

**Text:** Hebrews 11:20-22

**Title:** The Faith of the Patriarchs at the End of Their Lives

**Date/Location:** September 18, 2011

## Introduction

Here are three more examples of Biblical faith. In each case, there was a blessing pronounced or statement made at the end of the patriarch's life. *Patriarch* is a common Biblical designation for the forefathers of the nation of Israel. There are several patriarchs who were important ancestors.

### I. Isaac, v. 20

### Genesis 27:26-29, 33-40; 28:1-4

Isaac had plenty of info from his father on the promises. But he also had direct revelation from God in Genesis 26:3-5.

The "by faith" incident selected out of Isaac's life is not the sacrifice that he (almost) underwent at the hands of Abraham his father. Rather, it was his blessing of Jacob and Esau that gets attention in Hebrews. As messy as it was with the deception by Jacob and the misunderstanding of Isaac about which direction the promises were going to go, this event still ranks at the top of faith-expressions of Isaac. It showed his utter confidence that God would bless him and his offspring, on account of Abraham. The trickery of Jacob is actually a side-note in this sense and can, if we let it, derail us from seeing the main point.

Note how Isaac was convinced of things not seen, according to the definition of Biblical faith in Hebrews 11:1.

"By faith" Isaac blessed Jacob. He did not do it blindly or just "hoping beyond hope" that something good would happen. He was expressing his utter trust in God about the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in the next generation. Isaac trusted God just like Abraham trusted God—"If I kill Isaac, God will *have* to raise him up from the dead to fulfill His covenantal promises." Isaac in effect by his blessing tells his sons, "God is going to fulfill His promises, we know that, and I'm passing them on to you since I've not seen their complete fulfillment yet."

#### A Brief Note on the Deception by Jacob and Rebekah

1. Somehow Isaac was misguided in his desire to bless Esau, because God had said that the older would serve the younger. He must have known that but somehow lost sight of it.

2. Keep in mind that Esau also received a blessing (27:39-40). It was not a blessing that had the Abrahamic covenant promises involved in it.
3. None of the above makes right the deceptive collusion by Rebekah and Jacob to steal the birthright that belonged to the firstborn. Even though it belonged to Jacob by God's word, and the birthright was despised by Esau, deceiving is not justified. Jacob could have gone in and spoken with his father directly about the matter and reminded him of God's revelation to his wife (Jacob's mother) in Genesis 25:23. Even if Jacob did bless Esau first, God still appointed Jacob as the "son of promise" for the Abrahamic covenant.

## **II. Jacob, v. 21**

**Genesis 48:1-5, 9, 13-20**

Jacob was a schemer. He got the birthright (Genesis 25:31) and then the blessing. But he did not scheme now that he was older and "settled down" in his faith in God.

It seems that 48:3 is key to understanding Jacob's thought process. God blessed Jacob and reiterated the Abrahamic promises to him. This happened years earlier as recorded in 28:13-15 and 32:26-29. Jacob fully believed that the promises would be fulfilled and so could pass them on in faith as he blessed his offspring.

Jacob, by his declaration, officially adopted the two sons of Joseph to be his own and to be equal partakers with his direct biological children of the Abrahamic promises.

In effect, Joseph received the double portion of the inheritance by having two of his sons included with his brothers in the blessing of his father Jacob.

Jacob knowingly blessed the younger of the two sons. He prophesied that Ephraim would be the greater than Manasseh. This indeed was the case as Ephraim was more prominent in later Israelite history.

Jacob worshiped God, as Gen. 47:31 says, leaning over at the head of the bed. Perhaps he bowed forward while he held on to the headboard of the bed with one hand and leaned on his staff with the other hand (from the Septuagint = LXX = Greek translation of the OT).

## **III. Joseph, v. 22**

**Genesis 50:24-25, Exodus 13:19**

Joseph learned of the promises from his father Jacob. He also realized that God had used him to sustain the infant Israelite people in the time of great famine so that the covenant promises could continue (Genesis

50:19-21). As a teenager he had revelatory dreams from God about the future (Genesis 37:1-10) and also was an interpreter of the dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 41:16ff), so he had access to special revelation as well. (See also Psalm 105:17-22).

Joseph's life was full of faith from when he was a teenager until he was 110 years old. He went from the pit to Potiphar's house to prison to the palace of Pharaoh. But none of those more well-known incidents are called out by the author of Hebrews. It is as if God highlights the one most remarkable demonstration of faith in Joseph's life. That evidence of faith was how he believed when he was dying.

Perhaps the selection of a future event that Joseph could not see indicates to us that **faith is most visible when its object is most invisible!**

Joseph said two things to his brothers and descendants before he died:

1. God will bring Israel out of Egypt and into land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How did he know this? God had said Israel would be in Egypt, eventually under bondage, for 400 years, but that they would get out (Gen. 15:13-14). Furthermore, Joseph knew the promise that was given over and over. At some point, Israel *had to leave* Egypt for the promise to be fulfilled.
2. He charged his brothers to bring his bones out of Egypt. He was so certain that God would fulfill His promise that he talked about taking his remains in a coffin out of Egypt so his resting place could be in the promised land. Note that Joseph would have had a huge funeral and prominent burial place in Egypt. He was such a high official that there probably would have been a huge monument. He eschewed all of that, instead desiring to be in the land of promise.

#### **IV. Application to Today**

God clearly stated the promise to Abraham (initially in Gen. 12:1-3), and then repeatedly throughout the ensuing years as recorded in Genesis. The patriarchs banked on that promise – from Abraham and Sarah having a child, wandering about in tents, to Abraham's offering up the promised son, and the other patriarchs demonstrating certainty and conviction that what God had promised would come to pass.

So...what about the clear and repeated promises that God has made to you? The things that are unseen—do you believe them? Will you trust Him and believe them even to the end of your life like Joseph and Jacob and Isaac and Abraham? Here are some of God's promises to us:

### **Promises for everyone:**

“If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” John 8:24.

“He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John 3:36.

“Whoever believes in [Jesus] should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

“The one who comes to Me (Jesus) I will by no means cast out.” John 6:37.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Matthew 5:6.

### **Promises for the Christian:**

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” John 10:28.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5, Deut. 31:6, 8, Joshua 1:5.

“I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” John 14:3.

“We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” 2 Peter 3:13.

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain.” Rev 21:4.

Such are God’s promises. Given God’s truthful and immutable nature (and his 100% track record!), how could we *not* believe in Him?!

### **Conclusion**

This section concludes Hebrews’ examples of faith in the book of Genesis. Next we will learn about the faith of Moses from the book of Exodus.

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