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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

# Analysis of Hebrews: Chapter 11



Part 18/23

## God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

In our previous session of these studies in Hebrews I had just got into the beginning of Hebrews 11. I had actually read the first six verses but only commented fully on the first two verses. Now we're going to go on at verse 3 which is a tremendously important verse.

I pointed out in my previous study that chapter 10 ends with the statement that "we are not of those who draw back, but those who continue to believe to the saving of our souls." The emphasis there is on the essential nature of faith in the Christian life. Because of that ending in chapter 10, chapter 11 logically begins by expounding on the nature of faith and then illustrating faith by many examples taken from the Old Testament.

As I pointed out previously—but it's worth saying again—the first verse of Hebrews defines faith. It's one of the few biblical concepts that is actually defined in the Bible. We could look at it again to refresh our memories and move on from there.

> "Faith is the substance of things that are hoped for, a sure conviction [or a proof] of things that are not seen."

That tells us certain important facts about faith. First of all, faith is so real that it's a substance. It's not something you imagine, it's not something illusory, it's not hard to relate to; but it's a substance, a spiritual substance. It's the underlying basis of things that we hope for. Only those hopes which are built on genuine faith are valid. Other hopes are really just wishful thinking. They may come true but there's no guarantee.

I point out these two principles and I should add that the letter P capitalized is short for principle. Also, the letter E is short for example. In this chapter we'll be looking at a great many different examples and principles which they illustrate.

The first two principles that we see are in relationship to verse 1. Faith is present, hope is future. We have to make that distinction otherwise we become confused. Without faith hope has no solid basis.

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The second principle is that faith relates to the unseen. It's a sure conviction concerning things that are not seen. When we see, we don't need to believe. But in God's order, believing comes first and seeing follows. When Martha stood outside the tomb of Lazarus and Jesus was about to raise him from the tomb He said to Martha, "Did I not say unto thee that if thou would believe thou should see the glory of God?" Notice, believing comes first; it leads to seeing. Many people with carnal minds say, "I'll believe when I see." But then, you don't need to believe because you see. Believing precedes seeing. Believing relates us to the unseen.

It's always difficult for the human mind to relate to the unseen. Time and time again throughout the Scriptures, we find that people couldn't hold on in the Spirit to the unseen so they came back to the material and the visible. In so doing, they lost out spiritually.

Verse 2, I'll simply read my comment and move on. "Faith was the key to the victories of the Old Testament saints." The same applies to God's successful servants in all ages. Faith is the key to victory and to successful service, no matter what the type of service may be. We are called to many, many different types of service but the same underlying principle applies to all of them, faith is the key to success.

Now we come to verse 3.

> "By faith we understand that the ages were fitted together by a spoken word of God, so that that which is seen did not come into being out of things which appear."

That's a pretty literal translation. Notice again the emphasis on "that which is not seen." By faith we understand that the ages were fitted together by a spoken word of God. The word for word there is the one that's so popular today in Charismatic circles, rhema. Not logos. And rhema means primarily—not always—a spoken word. When God spoke, the universe came into being.

I pointed out also, but I'll say it again, that where it says the world the Greek says literally "the ages." The word is used primarily of time, secondarily of space. One of the very interesting features about this is that the Bible—and specifically this passage—in a sense, anticipates the modern Theory of Relativity of which the essence is you cannot specify space without time or time without space. They use the phrase the "space/time continuum." Really, the writers of the Bible were there long before modern physicists. Even before Albert Einstein!

As a matter of fact, it's worth noting that when God sanctified something, the first thing He sanctified was not a place but a time. He sanctified the seventh day. We tend to think in terms of places being sanctified but the first thing sanctified in our earthly existence was a time, the seventh day. I read a work by a Jewish rabbi who is a very scholarly writer in which he spoke about a cathedral built of time, not of space. We won't go into that, but there's so many interesting possibilities that come out of that statement.

The statement that the ages, or the world, or the universe was brought into being by God's spoken word agrees with various passages elsewhere. We'll look just at one which is not referred to in your outline. It's Psalm 33:6 and 9.

> "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host."

And again in the same context, verse 9.

> "For He [God] spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast."

So the ultimate reality behind all reality is the spoken word of God.

Many of you know that I was at one time a professional philosopher. One of the great questions—in fact, the initial question of European philosophy going back in Greece to about 6 BC was "What is the ultimate reality?" The first theories were somewhat naive like "It's water," "It's fire," "It's earth" and so on. One philosopher said, "The thing that out of which everything is made is water." Another said fire and another said earth. But they were groping for what is behind everything. The philosophic phrase for that is "What is the first cause?" Well, the Bible answers that question very clearly. The first cause of everything is the spoken word of God. God spoke the universe into being. So, behind the visible is the invisible.

Again, this is in remarkable agreement, to a certain extent, with modern physics. If you were to ask a physicist to explain the pulpit that I'm speaking from he would speak in terms of atoms and protons and electrons and other things. All of which are invisible. No human eye has ever seen them; no human eye ever will see them. If you would ask him to make a statement, it would be in the form of some kind of equation. That's very, very close to the biblical

revelation that behind everything in the physical universe is a word of God. That's the explanation.

