and He had to become more imperative with Moses. Will God need to get angry with you, young called person, before you will respond to His call to the ministry or missionary work? It seems that many times He has to do so. People will respond with alacrity to a call to be secretary of some prominent man; but the call of God to the highest honors is dreaded

and responded to only when God becomes imperative. Thousands of people have missed the best things in life because they have persistently turned down God's call to service. They are growing old, and will some day regret that they missed God's best for them.

How glad we are that Moses finally yielded to the call of God! The future history of the world hung on Moses' decision, and things have been different because Moses eventually obeyed God and for forty years still endured as seeing Him Who is invisible.

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18 -- MOSES' FAITH SAVED THE FIRSTBORN

But there is more in this great chapter about Moses. "By faith he kept the passover." Here is faith and obedience again. God told Moses beforehand of His plan to destroy the firstborn in every family in Egypt, but gave him a plan whereby the families of the Israelites might protect themselves from the destroyer. Moses called the heads of families together and instructed them how to protect the firstborn of their families, and, so far as the record goes, not a firstborn child in any Israelitish family died that night. The people believed Moses as Moses believed God, and obeyed the instruction. There are cases where people pin their faith to the faith of some man or woman of faith. They believe God because some one in whom they have confidence believes God.

The Israelites were to do more than kill the lamb: they also kept "the sprinkling of the blood." There must be not only the death of the lamb as a substitute for the firstborn, but there must be the blood of the lamb out on their doors as evidence that the lamb had been slain. It was not a living, spotless lamb tied in the front yard that would keep the destroyer away; it was not the blood of the lamb in a basin on the doorstep, but it was the blood on the lintel and sideposts of the door of the house that would cause the destroyer to pass by the house and spare the firstborn.

There are many people who believe in the spotless life and character of Jesus, but that is not saving faith. There are others who believe that it is the death of Christ that is the saving element in the work of Christ, and yet some of these never appropriate that fact to their own case. They are like the people who might have kept the blood in the basin, but never sprinkled it on the door posts. It is interesting to note how the blood was conveyed from the basin to the doorposts. The instruction was very plain, as described in Exodus 12:22 -- "And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two sideposts with the blood that is in the basin." Hyssop was a common herb that, so far as known, grew in every yard, and was therefore easy for the owner of the house to find it. They did not need to go away off somewhere to get the instrument wherewith to convey the blood to the door. And this is the way it is with appropriating the blood of Christ to one's individual need. Just obey the instructions of the Bible, and use your faith, be it little or much, in believing that what God says about the blood He will do in your case.

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19 -- THE SIMPLICITY OF SALVATION

Read Deuteronomy 30:11-14 -- "For this commandment that I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

There is a New Testament statement of the same import that brings the advice and instruction down to our own time and condition. Read it in Romans 10:6-10 -- "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth: that is, the Word of faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Thus, in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament, God has set forth the simplicity of salvation and the ease with which it may be obtained if a person is humble and teachable enough to believe God's word for it. If those Israelites believed what God told Moses they would do as Moses instructed and thus save the firstborn in their home. In like manner, if we believe God we will do what He says: we will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved by faith. It is good to admire the spotless Lamb of God; it is good to believe in the shed blood; but your admiration and general belief will not save your soul: you must take the shed blood by faith for your own case, and this is easy to do, if you cease depending on your own works of righteousness. So many people believe they will be saved by trying to be good. But the conduct that results from salvation cannot be grafted into the natural man.

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20 -- FAITH IN THE PHYSICAL REALM

We read in the New Testament of a faith that moves mountains. Here, in the history of Moses, is demonstrated a faith that moved a sea of water and made a path through the deep. "By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land." It was faith in God that caused Him to divide the sea. The Israelites were in a desperate situation, but just where God had directed them to be. When in God's place we can believe Him for the impossible. Shut in a V-shaped region, with the Egyptians pressing hard after them, the situation was indeed desperate. But it is in desperate conditions that God acts for His people. Why need He show His hand when we can make out by our own ingenuity? Naturally we dread getting into desperate circumstances, but it is just then that God acts, when we are thrown back on Him. Faith also seems to work better when we are in circumstances when we do not know what to do, and call upon God.

Notice how many times God allowed the Israelites to get in desperate conditions. They came to a place where there was no water for them or their cattle. It was then that God brought water from a rock. They ran out of bread and were hungry. It was then that God fed them with

bread from heaven, even angels' food (Psalm 105:40 and 78:25). It was by faith that the Israelites passed through the Red sea and were delivered; it was by presumption that the Egyptians undertook to follow them, and were drowned. Many people in the course of time have undertaken enterprises in which they thought they had God's approval, and found that their supposed faith was presumption. Some very good people have been thus deluded and failed in what appeared to be good objectives.

