
Words of Truth

Hebrews 11:17-22

By: Brian A. Yeager

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (Hebrews 11:17-22).

God tested Abraham by telling him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:1-2). Abraham went forth and was ready to carry out that instruction (Genesis 22:3-10). At the point wherein Abraham was about to take the knife to his son, the angel of the Lord stopped him (Genesis 22:11-12). God provided a ram to offer instead (Genesis 22:13). As a father, I cannot imagine this test. In addition to a father's love being tested, it was through Isaac that God was going to fulfill His promises to Abraham (Genesis 17:19).

Abraham's willingness to obey God's very difficult instruction proved his faith. James wrote: *“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”* (James 2:18-24).

Through the pen of the Hebrew writers we see that Abraham believed that God was able to raise up Isaac. That may be what Abraham was thinking when he told the young men with he and Isaac, *“I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you”* (Genesis 22:5). Abraham was fully persuaded that, what God had promised, He was able also to perform (Romans 4:21). We too know that God keeps His promises (Numbers 23:19 and Titus 1:1-3). Therefore, like Abraham, we know that we can obey God's instructions without fear that those instructions will cause us to miss out on His promises.

After writing about Abraham passing his test, the writers of this letter jump forward to Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau. We know that this language is a very simplified account of what happened (Genesis 27:1-28:4). The focus herein is not on what happened between Jacob and Esau. The focus is not on the trickery of Rebekah and Jacob. The focus is on Isaac's faith in granting the blessing. Like his father, Isaac believed in the promises of God. Isaac knew that the seed of his father would continue through him because God made that promise (Genesis 21:12). The fact that he extended this blessing through his offspring is a testimony to his faith in that promise.

The account then moves forward to the end of Jacob's life. The Holy Spirit did not focus on how Jacob's marriages came about or the births of his children (Genesis 28:1-30:43 and Genesis 35:1-27). What happened as Jacob was pursued by Laban is not covered (Genesis 31:1-55). The Holy Spirit did not have the account of Jacob and Esau's feud or resolution (Genesis 32:1-33:16). The Holy Spirit did not have these penmen focus on what happened with Dinah (Genesis 34:1-31). The Holy Spirit did not have these penmen focus on what happened to Joseph and how the children of Israel got to Egypt because of Joseph (Genesis 37:1-47:27). What is mentioned is the blessing of Joseph being given to his sons by his father Jacob (Genesis 47:28-48:20). Again, the faith is in the promise of God made originally to their father Abraham.

Then, the writers of this Hebrew letter jump forward to the time Joseph died. The original record says this: *"And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt"* (Genesis 50:22-26).

This section of our study could easily be subtitled: "Faith In The Promises Of God." God has a great track record. In the days of Joshua we read: *"And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass"* (Joshua 21:43-45). This matters to us because unto us there have been given, *"exceeding great and precious promises"* (II Peter 1:4). We can look back at examples such as we have in this study and see that God did exactly what He promised. If you read the details of the accounts, you can see that even great obstacles did not change what God said would happen. Like those before us, go forward in faith!