

Hebrews Chapter 11E

In Genesis chapter 17, when God appeared to Abraham the third time He confirmed His covenant and expanded it to include all of the generations that would come forth from Abraham.

- Two of the main benefits of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his offspring were a unique relationship with God and a special residence.
- Let's take a look at the covenant and see the relationship and residence.

Genesis 17:7 **And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."**

First - The Relational aspect of the covenant:

- God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants involves a special relationship that is described in this way **"I will be God to you and to your offspring after you."**
 - That's interesting because: throughout the O.T. and into the N.T. God is often called, **"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."** So we see that the patriarchs are described in light of their unique relationship with God.

Now we know from the Scripture that God's relationship with Abraham and his descendants is different from his relationship with the rest of mankind. How is that?

- ALL of mankind was separated from God through Adam's sin in the garden. And because of that sin the only relationship that man had with God was the relationship of a guilty criminal to a righteous judge.
- BUT God in his mercy revealed himself to Abraham, and He actually entered into a covenant with him. A covenant through which He would obtain a right standing with God through faith.
 - And that special relationship came with a special residence.

Genesis 17:8 **And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."**

- So the covenant promise of a unique relationship and a special residence was given by God to Abraham and to his offspring after him.

Now after giving a great deal of attention to Father Abraham, the writer of Hebrews moves on to highlight the faith of Abraham's descendants, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

- BUT rather than provide a lengthy detailed description of each one of their lives the Author focuses our attention on the very end of their lives.

- Each one of these men is presented to us as they are lying on their death bed. (That's strange WHY?)
- If you remember, earlier the author of Hebrews wrote:

Hebrews 11: 13 **These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar,**

- All these, that is all of the Patriarchs died in faith.
- Although each of these Patriarchs wavered between faith and flesh throughout their lives, the one thing they all had in common was that they all died in faith.
- They did not die in the despair of unfulfilled dreams, they did not die lamenting the years of Pilgrim wanderings, instead they all died in the perfect peace of God's faithful promise.

And each of them, on their death bed by faith passed the covenant promises of God on to the next generation.

- The greatest treasure that they could bestow on their children was their unique relationship with God and the residence that he promised.

Let's consider the Faith of these next three Patriarchs under these three headings:

- An Unremarkable life of faith. (Isaac)
- An Unsteady life of faith. (Jacob)
- An Unsinkable life of faith. (Joseph)

1 Unremarkable Life of Faith

Hebrews 11:20 **By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.**

- Reading through the account of Isaac's life in the book of Genesis my initial reaction was, "What an "unremarkable life." Isaac certainly doesn't come across as a great man of faith like David, Elijah or Daniel.
- We don't read of Isaac, subduing kingdoms (David) stopping the mouths of lions (Daniel) or quenching the power of fire (3 Hebrew friends)
- We DO know that God graciously revealed himself to Isaac after Abraham's death:

Genesis 26: 2 **And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.**

4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

This revelation of God to the son of Abraham is an invaluable key to the passing on of the covenant. You see the covenant did not pass from generation to generation

biologically; instead it was passed on by the sovereign will of God through the revelation of His Promise.

- Point in case, Ishmael and Esau were not partakers of the covenant even though they came from the loins of Abraham.
- The Apostle Paul makes this distinction in Romans 9.

Romans 9: 7 **not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."** 8 **This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.**

Nevertheless, in Isaac's life the evidence of true saving faith is harder to find than it was in Abraham's.

- We see a few sparks of faith when Isaac was confronted with Rebekah's infertility. He trusted in the Lord, prayed and the Lord granted his prayer and twins were conceived in her womb.
- Like his Father he was a worshipper, building a family altar in the wilderness.
- BUT much of Isaac's life seemed to be consumed with his fleshly appetite.

When God reveals which of his two sons was chosen to carry on the covenant, Isaac doesn't really seem to care.