When we believe that, it lifts us onto a totally different level of faith because we're dealing with a God who can speak things into being or can speak things out of being. We can look at the material universe and say, "How could certain conditions be changed? How could a broken arm be changed?" The answer is, "By the spoken word of God." When we face some mountain of a situation that seems impossible and blocks the will of God in our lives, how can it be changed? The answer is by a spoken word of God. Furthermore, Jesus indicates that God might allow you or me to speak that word with the faith of God and it would be just as effective as if God spoke it Himself. So you see how important it is to understand what's behind everything. We ought to be infinitely grateful to God that we have received this revelation in the Bible because millions of people have groped through philosophy, through science, through religion to find the answer and never found it.

We're going on now to verse 4. Now we come to the first of a whole series of examples given more or less in chronological order from the Old Testament, beginning with the book of Genesis. This is my translation.

> "By faith Abel offered to God a superior sacrifice to that of Cain, through which he was attested that he was righteous, God Himself bearing witness to his gifts [or to his offerings], and through it [through faith] though he died, he still speaks."

That refers, of course, to the incident at the beginning of Genesis 4. I'm not going to turn to all these Old Testament passages because it would take too long. Most of you, I'm sure, are familiar with the story of the first sacrifice man ever offered in human history. There were two brothers, Cain the elder brother and Abel the younger. By revelation, I take it, they knew that to approach God they needed a sacrifice or a gift. You see, nobody is ever to approach God empty handed. The elder brother Cain, who was a farmer, brought the fruit of the earth. The younger brother Abel—and I believe by revelation—brought the best of his flocks and slaughtered them or slaughtered a sacrifice. We have there the beginnings of all religion throughout human history.

Personally, I believe there are only two kinds of religion that anybody can ever have. One is the religion of Abel, the other is the religion of Cain. Abel offered a sacrifice which included the shedding of blood, speaking of a life laid down as a propitiation for sin. God apparently bore supernatural testimony to his sacrifice. We're not told how. Some Bible commentators believe that the fire of the Lord descended on the altar and consumed the sacrifice. Anyhow, there was some manifest response from God to Abel's sacrifice which indicated that He had accepted it. It was acceptable in His sight.

For Cain's sacrifice there was no such response from God because Cain offered merely the fruit of his own labor from the earth. In the previous chapter of Genesis the Lord had already cursed the earth and so what Cain was offering was something that was under the curse of God. It was not accepted.

Basically, Bible commentators teach Cain represents man's own efforts and good works, but it's efforts and good works that are under a divine curse. Abel represents by faith the recognition of a propitiatory sacrifice with shed blood indicating a life laid down. Thus, Abel's sacrifice recognized the fact of sin and the need for its propitiation.

The consequences are extremely interesting and rather frightening. Abel's religion produced a martyr, he died for it. Cain's religion produced a murderer, he killed his brother. I venture to suggest to you that this is a principle that goes all through human history. The religion of works ultimately produces murderers. The religion of faith and revelation produces martyrs, or witnesses. If you analyze God's problems in dealing with the human race all through the Old Testament and on into the New, His biggest problems have always been with religious people. Right through history, religion without the grace of God produces murderers. They murdered God's witnesses in the Old Testament and they murdered God's Son in the New Testament. And also, perhaps all of the apostles. That's no accident.

You see, when man trusts in his own efforts he's trusting in his own carnal, fallen, rebellious nature. Even though his motives ostensibly are maybe very good. But that nature is corrupt and when we give it reign by trusting in it, it manifests what it really is. It's a rebel and it's a murderer. I think this is important because I think the same tends to happen among many professing Christians. I don't want to be negative but seldom is anybody more unkind to another person than Christians are to one another. In the history of the church they have freely murdered one another with the best motives and in the name of the Lord and of religion. I'm not attacking such people, I'm simply pointing out that once we descend from the realm of faith revelation and obedience to their revelation to the realm of human effort, we've let loose a murderer. Some murder with the tongue,

some murder with the stake, some murder with the sword of the civil authority. But, one way or another the end result of manmade religion is a disaster.

There's a very interesting statement in Revelation 18:24. If you want to turn there, speaking about mystery Babylon, this end-time religious system which is identified with witchcraft. It says of this city which is this religious system:

> "In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."

Isn't that an amazing statement? Both right at the beginning of the Bible and right at the end it traces murder to religion.

I've been long enough in this thing to have some experience. When I see the behavior of some religious people, I say to myself at times, "God, keep me from religion." Actually, most people think religion is very respectable. And indeed, it can be. But the Bible has very little to say about religion. In fact, as far as I know, you have to get as far as the epistle of James before it's mentioned for the first time. The Bible has a tremendous amount to say about salvation. Religion almost comes in as an afterthought. The Bible also defines religion and it says this: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Again, that's a very different definition of religion from that current in most Christian churches where visiting the fatherless and the widows is very low on the list of priorities and, in some cases, it's dropped right off the bottom.

