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## THE ANCIENT WORTHIES

– MARCH 30. – HEBREWS 11:1-19. –

**"Our fathers trusted in Thee; they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them." – Psalm 22:4.**

ST. PAUL in this lesson throws upon the screen vivid pictures of the wonders wrought by faith in ancient times, and then he gives a partial roll-call of the heroes of those faith-battles, and a hasty word-painting of the nature of their triumphs. The broad foundation for his dissertation is found in the first verse of this study – "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." As water is not a solid upon which our feet can travel, except it be congealed in the form of ice, so likewise belief, in the ordinary sense of the word, is not sufficient as a foundation for our trust and onward progress, unless that belief be congealed, solidified, into a substantial faith.

Thus we should always clearly differentiate between credulity and faith – credulity, which is reprehensible, and faith, which is commendable. A crystallized faith, such as will carry us safely over the quicksands of ignorance and superstition, and bring us safely to the goal which God has marked out for us, needs more than human assurances, more than our own or other men's imaginations. [R5188 : page 61] True faith seeks for a positive Message from the Lord. It requires diligence in its endeavor to find that Message. Then it becomes an evidence, or proof, of things invisible.

By such a faith in God and His promise to give Israel the land of Canaan, the two elders sent to spy out the land brought back a good report. Their companions, lacking that faith, looked merely to the strength of the Canaanites, and brought back an unfavorable report. By faith we believe in the Divine Power which created the planets, and the Divine Power which has ordered the ages and

dispensations of human affairs, and which will bring out of these, results which were not at first apparent, except by the eye of faith.

### **ABRAHAM, ENOCH AND NOAH**

By faith Abel offered to the Lord a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, and obtained the witness of his approval by God's acceptance of his offering. His acceptance still speaks to us in Abel's favor, although he is dead. Abel's faith, no doubt, was the result of an endeavor to draw nearer to God – to appreciate what sin is and why the death penalty had come. From this standpoint of faith, he was led to offer sacrificially animals which typified the better sacrifices by which reconciliation will eventually be effected between God and humanity.

On account of faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death. He "walked with God, and... God took him." The story of Enoch's translation is vouched for more than once; and by faith we may accept it. There is no record as to where he was taken, except that he was not taken to Heaven. (John 3:13.) For aught we know to the contrary, God may have protected his life through all these centuries as an illustration of how human life could have been prolonged by Divine Power, if God had not placed the curse of death upon the race. Indeed, Enoch could be no exception to that curse. He is under the death sentence and could come to full perfection and Divine justification to life only through the merit of the Redeemer, even as others.

Noah's faith manifested itself by his obedience in the building of an ark, at a time when there was no apparent excuse for such a building, since not a drop of rain had fallen from the time of man's creation until that time. (Genesis 2:5.) God blessed his faith, and made him a channel of blessing to his family.

## THE FAITHLESS NOT ACCEPTABLE NOW

St. Paul makes a sweeping statement – "Without faith it is impossible to please God." On the basis of this statement we may say, then, that a person is pleasing to God in proportion as he has faith, and displeasing in proportion as he lacks faith. Surely here we have an incentive to growth in faith, since all of God's people desire to be pleasing in His sight.

But faith is not alike easy with all mankind. Some can crystallize their faith in God and His promises into what is the same to them as an absolute knowledge, and on this faith-knowledge they can dare and do anything, and increasingly so. But this is not true of all. Many have less faith and are still children of God, and must needs pray, "Lord, increase our faith," and must seek to emulate the faith of others, and to be encouraged by the rewards of faith given to them. There are still others, however, to whom faith seems to be absolutely impossible. They cannot believe anything beyond their own five [R5189 : page 61] senses. They have never developed the sixth sense – of faith, confidence in the Lord.

What shall we say of these? Are they by this natural effect of heredity debarred from Divine favor to all eternity, because they do not please God – because "without faith it is impossible to please" Him? This is not the teaching of the Scriptures. They teach that a time is coming, under Messiah's gracious Kingdom, when the "knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth," reaching all classes. It will not be dependent upon faith, nor be merely for those who can exercise faith. The way will be made so clear and so plain that even a wayfaring man and a simpleton need not err in his endeavor to find and to know and to appreciate the Truth.