- During her pregnancy God spoke to Rebekah:

Genesis 25: 23 **And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."**

- You know the story, Rebekah gave birth to Esau and Jacob. Esau came out first and Jacob followed immediately afterwards holding on to Esau's heel. And so he was named Jacob which means (supplanter) heel catcher.
- Now it was customary for the oldest son to receive the blessing from his Father, but in this case Rebekah was specifically told by God himself that Jacob would receive the blessing.
- Certainly Rebekah, being a good wife would have communicated God's Word to Isaac, but He didn't seem to be listening. (*I know that's hard for you wives to believe*)
- Isaac actually favored Esau. (He was a man's man, he was a hairy hunter who shared his father's appetite for good food and wild game)

Genesis 25:27 **When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.** 28 **Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.**

Isaac's love for Esau seemed to blind his eyes even more than the cataracts from which he suffered and although he knew that God had chosen Jacob he stubbornly decided to give his blessing to Esau.

- You know how that worked out. With the help of his mother, and the skins of a goat, Jacob tricked his blind and frail father into giving the blessing to him rather than Esau.

In light of Isaac's Unremarkable life of materialism and favoritism where do we look to find a true expression of faith?

- The writer of Hebrews points us to the very end of Isaac's life when it seems that God opened the Patriarch's blind eyes.
- After years of spiritual lethargy, decades of fleshly favoritism Isaac sees the light and submits to the will of God. (Rebekah was right!)
- Calling Jacob into the room he prayed the covenant blessing of Abraham on the son of God's choosing

Genesis 28: 3 **God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.** 4 **May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!"**

What do we learn from Isaac's "Unremarkable Life of Faith?"

- We learn that the will of God, communicated by the Word of God cannot be manipulated or changed by men.
- Regardless of how strongly you may feel about someone or something, when the Word of God communicates the will of God you don't have the right or ability to change it.
- With all of his heart, Isaac wanted to give the blessing to Esau even though he knew it was God's will to bless Jacob.
- And when he rebelously sought to arrange Esau's blessing, he was out-foxed by a more cunning wife.

If we want to live a remarkable life of faith we must simply receive and believe the Word of God and we must submit to the Will of God even when our flesh (*our desires and our emotions*) are pushing us to rebel.

- Now we move from an unremarkable life of faith to an unsteady life of faith.

2 Unsteady life of faith

Like Father, Like Son: There were times when Jacob was like his father Isaac.

- He was spiritually hot and cold, often driven by the desires of the flesh.
 - He had moments of great faith and seasons of great fear.
 - Like his mother Jacob manipulated people. He even tried to bargain with God
- But Jacob's sinful tendencies always seemed to backfire on him.
- Every achievement that he gained through manipulation resulted in him being forced to flee the impending wrath of the people he wronged.

- By his own admission he lived a very hard life.

BUT like his grandfather and his father before him Jacob was confronted by the Living God. Running away from his brother Esau HE headed toward Haran.

- As the sun went down he laid his head on a stone and under the star-lit sky and he dreamed and behold a ladder was set upon the earth and the top of it reached into heaven.
- The angels of God were ascending and descending on it and the Lord stood above it and said:

Genesis 28:13 "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

- Through this divine visitation the prayers of Isaac were realized and the covenant of God was passed on to the next generation.
- Like many of us, Jacob's life could be likened to a wrestling match.
- Inside of him there was a constant battle going on between faith and fear; between Self-sufficiency and worshipful surrounded.
- And Jacob's wrestling match continued up to that fateful day when he literally wrestled with Lord.
- BUT the writer of Hebrews focuses our attention on Jacob's faith at the end of his life.

Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

- The picture that the writer of Hebrews paints for us is the image of a man who has run the race, one who has completed the course, a man who is ready to receive his reward.
- Jacob is physically exhausted, his eyes are dim with age but his spirit is alive and the promises of God are at the forefront of his mind. This is the death of a Saint!!
- Like never before Jacob speaks with prophetic clarity the Word of the Lord to each and every one of his Sons.

Genesis 48: 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.

- Even though He had departed the Land of Promise and was living in Egypt, by Faith Jacob spoke of his family's return to the Promised Land and He made Joseph promise to take his bones with him and bury them in the Land that God had given them.