In other words, the Bible is a revolutionary book. If you can read the Bible without being shocked by it, you haven't been really reading it. A lot of people read the Bible to make it mean what they think it ought to say. But that's not reading the Bible. I'll guarantee if you honestly read the Bible every day for a month you'll find something shocking and startling in the course of that month. So, let me say that again. If you've never been startled by the Bible or shocked by it, you've never really read it.

Let's just look at the outline and look at E.1 and the result. In each case where we have an example of faith I've sought to single out the result of that faith so that at the end of the chapter we'll have a picture of tremendous variety of different results all produced by faith. One reason for doing that is we get such a stereotyped picture of faith that it consists of sitting in church and singing hymns or praying for the sick or something like that. Faith produces results which are far more varied and exciting than that.

Example number 1 of faith in action: Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice. We've analyzed that.

Now let's look at the result, it's stated. Though he is dead, he continues to speak. I believe that's true of a life lived in faith. The life may end but the message goes on. I'd have to say by way of a comment that it was certainly true of my first wife Lydia. She is dead but she continues to speak. And the book that records her calling and her journey to Jerusalem is selling more now than it ever sold all over the world and has been translated into a number of modern languages. That's just a little up-to-date example of the working of faith. Your life really never ends when it's a life lived in faith. There are ongoing consequences which affect people that come after you.

We'll look at verse 5, the next example of faith.

> "By faith Enoch was ... I prefer the word translated. I think some of these say 'he was taken up,' but it doesn't so much mean 'up' as 'from one setting to another.' He was transferred. I believe the same word or a similar word is used where it says in Colossians 1 we're to give thanks to the Father who has 'delivered us from the domain of darkness and transplanted us to the kingdom of the Son of His love.' It speaks about a total moving over from one realm to another. Of the two men that were translated in the record of Scripture, Enoch and Elijah, both of them went entire. Their spirits were not just translated but they were totally taken over. They left nothing behind except Elijah left his mantle for his successor."

How was it that Enoch was translated, transferred, carried over? By faith.

> "... so that he did not see death; and he was not found because God carried him over [translated him, took him away]; for before his translation he received testimony [he was

> attested] that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him ..."

We'll go with verse 6 in a moment. Just look at Enoch. What was the example of his faith? He walked with God, pleased God.

What was the result? He was translated without dying. That makes it exciting, doesn't it? Who knows what could happen?

I heard a preacher—I forget who it was—say Enoch walked with the Lord for 300 years or so and one day they got so engrossed in one another's company that Enoch forgot where he was and then the Lord said to him, "Enoch, we're nearer to My place than yours now. Why don't you come on home with Me?" That was the end of Enoch.

We could look for a moment at this very simple statement in Genesis 5:21–24.

> "And Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."

Let me point out something interesting about the generations that preceded the flood in the time of Noah. We have the record of three men who, in one way or another, escape the flood. Methuselah died the year before the flood. Enoch was taken a considerable while before the flood and Noah went through the flood in the ark. I've always felt instinctively, without having a theory, that those indicate the three possibilities for God's people. Some will be taken, some will be taken by death and some will go through in the ark, whatever it is, that lies ahead. That's just an instinct of mine. I just feel the Bible is telling us that. I don't have an eschatology to fit it all into. Maybe you say, "Praise the Lord!"

Let me point out something that to me is a blessing. Right at the beginning of human history when man related to God, their relationship was so simple. It wasn't a lot of religion and paraphernalia. Enoch just walked with God. And then we go on further into the great father of the faith, Abraham, and his most honorable title was "he was a friend of God." They just enjoyed one another's company. I sometimes long to get away from all the theology and all the religious formalities and just have a relationship of being God's friend and walking with Him, enjoying His company. I really believe God loves to be enjoyed by His people. Sometimes we get so preoccupied with methods and theology and doctrine that God gets lost in the middle of it all. You get into the middle of the forest and all you can see is trees. You can't see the whole picture. Then you have to back out of the forest and take a fresh look and maybe adjust your priorities.

Example number two, right at the bottom of Page 11/1, Enoch walked with God and pleased him. The result was he was translated without dying. That makes the walk of faith very exciting, doesn't it? Who knows what could happen to you or me?

I did hear about a lady who was a very saintly woman. She went out of a meeting once and nobody ever saw her again. Nobody knew what happened to her. Who knows whether she experienced the same fate as Enoch? Just never was seen again, she just disappeared.

11:6, now we come to one of the most important statements in the Bible, in my opinion.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him [God, understood], for the one who comes to God [approaches God] must believe that He is [that He exists], and that He is a rewarder of those who wholeheartedly seek Him. Or seek Him earnestly or diligently. There's a preposition at the front of the verb which makes it a strong verb: to seek God earnestly, persistently, wholeheartedly.

So, we can never emphasize this too much. Without faith it is impossible to please God, no matter what you do. If it's done not in faith, it is not acceptable to God. We can never overemphasize the importance of faith provided we rightly understand what faith is.

He that comes to God must believe two things: First of all, he must believe. He must exercise faith. There is no other approach to God. The door is closed if you don't come in faith. You must believe that God exists—but that's not enough. Most of the world believes that God exists. Some people say they don't, but I question whether they're really sincere. I think most people actually do believe there is a God. That's not enough. As James said, "the devils believe and tremble." You've got to believe the second thing, that He is a rewarder of those who earnestly or diligently seek Him. You've got to believe that God will respond to you if you seek Him aright. God insists on that. He offers no alternative.

