

### The Faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph

#### Hebrews 11:17-22

Hebrews 11:17-22 – *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” <sup>19</sup> concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.*

<sup>20</sup> *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*

<sup>21</sup> *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.*

<sup>22</sup> *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.”*

#### Background Notes

Last week a good Christian friend mentioned that he had just read a book by a man who experienced a “near death” event. As a result of this “out of body” experience, the author testified that he had “come to faith.” However, throughout the book he never explained what he meant by “come to faith.” Apparently, from what was in the book, his “faith” was not faith in Jesus Christ or the God of the Bible. It was merely faith that there is life after death - based on his experience.

Well, that kind of faith may change your outlook on life - but it won't save you! And that's not the kind of faith that's discussed in Hebrews 11. In the Bible, “faith” is not just “faith” as an end in itself, or “faith” based on an experience. Biblical faith, as illustrated in Hebrews 11, is faith in the one true God of the Bible. Biblical faith believes and acts on what God has said and revealed. That's the kind of faith that pleases the heart of God!

Hebrews 11:17-22 touches on the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Notice - in each case ***their faith was demonstrated by their actions*** and ***those actions were based on what God had revealed***. God is looking for that kind of faith!

Do you want to have the kind of faith that pleases God? Then follow the faith of these biblical models.

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. Believers should follow the faith of Abraham.

Abraham's faith was mentioned earlier in this chapter (v8), but the greatest test of his faith was seen in verses 17-19 - when God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

The account of this supreme test of Abraham's faith was recorded in Genesis 22: *“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, “Take now your son, your*

*only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”*

What an incredible test of faith! I'm sure that you know that this event is a beautiful Old Testament *type*, or picture, of the sacrifice of Christ. As Isaac went willingly to the place of sacrifice, so the Lord Jesus went willingly to the cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God.

As Abraham did not spare his beloved son, so God did not spare His only beloved Son. Notice how the words “*only begotten*” in Hebrews 11:17 are the same words used in John 3:16: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.*” It's often been pointed out that God spared Abraham's heart, but He could not – and would not - spare His own heart.

A very interesting aspect of this great Old Testament *type*, or picture, is that this Old Testament event was not only a picture of the **sacrifice and death of Christ**, but it is also a picture of the **resurrection of Christ**. Abraham “*concluded that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type*” (v19, NASB). So Hebrews 11 demonstrated that the Genesis 22 account was a *type*, or a picture, of the sacrifice of Christ - including both His death and His resurrection.

However, the main point of Hebrews 11:17-19 is to highlight the test of Abraham's faith. It was a supreme test of faith, and Abraham passed this test of faith because he believed what God had revealed. And thus he obeyed God. God had revealed to Abraham that Isaac was the promised son, and that God's covenant with Abraham would be fulfilled through Isaac and Isaac's descendants. So Abraham knew that there was no way that Isaac could die (or at least remain dead) before he was married and had children. Abraham's faith in God's promises was so strong that he truly believed that God could - and would - raise Isaac from the dead.

We know the rest of the story, and we know that God never intended Isaac to be sacrificed. But Abraham didn't know that - yet he trusted the Lord completely. The focus of Abraham's faith was the one true God and what God had promised.

What a model of faith for us! When our faith is tested, what is our response? Do we obey God? Believers should follow the faith of Abraham.

## **2. Believers should follow the faith of Isaac.**

Do you remember the story of Jacob and Esau? Before the boys were born, God revealed to Isaac and Rebekah that the descendants of the older son, Esau, would serve the descendants of the younger son, Jacob (Genesis 25). But Isaac didn't like this arrangement. It was politically and culturally incorrect for the older to serve the younger – and besides, Esau was Isaac's favorite son! So in Genesis 27, Isaac gave the blessing to Esau - at least he thought he had given it to Esau.