Again and again we see the Saints of God dying with a great assurance of faith.

2 Timothy 4:7 **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**
8 **Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.**

- This is the assurance of faith!
- We have seen how faith works in an Unremarkable life (Isaac) and we have seen the effects of saving faith on an Unsteady life. (Jacob) Now we move on to see an unsinkable life of faith in Jacob's son Joseph.

3 Unsinkable life of faith

Joseph's life is different from the lives of those who went before him in many ways. First, there is no record of divine visitation in his life. Instead Joseph was a dreamer and along with the promises of God that were handed down from Jacob, the Lord revealed himself and his plan to Joseph through his dreams.

- A second thing that strikes you when you read the story of Joseph's life is his sterling character. In the face of tremendous hardship and the persecution, of his own brothers Joseph remains resilient always taking the moral high road.
- Finally, from the Scriptures we know that Joseph spent all of his adult life in Egypt. Although he was the fourth generation heir of the promise, he did not spend his life as a sojourner in the land like his predecessors.

It had been 200 years since God made his covenant with Abraham and it seemed like the promise was becoming more and more out of reach. 200 years and still there was no fulfillment in sight so at the end of the book of Genesis we find the whole family of Israel living in the land of Egypt.

- Even though the family's move was unanticipated it was not unexpected. God prophetically told Abraham that his descendants would sojourn in a land that was not their own for 400 years.

Genesis 15:12 **As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.**

13 **Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.**

- I believe that this prophecy was passed down through the generations by word of mouth because we hear Joseph making mention of the return as his death approached.

Genesis 50: 24 **And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."** 25 **Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."**

- Convinced that the Word of God was absolute truth Joseph makes his brothers swear to take his bones with them when God brings them into the land.
- So we see that the writer of Hebrews highlights the faith by which the Patriarchs held fast to the promises of God. Although they did not see the fulfillment in their lifetime they held fast to the Word of the Lord.

Heb 11:13 **These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar,**

- These brief descriptions and the Genesis records to which they point clearly exemplify everything we have discovered about faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

In Verse 1 the writer said: **Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

- Surely this is what we find in the record of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, who trusted in things that they never saw with their eyes, promises from God that were made tangible by faith.

What can we take home this morning from the life of faith that was lived by Isaac, Jacob and Joseph?

FIRST: Their faith was firmly fixed upon the promises of God and the plan of God that was revealed to them through the Word of God.

- Whether that Word came to them through the mouth their father, by a dream or divine visitation, they all received the Word of God by faith and believed.
- Through the promises and prophecies that were passed on to them their eyes were opened and they were able to see the substance of those things for which they hoped.
- And that hope held them fast to the promise even as they passed through the valley of the shadow of death.

SECOND: We see in the Patriarchs how faith handles the prospect of death.

- We know that Abraham believed in the resurrection of the dead because he was willing to offer his Son Isaac on the altar being confident that God would raise him from the dead if necessary in order to fulfill his promises.
- We see this same confident assurance in Jacob's life as he approached the final curtain. He rested on his staff and worshipped the Lord at the time of his death.
- King David would write, Ps 23:4 **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

How much more should we who have heard the good news of the resurrection of the dead which comes through Christ Jesus rest with confidence as we approach the entrance into our eternal reward.

Last and certainly not least, each and every one of these pioneers of faith were concerned with the passing on of God's promise to the next generation.

Psalm 145: 4 **One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.**

Deuteronomy 6: 6 **And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.**

7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Proverbs 22:6 **Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.**

Eph 6:4 **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

Proverbs 1:8 **Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, 9 for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.**

Friends through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we have become children of Abraham, participants in the covenant of Grace, recipients of the gift of righteousness.

- By faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have been set free from the power and the penalty of sin. We are citizens of the Kingdom, heirs of God joint heirs with Christ.
- Like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we live in this world as sojourners, pilgrims waiting for the city whose architect and builder is God.
- Like them we have the assurance of eternal life through God's sovereign grace