I want to tell you on the basis of personal experience, I believe it's true not merely because the Bible says it, but because I've proved it. I have never sought God earnestly and sincerely without being rewarded. However, quite a number of times the reward wasn't what I was expecting. You can't dictate to God what the reward will be unless He's committed Himself. But you can be sure that He will reward you.

We have then this third P or principle and this fourth. The third principle is faith is essential to please God. We must approach God with the expectation that He will reward us.

The fourth principle is our approach to God determines His response. That, again, is tremendously important. Some people get wonderful results from God, others apparently get nothing. The people who get nothing are prone to blame God. The Scripture reveals the fault is with those people. The way we approach God, our attitude in approaching Him, determines how God responds to us. This is stated very vividly by David in Psalm 18:25–26. David is speaking to God.

> "With the kind Thou dost show Thyself kind; with the blameless [or the sincere, upright or perfect] Thou dost show Thyself sincere [upright, perfect]; with the pure Thou dost show Thyself pure; but with the crooked Thou dost show Thyself astute."

The NIV says shrewd. Whatever way we approach God determines the way God responds to us. If we come to Him out of kindness, He's kind to us. If we come to Him out of sincerity and openness, He's equally open with us. If we come to Him out of purity, He's pure with us. But if we try to be smart and deceive God, David says God is a lot smarter than we are. Don't try it, it doesn't work. Scripture says God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, he will reap. That's the same principle here. If we sow kindness, we reap kindness. If we sow sincerity, we reap sincerity. So, in a certain sense, the key is in your hand. If you want God to respond to you a certain way, approach God that way and that will determine His response.

We'll go on now to verse 7, the next example of faith, example number three.

> "By faith Noah, being warned by God ..."

It's a word that's used in classical Greek of an oracle. Do you know what an oracle is? You go to a certain shrine or a certain prophetess or priestess and you get what you believe is an answer from God. It's a supernatural communication. It can be from the devil or it can be from God. But, it's not on the natural level.

> "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning things that were not yet seen [and notice again faith relates to the unseen], moved with fear [or with reverent fear] built an ark for the salvation of his household, through which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

There again is the particular example. This man built a boat, a large boat. He built it on dry land, it had never rained, it was the craziest thing to do. But he did it by faith. Why did he do it? Because he had a warning from God that there was going to be a flood.

And I want you to observe two things. First of all, if he'd waited till the flood came, it would have been too late. Secondly, only eight persons entered that ark. Noah and seven members of his family. All the people that entered the ark were people who had worked on it, because Noah never built that ark by himself. Those of you that are familiar with the Middle East, you'll know when the Arabs built a house, the whole family builds it. Noah built an ark, the whole family built it. There's an important principle. The only people admitted to the ark were people who had worked on it. That's faith and works. Noah's wife could have stood back with her arms folded and said, "I really believe there's coming a flood." But if she'd done nothing about it, it would have been faith without works and she would have been left out of the ark. It's interesting also that Noah's family got in on the basis of his faith. Have you ever noticed that?

Turn for a moment to Genesis 7:1. The flood is now about to come and the Lord says this to Noah:

> "Enter the ark, you and all your household; for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time."

The translators have put in "alone" but I think it's probably legitimate. I don't know whether you ever noticed that. It was Noah's righteousness that got his family in. That's a great encouragement to parents, isn't it? If you're having a

struggle with your children, just be sure your own relationship with God is such that it will commend your family to Him. That's what we call "imputed righteousness." God is so merciful. He doesn't want a father to find salvation apart from his family. So, when he saw Noah's righteousness He said, "Your righteousness will get your family in." I find that God deals that way.

In Acts 16 when the Philippian jailer said, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved ..." Some evangelicals put a period there. But Paul said something more. "And thy household." Paul promised salvation to the jailer and his household on the basis of the jailer's faith. You see, there's a whole area of our inheritance that many of us let go unclaimed. We have a right on the basis of genuine faith to claim not merely our own individual salvation but the salvation of those whom God has given to us. Many of us need a larger heart. We need more compassion. I believe compassion leads to faith many times. When we're really exercised about people's salvation, we'll take the steps that will bring us the faith that will bring their salvation. The next passage we'll look at is chapter 11:8–10 which deals with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I'll translate those three verses and then comment on them.

> "By faith, being called, Abraham obeyed to go out to a place which he was due to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in an alien land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs together with him of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose builder and architect is God."

There is our next example of faith, it's number four in our list and it concerns not only Abraham but his son and his grandson, Isaac and Jacob. Let's look at the nature of what these three patriarchs did. Abraham was living in Ur of the Chaldees, which was a wealthy and cultivated city of that time but idolatrous. I believe it was primarily a worshiper of the moon goddess. Probably Abraham was a fairly substantial citizen of that city. God appeared to him, spoke to him, and told him to leave the city, to leave his family and his roots and to go out to a country which God would later show to him. As the writer says, he went out not knowing where he was going. That's the first aspect of his faith—he obeyed God although he didn't know what it would lead to.