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21 -- FAITH BREAKS DOWN WALLS

The Apostle omits reference to any exploit of faith in the next forty years, for it is the period of the wilderness wandering of the Israelites, a faithless and complaining people, who grieves both God and Moses. That generation failed to enter the Promised Land, and the Apostle gives the reason in Hebrews 3:19 -- "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." What a perverse generation that was. They refused to go into the land when told to do so, and then undertook to go in when they were told not to do so. Read Numbers 14:40-45 for the account of their presumptuous attempt. "They presumed to go up," and were defeated by the Amalekites and the Canaanites.

But faith began to work as the new generation under Joshua's leadership set their faces to enter the land. Jordan dried up by faith. The next mention of faith by the Apostle is, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." But they had to demonstrate their faith by compassing the city "seven days." God responds to the faith of people on conditions that He sets out. Generally, if not always, there is something that God requires people to do before He acts on their faith. We see this in the miracles of Jesus. He asked that the stone be taken away from the tomb of Lazarus before he spoke the word that raised him from the dead; He sent the blind man to the pool of Siloam to wash after He anointed his eyes with clay; He told the ten lepers to go and show themselves to the priest. Careful study will reveal the fact that practically everything God does for man is in response to or because of something done in the natural realm.

Archaeologists who have examined and excavated the ruins of Jericho admit that the city had very strong walls. It would have taken much cannonading and bombing to have destroyed those walls. But under the shout of faith they fell inward, as the ruins indicate. It is truly wonderful what God will do in response to the faith of a man or number of men. The compassing the city seven days and the shout preceded the falling of the walls.

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22 -- FAITH AGAINST FAITH

But there was a woman of faith in the city of Jericho, and her house was on the wall, the very place where the faith of the Israelites was directed against. "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not, with them that believed not." All of the inhabitants of Jericho except Rahab were unbelievers. No faith was in them. But her faith saved her and her house from the destruction that was universal in the remainder of the strong city. But Rahab had shown her faith by works, as

James says in his Epistle (James 2:25) -- "Likewise was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" It was a dangerous thing to take sides with the spies of Joshua who had come to investigate the city. The king of Jericho heard of the two men coming to the city, and demanded of Rahab that she surrender the men. Faith may exist in persons where we might not look for it. Some expositors do not believe that Rahab was a harlot in the bad sense, but that she was an inn-keeper, and naturally the two spies went to what we would now call a hotel. But she was not what we would now call a Christian, and in no way connected with the covenant people of God. She prevaricated in her response to the king's demand, for she had not been brought up to think it was wrong to lie. But God saw in the woman a person who believed what she had heard of God's plan to give the land to the Israelites, and one who was ready to identify herself with the people of God. From this it appears that a person who is not saved can exercise faith. In fact if it were not so, how could a sinner have faith to be saved? Rahab's faith was contagious. When she told her kinsfolk about the visit of the two men and their promise to her, they believed what she said although they did not have first-hand knowledge of the men and their promise.

Rahab obtained more than the saving of her life from the general destruction of Jericho. In the first chapter of Matthew, in the genealogy of Jesus, we find the name of Rahab as married into the royal line, and therefore in the ancestry of Christ. Faith surely has its rewards. God delights in people who believe Him and His Word.

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23 -- THE ABUNDANCE OF MATERIAL

The Apostle does not cut his account of faith and its exploits short because he has run out of material. The only reason he does not go on and tell of the exploits of the others he names, is as he says, "the time would fail me." Let us look at some of these that he briefly mentions.

"Gedeon," the Greek for "Gideon". He is probably the one referred to in verse 34, "turned to flight the armies of the aliens." God had Gideon reduce his army down to three hundred. This gave room for God to do something, whereas, if Gideon had used the entire army of 32,000 that he gathered (Judges 7:3) he would have believed that the victory was won by the army. But when God reduced his army to three hundred, it put Gideon's faith to the test. It took time for God to stimulate Gideon's faith. He tried the fleece first wet and then dry. God was very lenient with Gideon. Even after the wet and dry fleece, it seems Gideon was a little fearful. (See Judges 7:10,11) -- God says to Gideon, whom He had instructed to go down to the host of the Midianites, "But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host." It is interesting to recount the means God used to stimulate Gideon's faith. But without faith it is impossible to please God, so God nurtured Gideon's faith until it worked. The result was the conquest of that great army.