This was completely contrary to God's stated will! How then, can Hebrews 11:20 say, “*By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*” The answer is in Genesis 27:33. When Isaac realized he had been tricked, and that he

had actually blessed Jacob rather than Esau, he did not revoke the blessing that he had pronounced on Jacob. Isaac told Esau: *“And indeed he shall be blessed.”* Based on what God had revealed years before, by faith Isaac let the blessing rest upon his son Jacob, just as God intended.

God recognized Isaac’s last-minute faith, and God honored it in Hebrews 11. This lesson in faith should be very encouraging to us, especially if our faith sometimes wavers. Have you been weak and wavering in your faith - maybe for many years? If so, turn to the Lord in full trust now! Believe what He has revealed in His Word! Believe in what He has done! God will honor genuine faith, no matter how much you have previously wavered. Believers should follow the faith of Isaac.

### 3. Believers should follow the faith of Jacob.

In Genesis 48, Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to his aged father, Jacob, for his blessing. Joseph brought them forward so that Jacob’s right hand of blessing would go on the head of Manasseh, the firstborn, and his left hand would go on the head of Ephraim, the younger son. But Jacob deliberately crossed his hands, and by faith he gave the greater blessing to Ephraim. Evidently God had revealed to Jacob that Ephraim would become the greater tribe in Israel - and that indeed came true. The tribe of Ephraim was so significant that in many Old Testament references, the northern kingdom of Israel became known as “Ephraim.”

So in spite of the culture, and in spite of Joseph’s suggestions, Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons - by ***faith in what God had revealed*** to him about the future. God is looking for that kind of faith.

One more point is added here about Jacob’s faith: Jacob *“worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.”* When you look at the biblical record of Jacob’s life, you’ll find many times when he did ***not*** set a good example for us to follow! Jacob had a lot of rough edges, and he had to travel a long way and learn a lot of lessons in the “school of God.” But in the end he made it into the Hebrews 11 “Hall of Faith” because ***his faith was genuine***. And that true faith resulted in and was demonstrated in true worship at the end of his days.

What an encouragement, especially for older Christians who may not have had shown much faith or had a strong faith in their younger years. In this way, believers should follow the faith of Jacob.

### 4. Believers should follow the faith of Joseph.

The final act of Joseph’s faith is recorded in the last chapter of Genesis. *“And Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here” (Genesis 50:24-25).*

At that point of Joseph’s life, that was quite a statement of faith! Think of Joseph’s high position in Egypt and the wealth and comfort that surrounded him. God Himself had provided the land of Egypt as a place of refuge from famine for

Joseph's extended family. But 200 years before this time, God had revealed to Abraham that He would bring Abraham's descendants out of Egypt, and give the land of Canaan to them as a possession.

Joseph believed what God had revealed. That's biblical faith! Joseph believed God had promised a literal, material Land for the nation of Israel. Joseph didn't spiritualize the promise of the Land, or apply it in a nonmaterial way to some other place or people.

Joseph believed so strongly in the literal promise of God to give that land permanently to the people of Israel that he made sure his bones would be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Promised Land. Hundreds of years later, Joseph's bones were taken from Egypt (Exodus 13), and were buried in Shechem, in the Promised Land (Joshua 24). The tomb of Joseph is there to this day in the land of Israel, in the modern town of Nablus.

The tomb of Joseph is a testimony to the faith of Joseph. He believed what God had promised – and he believed it literally. Believers should follow the faith of Joseph.

## **Practical Application**

### **Have you passed “the test of faith for children”?**

What do I mean, “pass the test of faith for children”? Becoming “as little children” and having a child-like faith, as Jesus said? No. Having an immature faith? Certainly not.

Go back to the faith of Abraham in verses 17-19. Abraham passed “the test of faith for children” when he was willing to give up his beloved son Isaac, in obedience to God's command.

Have you passed that test? Have you released your children to the Lord? Some Christian parents refuse to let go. They want to maintain total control of their children's lives. Even though the Lord may be calling their young people to Christian service, the parents have their own plans - so they hinder the Lord's will for the lives of their children.

If you are a parent, or when you become a parent, determine that you will release your children to the Lord! This is a good question for all of us who are parents: Have we passed “the test of faith for children”?