I'm sure if I were to ask for a show of hands—which I don't intend to do—that many of you would say, "At some point in my life God made a similar demand of me. He asked me to give up something, to leave it," apparent security and prosperity and worldly success and acceptance; "and to go out not knowing what lay ahead." That was certainly true of my first wife whom I've mentioned here. I think it was true of my case also. I think, actually, sooner or later, it's liable to happen to almost everybody who is truly called of God. At some point you've got to step out of the familiar and the secure and just leave your faith in the hands of God. That seems to be an absolute requirement of God to begin the life of faith.

The next aspect of his faith was also shared by Isaac and Jacob. It says they lived as aliens in the land of promise. Living in tents, they didn't stake out any permanent claim in the land that was to be their inheritance. It's rather interesting, they lived in tents, which are a very mobile, very impermanent type of dwelling. It says several times of Abraham "he pitched his tent but he built an altar." The most permanent thing that Abraham actually built was not his dwelling but an altar to God. I believe it was Charles Simpson who said once, "A lot of contemporary Christians build their tent and pitch their altar." Abraham had a right sense of priorities. The altar of God was more important than his own dwelling.

Interestingly enough, those three patriarchs, though the whole territory was promised to them, up to the present time, own no more than just the burial ground of Machpela. They have just enough to be buried in. That was their faith.

Why was he willing to do that? It says in verse 10 he was looking for something in the future. He was expectantly looking for this city which has the foundations. There's "the" in both parts. The King James Version, which we're also familiar with, says "a city." It's more specific, it's "the city" which has "the foundation," which is, of course, the city that's described at the end of the book of Revelation which John the Revelator saw coming down from heaven and it's foundations were the twelve apostles of the land.

Let's look at the principle, number five. To receive our God-given inheritance it is often necessary to renounce our worldly inheritance. There's one word I hesitated about there, do you know what it was? Can you guess? It was the word "often." I'm not sure that it isn't always necessary sooner or later. I believe Jesus essentially said this in Luke 14:33.

> "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

That's very simple and very radical, isn't it? "You cannot be My disciple," Jesus says, "as long as you're holding on to your possessions in this world." We've had a lot of teaching about discipleship which has been valuable, but I've observed many times in that teaching there's been very little reference made to the basic requirement which is giving up all your possessions. That's basically what Abraham had to do. Abraham is the father of all who believe and we are his children if we walk in the steps of his faith.

I would like to suggest to you God doesn't ask you to do it simply out of principle. There are principles in the Bible, but if we try to act on principles we usually mess it up. We are not sufficiently sensitive to know how to apply the principles. If Jesus chooses you to be one of His disciples, He will arrange the circumstances of your life so that you'll end up by meeting His conditions. I've been impressed by the statement that He made in John 15 when He said to His disciples, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." I don't think He was talking about the choice of salvation, I think He was talking about the choice of discipleship.

So, I want, in a sense, to frustrate you and I want to say, "You can't follow Him in discipleship unless He chooses you. They didn't make the choice, He did. He knew what He was doing. You will see, if you study the gospels, that in fulfillment of His choice, they had to meet His conditions: to forsake all that they had.

This was true in my life when I stepped out into what they call "full-time ministry" in 1946. I had no knowledge of the principles, but the Lord led me to do the things. I was considering the other day: I gave up my career, I gave up my money, I gave up my country. I put the claims of God's call before those of my family. I did literally give up everything I owned. I didn't do it with a great spiritual flourish. "Here I am, Lord. I'm becoming a disciple." As a matter of fact, to be honest, some of it I did rather reluctantly. The Lord gave me no option. He said, "If you want to enter into your calling, what I've called you to do, that's the only way."

At a certain point I was in the land of Israel (although it was still called Palestine at that time). My grandfather, who was a retired general in the British Army (and I was his only grandson and there was a close relationship between us), was dying in Britain of cancer. The British Army owed me a free passage back to England because I'd served nearly five years overseas. I dearly wanted to see my grandfather and I knew that he would be missing me, but when I began to make plans to accept that free passage to go home the Lord gave me a prophecy which was rather vivid and it's not the way I would think. He said, "The ship is in its harbor, the sails are set, the crew is on board, the cargo is stowed. If you want to get on now, you can get on. If you don't get on now, the ship will sail without you." He was absolutely radical. I know that if I made any other decision at that time I would never have entered my calling in God. I think we need to bear in mind that Christianity, amongst other things, is a very radical religion. You know what radical is? It means "it goes to the roots." When John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the coming Messiah, one of the statements he made in that connection was, "Now also the axe is laid to the root of the tree. Every tree which does not bring forth good fruit will be hewn down and cast into the fire." You can cut down the branches of a tree and it will go on growing. You can even cut its trunk and it will remain in the soil. But when you deal with the root, there's no more tree. That's radical. The claims of Jesus are radical.