Barak is next named by the Apostle. From the reading of Judges 4:4-9 it would seem that it was the faith of Deborah that should have the honor. It appears that Barak's faith rested on the faith of Deborah. However, Deborah was a prophetess as well as a judge, and it is the words of the

prophets that stimulate faith. With his faith stimulated by the words and presence of Deborah, for she went with him, Barak routed the army of Sisera, and delivered Israel from the bondage of that ruler. In this connection it will be well to consider Romans 10:17 -- "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Samson. He is very likely the one spoken of in verse 34, "out of weakness were made strong." God was surely merciful to Samson. After he had given away the secret of his strength to a Philistine woman, and consequently lost his eyes and his strength, in answer to his prayer God restored his strength, and perhaps increased it, so that he pulled down the temple of Dagon and destroyed the worshippers of Dagon. If you are weak, then call on God for strength. Remember, also, what Paul says in II Corinthians 12:10 -- "When I am weak then am I strong."

Jephthah comes in for mention. Naturally he was an unfortunate man, being the son of a harlot, which could not be laid to his charge, of course. But he was thrust out and denied an inheritance with the legitimate sons. But the Lord blessed this unfortunate man with faith to conquer the Ammonites. God can take even persons of lowly birth and use them if they will believe His word.

David comes in for brief mention. What wonderful things could be said of David, how he slew the giant Goliath and "subdued kingdoms"! His exploits were done by faith.

Samuel, the greatest of the Judges, who delivered the Israelites from the Philistines and laid the foundation of the kingdom.

The Prophets. The evident reason they are not named is, as the Apostle says, "time would fail me." If he had written as much about each of them as he has of some of the others, the book of Hebrews would have been very much larger. What he has said suffices to make his point. It is a good speaker who knows when he has given enough illustrations to make his point.

Women of faith come in for favorable mention -- "Women received their dead raised to life again." The widow of Zarephath had faith in the words of Elijah that her oil and meal would not diminish during the famine. She showed her faith by making a cake for him first. When her son died... he was restored to life by the prophet Elijah.

The Shunammite Woman also had her son restored to life. She had shown her faith in providing a chamber in her house where Elisha could stay over night when on his journeys to and fro in his service. Her son was born in accordance with Elisha's prophecy, and when it died, the woman resorted at once to Elisha, who restored the child to life.

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24 -- ANOTHER ASPECT OF FAITH

"And Others." These words introduce a different line of thought from what has gone before.. Thus far the Apostle has recited exploits of faith. We read in verse 34 of persons who through faith, "escaped the edge of the sword," but in verse 37 we read of others who by faith,

"were slain with the sword." Did these have less faith than those who escaped the edge of the sword? That is a question to consider. May it not be that we are here introduced into a more victorious faith than what has been recited before? The 39th verse says that these all, "obtained a good report through faith." So these who suffered for their faith, as well as those who triumphed by faith are accorded equal favorable mention.

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25 -- THE ENDURANCE OF FAITH

Whereas we have in the first part of this great faith chapter the victories of faith, here we have the endurance of faith. Or, we might say, we have here the faithfulness of faith. These people believed God, though He saw fit to let them be slain by the sword and otherwise maltreated by the world. Is it not possible that the Apostle is here introducing the readers into a higher manifestation of faith than in the earlier part of the chapter? Does not this accord with the last verse, where it says, "God having provided some better thing for us"? That is, we of this dispensation have better things than the people of former dispensations.

It does look as though God was partial when, as we read in verse 34 that certain ones, evidently the three Hebrews in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, "Quenched the violence of fire," and in verse 33, "stopped the mouths of lions, evidently referring to Daniel, then allowed Nero to tie Christians to stakes and burn them to death, and threw others to the lions who ate them up just as they did other people.

Let us try to put light on this subject by an illustration. When a boy is small his father sees that he is looked after. If anyone molests the boy, he appeals to his father, and his father by taking his part shows what kind of a father his boy has. But the boy comes to maturity and the father allows him to go on his own and take care of himself. The son now shows what kind of a son his father has.

In some such way, in the former dispensation, when God's people were molested by the world, God intervened in their behalf, thus showing what kind of a God His people had. But, if we may so say, the race has come to maturity now, and it is time for God's people to demonstrate what kind of people God has. Nebuchadnezzar discovered, when he put the Hebrews into the fiery furnace, what kind of a God the Hebrews had. But, when Nero burned the Christians at the stake and threw them to the lions, he discovered what kind of people God had.

