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## **TWO BANDS OF GOD'S HEROES**

– *MARCH 12.* – *HEBREWS 11:1 – 12:2.* –

FAITH HEROES OF THE JEWISH AGE – FAITH HEROES OF THE GOSPEL AGE – THE HOUSE OF SERVANTS – THE HOUSE OF SONS – EARTHLY PROMISES – HEAVENLY PROMISES – RESURRECTION TO PERFECT HUMAN NATURE – RESURRECTION TO DIVINE NATURE – THE CHRISTIAN RACE COURSE.

**"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith." – Hebrews 12:2.**

THE Bible puts faith before works, because no works can be acceptable to God unless inspired by faith. Thus it is written, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." The Bible brings to our attention two distinct classes of Faith Heroes, both pleasing to God and both to be highly rewarded by Him. One of these classes preceded Jesus' day; the other class follows His day. The first class of Faith Heroes are therefore known as the Ancient Worthies; the latter class, with Jesus as their Head, are styled the sons of God. This distinction or division of God's servants, although clearly marked in the Scriptures, has been overlooked by the Lord's people until recent years.

No matter how faithful or loyal Enoch, Abraham, David, Jeremiah and others were, they could not be recognized by God as members of the House of Sons, because they lived before Jesus' day – before Jesus tasted death for every man. The Bible points out that the first man Adam was recognized as a son of God. (Luke 3:38.) From the time that sin entered the world through Adam's disobedience, God recognized none of the human family as His sons – all were sinners – until Jesus came and died, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us back to God and open to us the door of sonship. It is in harmony with this that St. Paul declares, "Moses

verily was faithful as a servant over all his House [the House of Servants], but Christ as a Son over His own House [the House of Sons]." – Hebrews 3:5,6.

Thus the distinction is clearly marked between the noble brethren before the Cross, the last one of whom was John the Baptist, and the noble brethren since the Cross, the first of whom were the Apostles. That John the Baptist was the last of the Ancient Worthies is attested by the Master's words, "There hath not arisen a greater Prophet than John the Baptist; and yet I say unto you, that he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he." – Luke 7:28.

St. Paul makes this distinction between the Ancient Worthies and the Christian Worthies in today's lesson. He first of all recites the names of the prominent ones of the past – Enoch, Abraham, David, Jeremiah, etc. He declares their faith, and says that they were pleasing to God, noble, praiseworthy. Then he calls attention to the fact that they never received the promises which God made to them.

It should be remembered that God did not promise Heavenly things prior to Jesus' day. The promises to the Ancient Worthies, which inspired their zeal and devotion, were all earthly promises; for instance, the one made to Abraham – "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever." – Genesis 13:14,15; 17:8.

St. Stephen calls our attention to the fact that this promise to Abraham is still secure and still unfulfilled. He declares that Abraham never received enough of that land to set his foot upon. On this promise he predicates the resurrection of Abraham, that in God's due time he may inherit the land, and that his faithful seed, or posterity, will inherit it after him.

On the other hand, the promises in the New Testament **[R5859 : page 61]** are only spiritual – Heavenly promises, "things above."

The Christian Worthies are promised a share with Jesus in the Heavenly Kingdom which He is to establish at His Second Coming. They are to be His joint-heirs, "if so be that they suffer with Him that they may be also glorified together." (Romans 8:17.) The promise to these is that they shall be a Kingdom of Priests, or a Royal Priesthood; while the promise to the Ancient Worthies is that they shall be made "princes in all the earth." – 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 20:6; Psalms 45:16.

The Christian heroes are to have a change of nature from human to Divine, the beginning of this change being the begetting of the Holy Spirit in the present time, and the completing of the change being that of the resurrection – "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" – "sown in weakness, raised in power; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown an animal body, raised a spiritual body." But the Ancient Worthies, not having the begetting of the Holy Spirit to a new nature, will have a different resurrection; namely, to human perfection.

Contrasting these two classes of Faith Heroes, the Apostle in verses 39 and 40 declares that the Ancient Worthies, "having obtained a good report through faith, received not the Promise [the things promised to them]. God having promised some better thing for us [Christian heroes, followers in the footsteps of Jesus], that they without us should not be made perfect." In other words, God from the beginning arranged that Christ should be first – Jesus the Head, then the Church, His Body; and after the perfecting of these, styled the First Resurrection, the Divine promises will begin to fulfil to the Ancient Worthies, and extend ultimately to "all the families of the earth." – Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:29.

## **THE CHRISTIAN RACE COURSE**

God has great blessings in store for every member of the human family willing to accept the same on the Divine terms. But the chiefest of all the blessings brought to our attention in the Bible are

those found to be provided for the Church class – the Little Flock, to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom, and the glory and the honor of association with Jesus in the work of blessing the world during His Millennial Reign.

The Apostle addresses this class in the two closing verses of today's Study. He urges us, saying, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Throne of God."

The Apostle is a forceful reasoner; for in these words he exhorts to look backwards at the list of Ancient Worthies and to consider what they endured and how faithful and loyal to God they were. Then he would have us consider them as though they were a cloud of witnesses watching us, to whom has been given this still greater blessing and privilege of becoming sons of God on the Divine plane, of attaining "the Divine nature." – John 1:12; 2 Peter 1:4.

He pictures before our minds a great race-course, in which we are runners. He pictures Jesus as the Leader gone before, the One who has become the Author of our faith, the One through whom we are privileged to enter this race, and the One who has promised us grace sufficient for every time of need. He pictures to us how Jesus ran in this race and by faith looked forward to the joy that was set before Him by the Father. He pictures to us how loyal Jesus was, and what He endured – the cross and its shame. He pictures the Father's faithfulness in highly rewarding Jesus, seating Him at His own right hand of Divine Majesty. Then comes the exhortation, "Let us lay aside every weight," every hindrance, everything that would prevent our running grandly and successfully the race for this great prize

which Jesus has obtained, and to which we are invited through the merit of His sacrifice.

The Apostle reminds us also that one of the greatest hindrances to our running this race is sin; that we are beset by inherited sin in our members; and that we need to run in the race not only perseveringly, but also patiently; for whoever would obtain so great a prize will need patience, will need to be proven and tested in all points as respects his loyalty and devotion to the Heavenly Father, to the Truth, and to the brethren. Only such as attain the character-likeness of their Leader in this narrow way may hope to be with Him and like Him, and share His glory; for God has predestinated that these shall all be conformed to the image of His Son. – Romans 8:29.

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