I don't want to say that to bring anybody into fear or condemnation, but I have a feeling that the Holy Spirit through me is talking to people who are going to be faced with that decision. Some of you, I know, have been faced. Some of you have made the decision already. I'm kind of serving notice on you that if God has something further ahead for you that you've yet entered into, He's going to insist on His unvarying conditions. At some point you're going to have to step out like Abraham and leave everything behind not knowing what lies ahead.

I did that, as I say, basically 39 years ago. I just want to tell you that I've never regretted doing it. If I had the choice again I'd make the same decision. I remember fellowshipping with a veteran missionary from Argentina one time. He'd been traveling in various churches speaking about the missionary call. He said, "In those churches I met quite a number of people who'd heard God's call and not obeyed it. There was not one of them that was happy." And he said, "I've also met people who've heard God's call and obeyed it. I've never met one who regretted it." Bear that in mind, Abraham is the pattern, he's the father of all those who believe. We walk in the steps of his faith and we have the same destination. We are looking, like him, for the city which has the foundations whose builder and architect is God.

Let's look now in the outline, I'll just read those words again. I'll still put in "often" although I'm not sure I should be. To

receive our God-given inheritance it is often necessary to renounce our worldly inheritance. Then I put there: Notice the continuing emphasis on inheritance." In this outline we've traced a number of words, twelve words that are key words, plus the word "high priest." Three of those key words were very closely related. I wonder if you can remember them. Inheritance, what were the other two? Can you remember? Both looking towards the future. Perfection and rest. Inheritance, rest, perfection. They're all ahead, they all combine. Only in our inheritance will we find rest and perfection. It's ahead. We cannot stop till we get there.

We go on to verse 11 which deals with Sarah. This verse is translated differently in the New International Version for reasons we don't need to go into. Personally, I think it's a mistake. I think the Standard Version of that verse is right. Verse 11:

> "By faith also Sarah herself received power to conceive seed, even though she was past the natural time of life, because she judged faithful the one who had given the promise."

It's important to see that Sarah's faith played an essential part in God's purpose. Sarah was not just an appendage; she was an essential part of the plan. Twice Abraham nearly missed the whole thing by being willing to let Sarah go. That was one of the great weaknesses in his character. He could never have entered into his inheritance apart from Sarah because Sarah was the foreordained mother of the child that was to bring the inheritance.

I say that to ladies. Bear in mind, you're just as important as your husband or the men in the church. Your importance is in a different area, but it's no less. I have strong reservations about any kind of presentation of Bible truth that suggests that women are on a lower level of importance or spirituality. I don't believe it. I know for my part I could never be what I am or anywhere near it without both my first wife and my second wife.

We're going on to verse 12, which describes the result of the previous examples. We'll read the verse and then we'll go back and look at the examples.

> "Wherefore also, there came forth [there sprung from one], and him a dead one, as many as the stars of heaven in multitude, and as the sand which is by the shore of the sea innumerable."

Once you've really got the King James for that verse you can't say it any other way. It rolls off the tongue, it has an impact that nothing else ever will have. That's the result of the examples of faith in the previous verses.

What was the example, going back to your outline on verses 8–10? Abraham obeyed God's call to leave Ur; he sojourned in Canaan with Isaac and Jacob as in an alien land living in tents, no permanent dwelling, always looking forward to the city of God. And then, the two principles. We've already said one, to receive our God-given inheritance.

The next one—or rather, the results in verse 12. The results of both Abraham's faith, Isaac's faith, Jacob's faith and Sarah's faith: an innumerable posterity to obtain the promised inheritance. Notice again the emphasis on obtaining the inheritance.

I think it's good to see there was a family faith. It included Abraham, his son, his grandson and his wife. And really, his son's wives, too. I think we need to give more thought to the importance of family faith. I think in the Bible and in biblical culture there was much greater emphasis on the collective faith of a family than we have in our very fragmented society today. Where a family can achieve collective faith, it's tremendously powerful. As parents we must never neglect the faith potential of our children. The real way to bring children into the spiritual life is to challenge their faith. Not to treat them as immature but to challenge their faith, to present the needs and the problems to them and challenge them to pray in faith for their solutions. The children that my first wife and I brought up, they had to live that way. Sometimes Lydia would say to them, "We've got no breakfast children; you'd better pray." Or, "We have no money; you'd better pray." When they saw the breakfast come and the money come, believe me, they knew that God was real. That was something that no subsequent brainwashing in a secular school could fully take away from them.

My youngest daughter of that batch, Elizabeth, when she was 18 years old, had very poor eyesight. Every year she'd have to get thicker glasses. When we were in East Africa I said to a servant of the Lord (who I now believe is with the Lord), I said, "Brother Mattson, would you pray for Elizabeth's eyes?" He prayed a very short simple prayer and Elizabeth took her glasses off. We didn't tell her to do that. She's a rather reticent child so we didn't want to push her, but after a couple of days Lydia said to Elizabeth, "How is your eyesight? Is it better?" She said, "Well, he prayed, didn't he?" She had absolutely perfect eyesight. She

excelled in needlework and she's never had to use glasses ever since.

Well, she's had some problems in her life, some ups and downs spiritually but that one thing is a rock for her faith that cannot be removed. God gave her her eyesight.