Sometimes we are tempted, when God does not send help in what seems to be an emergency, and He does not do anything, and seems to be silent and absent, to doubt God. But He is giving us an opportunity to show our fidelity without tokens of His presence. The props need to all be taken away, that we have used to bolster up our faith, and we come to rely entirely on the word of the invisible God, without seeing signs or wonders. Perhaps God wonderfully healed you once. Will you still be faithful to Him, if He sees fit not to heal you this time? If you are not healed you may be tempted to feel that your faith is not as strong as it was before, whereas it may really be stronger. It really takes more faith to trust God in the dark than it does in the light. Those Christians whom God suffered to burn to death and be eaten by lions showed to the world their

fidelity to God by dying rather than renounce their faith. They could say with Job (Job 13:15)
"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

We need a consecration to God that puts us completely in His hands to do with us as pleases Him. If He sees that it is better for the cause for us to be among them that are slain by the sword instead of those who escaped the edge of the sword, it is His will, not ours, to determine. In either case, as stated in Romans 14:8 -- "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

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26 -- THE WORLD'S UNWORTHIES

It is not an attractive picture that is presented in verses 35-38. The Apostle classifies them all as persons of "whom the world was not worthy." The world despised these persons. Perhaps we can identify some of these. We may not be able to point to definite individuals in the Old Testament records who were tortured, but there were many in the early days of the church that were tortured with a view to making them recant, but they did not "accept deliverance," from the torture, because they "might obtain a better resurrection." They had rather die in the hope of the resurrection than to live on here, or even be restored, as some were, to life from the dead.

The prophet Jeremiah may be classed with those mentioned in verse 36, for he suffered being put in stocks and imprisoned.

It may be the Apostle refers to Stephen when he speaks of some who were stoned.

Tradition identifies Isaiah as one who was "sawn asunder." The Bible does not mention how Isaiah came to the end of his life, but we know from what is said of him that he did not have a pleasant time all through his life.

Some were tempted, evidently offered all kinds of inducements to give up their allegiance to God.

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27 -- THE BETTER THINGS FOR US

The faith chapter ends with the statement that should be encouraging to every Christian. We look back to those worthies as great giants of faith, and yet the Bible says of them -- "And these all, " including those who endured as well as those who triumphed, "having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise." Verse 33 says they "obtained promises." Verse 13 speaks in the same way of those mentioned earlier in the chapter, as "not having received the promises." The meaning evidently is that they did receive promises of good things to come, but they did not receive the things that the promises foretold. Evidently the "better thing" that is provided for us, is that we have received not only the promises of things to come, but have actually received them. For instance, the Old Testament people of God had promises of the coming of Christ, and looked

forward to His coming from the time it was revealed that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Promises multiplied about the coming One, but they all died in faith, not having seen the promised One. But we have the record of His coming, while they had only the promises of His coming. We live in a better dispensation. But do we realize and appropriate these blessings as we should? Those Old Testament worthies put us to shame in the way they trusted the shadows, while we have the substance.

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28 -- THE EXHORTATION TO US

All that the Apostle had to say about faith could not be crowded into one chapter, so the exhortation, based on the testimony of these many witnesses, is in the twelfth chapter.

The eleventh chapter consists of forty verses, and, we might say, records the faith exploits of forty centuries. In reading these forty verses, we have been, as it were, sitting in the grandstand of the arena of faith and watched these racers of other days gain their trophies. Now, perhaps these winners of their races have taken our place in the grandstand, while it is now our turn to, "run with patience. the race that is set before us." We are "compassed about" by this "cloud of witnesses." These witnesses who have, so to speak, become spectators, might be heard saying to us, "We have run our race by faith and won our trophies. Now, you who have better things than we had, it is your turn to run the race by faith." This should surely be a stimulus to us to run patiently the race that is set before us.

History records the fact that when Napoleon had his army in Egypt and was on the eve of attacking a hostile army, he called his men together, and, pointing to the pyramids, seen in the distance, said, "Men of France, forty centuries look down on us today, so let us make history worth recording." The speech nerved his army and they won a notable victory. Shall not we, who are engaged in a more worthy warfare, be stirred to action as forty centuries of faith look down upon us?

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29 -- THE ORIGIN OF FAITH

Faith can be strengthened by use, but we cannot, by efforts of our own, create faith. We need to look unto "Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith." He gives faith, as stated in Ephesians 2:8 -- "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

Notice where we need to look for the stimulant of our faith. It may be well to realize that interested people are watching us, as from the grandstand, but it is not best for us to look at them to see what they think of our race; but we are to look to the goal, even to Jesus Christ.