But in the present time faith is an indispensable matter according to Divine arrangement, because the Father is seeking a special class to be the associates, the Bride and Joint-heir of His Son. Since these will thus be ushered into positions of great trust, as well

as great honor and great service, they must needs be tempted, tested, in all points. Their faith in the Almighty must be implicit. Similarly, as we shall see, God has provided a special work for the Ancient Worthies mentioned in today's Study; and hence He has recognized as worthy for that work only such as could manifest great faith in Him and in His Word.

### **ABRAHAM LOOKED FOR A CITY**

Coming to Abraham, St. Paul recounts the different steps of his faith-demonstration. He responded to the call and came into Canaan, not knowing the particulars respecting it beforehand. By faith he sojourned in the Land of Promise as a stranger, and dwelt in tents, as did also Isaac and Jacob, who were his associates in the Promise, and heirs through him. Sarah also exercised faith. The Apostle declares that she was thus assisted in becoming the mother of Isaac, and became identified with that Promise, which declares that Abraham's seed, through her, shall yet be as the sands of the seashore – innumerable.

Summing up (v. 13), St. Paul declares that all these noble characters died in faith, without receiving the things that had been promised to them. Their rejoicing was in the faith-view which they had from afar. So strong was their faith that they were content to be pilgrims and strangers – nomads. Their traveling up and down showed that none of the cities or countries through which they passed from time to time were wholly satisfactory to them. Yet they were not discontented in the sense that they wished to return to their former homeland, Haran. They were merely seeking a better country, a heavenly country, for they "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

At first glance, there is room for difference of opinion as respects the Apostle's meaning by these words. Did he mean that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were wanting to go to a heavenly country? Did he mean that they were looking for a place in the New

Jerusalem, as the Bride, the Lamb's Wife, is looking for that City – Messiah's Kingdom?

Such is not our thought. They had no Heavenly promises to think about. They had no Word of God to even suggest to them a change of nature from human to spirit being. All of their promises were of the earth, earthy – "All the *land* that thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed after thee," etc. To our understanding the country they looked for is the Paradise of the now near future, when "the wilderness shall blossom as the rose and the solitary places shall be glad," and "streams shall break forth in the desert," and the blessing of the Lord shall supplant the curse of sin and death. This is the country which God purposes shall be the inheritance of humanity in general, when brought back into harmony with the Divine will, during Messiah's reign of righteousness. [R5189 : page 62]

When we read that Abraham sought "a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God," our minds naturally go to the New Jerusalem, the City of God, which is eventually to come down from God to earth. But that will not be a literal city. The entire passage is symbolical. The New Jerusalem will be the Messianic Kingdom. It will be the Capital, or center of Government, for the reorganized social order of earth. From it will go forth the Law of God, the knowledge of God, the blessing of God. From it will emanate power and authority, which for a thousand years will rule the world in righteousness, overthrow sin, death and all who are in sympathy with sin, and uplift all who love righteousness and Truth.

The New Jerusalem primarily will be the Church in glory, on the spirit plane, the Kingdom or rule of God, emanating from Messiah. But it will have its earthly representatives, too. The very ones to whom St. Paul here refers, found faithful in their time – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Prophets and all the Ancient

Worthies – will be princes in the earth, representatives of the invisible Messiah and His Bride, backed by their full power and authority. – Psalm 45:16.

Of these Jesus spoke, saying, "Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the holy Prophets in the Kingdom." But He Himself has said, "Yet a little while and the world seeth Me no more." Of the Church the Apostle declares, "We shall be like Him." We all must be changed. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, on the spirit plane.

In substance, then, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the faithful of the past, waited for the promised resurrection of the dead, to be accomplished under the administration of Messiah's Government – a government being symbolically represented by a city, as St. Petersburg represents Russia; Paris represents France; London represents Great Britain; Berlin, Germany; and Washington, the United States.

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