We're going on now to verses 13 and 14.

> "All these died ..."

The translations say "in faith," don't they? But it's not the same preposition that's translated "in" earlier. It's died, I would like to say, "on the faith plane." They didn't come down from the faith plane when they died. That's my amplified version, which is not in print but it's fully licensed! They all died on the faith plane. Let's go on.

> "... not having obtained the promises, but having seen them from afar and having embraced them, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth."

Let's look, first of all, at some of the Scriptures to which the writer is referring. Genesis 23, these words always touch me. I think having seen one wife go to the Lord I can always identify in a special way with Abraham. I think I know what he felt. Genesis 23, immediately after Sarah's death, verses 3–4.

> "Then Abraham arose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 'I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.'"

You realize in that hot climate it had to be done very quickly. But notice his confession. "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you." I don't suppose he said that with tremendously spiritual motives. Like many things that we say that are very significant, we don't think at the time of their significance. You see, God heard that and it was recorded in his favor.

Then we could look at Jacob's confession in Genesis 47:9. In fact, I dare say Abraham's heart was breaking when he said that. It occurs to me that sometimes things that we say in moments of pressure and sorrow turn out for the best. This is Jacob's statement to Pharaoh in Genesis 47;9. It was a convention in Egypt that no one was to excel Pharaoh in anything significant. When Jacob was asked how old he was, he had to present his age, which was greater than that of Pharaoh, in such a way that it didn't upset Pharaoh's dignity. This is what he said:

> "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning."

Most people today would be content at a hundred and thirty. But Jacob said it's just a poor thing by comparison with Abraham an Isaac. But you notice that he too used the word sojourning. So, those are the passages that the writer of Hebrews had in mind.

We're going back now to verse 13 and we go on to verse 14 which is a comment.

> "For those that say such things [those are the words we've just read] make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own."

The Greek word is patris, directly derived from the Greek word for "father." It means a fatherland. All of the patriarchs were looking forward to a country, not backward. They all had in mind a place with a father. That's a very interesting root from the word "father"—pater in Greek. Another word is patriarch which occurs in Ephesians 3:15 where it says of God the Father:

> "... whom every fatherhood in heaven and earth derives its name [or every family]."

You understand that both the word family and the word country are connected with the word father.

They were looking forward to a place with a father.

My comment on that is, every true believer yearns for an eternal home. You hardly ever meet a person who doesn't change when you begin to talk to him about his home. It does something to a person. Even you ... or myself who are quite old, if we were to start thinking and talking about our childhood home or homes, something would begin to churn inside us. I don't know whether you've ever felt somewhat lonely. I grew up in Britain between the two world wars and Britain was a very secure place in those days. My family, all

being officers in the British Army, had a very secure position.

The world today is extremely different. It's unimaginably different. There's very little real security anywhere. Social position doesn't give it, money doesn't give it. We live in a tremendously insecure age when almost everything we would seek for security in the natural is liable to crumble and disappear almost overnight. I have to admit sometimes I think back to the days of my childhood and I think how secure I was. I didn't know anything but security in those days. There was nothing to threaten me. My grandfather, with whom I lived while my parents were in India, was a respected person in the area. I got some of the reflected glory. I would still feel insecure today if I didn't have the same conviction that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had. I believe I'm headed for a place where there's a father, a country of my own.

Let's look, for a moment, in Revelation 14:1. This is part of the vision of John the Revelator.

> "And I looked and behold, the Lamb [that's Jesus] was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads."

These people, who are very special people in the book of Revelation, are identified by the fact that they have the name of Jesus and the name of God the Father on their foreheads. And what is on your forehead, I think, typifies the way you think. They thought father-wise, they were secure, they knew they had a father. They followed the Lamb wherever He went.

It seems to me that as this age draws to a close and as we get nearer and nearer the picture of things that's given us in Revelation, we're going to have to have our Father's name on our foreheads. We're going to have to think in terms of security. We're going to have to be very sure that we're not looking backwards but like the patriarchs we're looking forwards to the city that has foundations, the foundations. Let's look now at the two principles that emerged. Principle number six, faith inspires hope beyond this life. I think that's very, very important. There's been a certain tendency sometimes almost to belittle faith for a future life. The world talks about it as "pie in the sky." Well, I think that pie has a sweet taste. I'm glad it's there. I'm not ashamed of looking forward to heaven. That's a mark of faith. It doesn't look backwards, it looks forwards and upwards.

The second principle there, number seven, faith needs to be expressed by appropriate confession. That was the strength of Abraham, his right confession before the tomb of Sarah. That, of course, is contained in the principle stated there in Romans 19:9–10 which we probably should know by heart.

> "If thou shall confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shall be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

It is not enough to believe in the heart. What makes believing in the heart effective is confessing with the mouth. And you'll see that, in one way or another, this principle runs all through this 11th chapter of Hebrews. There has to be the appropriate confession to make faith effective.

Looking now in verse 15, still speaking about the patriarchs.

> "And if they had remembered that country from which they came out, they would have had opportunity to return ..."