There is not only the gift of faith, but there is the finishing of faith; that is, it appears, not the finishing in the sense of ending our faith, but the finishing in the sense of perfecting or polishing it.

This may include the trying of our faith, somewhat after the manner in which God tried Abraham when He asked him to offer his son as a burnt offering. This thought seems to be referred to in verses 5-11 in the twelfth chapter, where the Apostle speaks of the Lord's chastening of His sons.

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30 -- PREPARING FOR THE RACE

The Apostle speaks of how to prepare for the race of faith. He says to "lay aside every weight." It is said that those who raced in the Grecian games, when preparing for the race, practiced running with weights on their feet. Then, when they entered the race, they took off the weights which made their feet so light, as compared with how they felt before, that they ran with great agility. It is said of Demosthenes, the famous Grecian orator, that he had an impediment in his speech, and overcame it by trying to talk with pebbles in his mouth. He succeeded so well that he is accounted one of the greatest orators in history. It may be that we all have so many weights and impediments to faith that we need not try to practice by putting on any artificial weights. It is noticeable, however, that people with natural impediments above what the ordinary person has, often accomplish more than normal people. A young woman, who was confined to a wheel-chair as a means of getting around, secured the help of a normal young woman, and, by means of a horse and wagon with a special platform for conveying her from place to place, went to a certain neglected county to preach the Gospel. Her results were so gratifying that people said of her that she did more good than all the able-bodied ministers in the county. She made capital of her infirmity.

From such cases, that might be added to, no one with a handicap need be dismayed. On the other hand normal persons should use their abilities to their full extent.

But there is another thing that the Apostle says must be laid aside -- "the sin which doth so easily beset us." Hereditary influences, or a long-established habit, or some questionable thing that does not seem so very bad; these or other things need to be recognized as sins and laid aside, if we would run successfully the race of faith. Some one has interpreted this sin to be, "the sin that is in good standing around." There are sins that the general public do not condemn, and that even some church members may practice: for instance, covetousness. Any one who would excel in faith and run the race with patience successfully, must have a better slogan than "they all do it."

Do not overlook that word "patience." Results of your faith may not be readily observed. It takes time for fruit to grow and mature. As the Apostle says in Hebrews 10:36 -- "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

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31 -- THE GREAT EXEMPLAR OF FAITH

Having used the faith worthies of the Old Testament as examples of faith to stimulate us to exploits of faith, the Apostle now sets forth the great exemplar of faith when he says, "Consider

Him," even the Lord Jesus Christ. To consider means to look at closely. Let us therefore give special attention to what Jesus did in the exercise of faith.

First of all let us consider Him as an example of obedience and submission. He said on one occasion, "I do always those things that please Him," that is His Father. In the same connection He said, "I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things." In the Garden, in the midst of agony that made Him sweat blood, still He said to His Father, "not My will, but Thine, be done." This attitude of obedience and submission is necessary as the foundation on which faith works.

Consider Him on the cross, forsaken of men and forsaken of God, in the midst of a howling mob, crucified with thieves, and treated worse than either thief. There was no halo of glory about Him. There was not a smile from God, or any indication that God cared or knew of His sorrow. Death and hell stared Him in the face. Not a ray of light shone on the future as He took the plunge into the region of the dead. But His faith failed not. He had read in Psalm 16:8-11 -- "I have set the Lord always before Me: because He is at My right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore My heart is glad and My glory rejoiceth: My flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show Me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

With these words he relied on the Father's care though there was no evidence of His presence, indeed He was forsaken. But He had faith in the Scriptures, and, bowing His head, He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." He doubtless knew that the soldiers would get a club and break the bones of those on the crosses to hasten their death, but He knew the Scripture that said, "not a bone of Him shall be broken." He very likely knew also that the carcasses of dead criminals were dragged off for the dogs to eat, but the Bible said He would make His grave with the rich. All of these things, and many more He had to leave in the Father's hands, and He believed all would work out as the Bible says.

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32 -- THE STIMULATING HOPE

We read further in the Apostle's writings, "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame." There is an old hymn that says "keep the bright reward in view." The stimulant of the Christian that is calculated to nerve him to endure all that may come his way, is the reward that lies before him. The history of the church reveals the fact that the way to glory is by the way of the cross. Let us therefore take up our crosses and follow Jesus in the path to the joy that is set before us, looking at all times to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.

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THE END