God doesn't always slam the door behind us; He sometimes leaves it open. If you want to turn back you're free to do so. But faith does not turn back. I have to say, in my own experience, I've many times gone through difficulties and pressures and I've sometimes said to myself, Is it worth it? But then I've said to myself, What's the alternative? Frankly, there isn't one that appeals to me. I tasted the world for 25 years, it has nothing that attracts me. I understand young people who've grown up in a totally Christian atmosphere, they look at it a little different. It has some glamour at a distance but when you're in it, it turns to ashes. I can really endorse that. We are partakers of a heavenly calling and we cannot afford to turn back.

Principle number nine which is by verse 16, going on with that sentence:

> "... but now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Wherefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared for them a city."

I think that relates specifically to Exodus 3:15. I'd like to turn there for a moment. This is the conversation between the Lord and Moses when the Lord is sending Moses back to Egypt to deliver Israel. Moses says, "When I tell them God has appeared to me, what name am I to give them?" This is the answer of God in Exodus 3:15.

> "God, furthermore, said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.'"

That verse has really made a deep impact on me. When God said, "You want to know My name? My name is the God of three men: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is My name and My memorial to all generations. If you want to know how to call Me, call me the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." That's stupendous—that God has chosen forever to be identified as the God of three men. Why? Because they were not ashamed of Him. Because they made the right confession. So, the writer of Hebrews says "neither was He ashamed of them."

Remember what Jesus said? "He that confesseth Me before men, I will confess before My Father; and he that denieth Me before men, I will deny before My Father." What we say is of destiny-deciding importance. God is the God of those who acknowledge Him by their confession.

Now we're coming to a rather lengthy passage and we have only a few minutes left. The next passage deals with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. I want to redeem the time so we'll begin to go into it but I'm afraid we'll have to go back at the beginning of next time. This is a very important passage. I think I can translate it, at least.

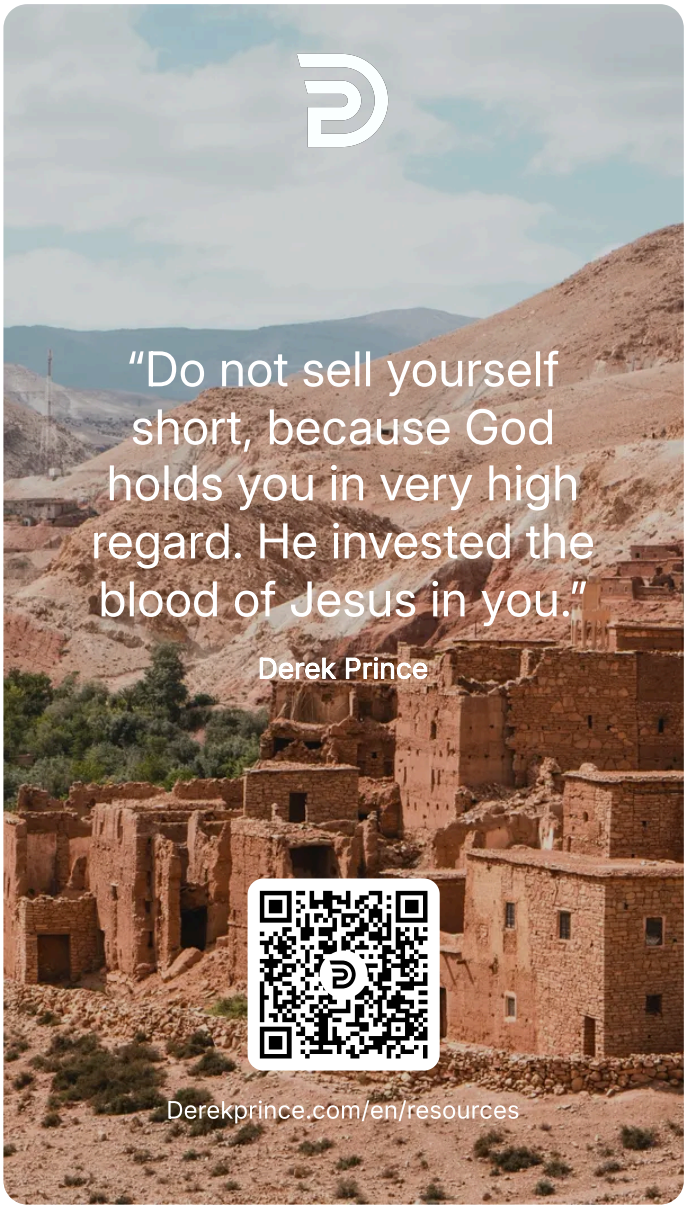
By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he was willing [or he was in process] of offering his only son; he [Abraham] the one who had received the promises; to whom it had been said, In Isaac your seed will be called. In other words, his whole destiny in God depended on Isaac. Without Isaac he had no destiny. And yet he was willing to offer him up in death. It goes on to say:

> "Reckoning that God was able even to raise him from the dead; from whence he received him also figuratively."

So in Isaac we have a figure of resurrection. He was not actually killed but he was at the point of death and Abraham was convinced because of his faith in God that if he obeyed God by killing his son, God would bring him back to life.

Sermon

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