

The Patriarchs: An Enduring Faith

Hebrews 11:20-22

90-386

We have a big challenge ahead of us tonight, although there are only three verses to look at in Hebrews 11. Essentially these three verses summarize a story that goes from Genesis chapter 12 to Genesis chapter 50. So we're not going to cover all of that, but we're certainly going to intersect with it a little bit.

Let's look at Hebrews chapter 11...Hebrews chapter 11 and we find ourselves looking at the heroes of faith. We have already considered Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham, the man who was introduced in Genesis 11 and 12. And now as we leave Abraham behind, we come in verse 20 to Isaac and to Jacob and to Joseph. These are the four patriarchs that take up that large section of the book of Genesis from chapter 12 through chapter 50. So let's see what it says about them.

Verse 20, "By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith, Jacob as he was dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped leaning on the top of his staff. By faith, Joseph when he was dying made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel and gave orders concerning his bones."

Rather cryptic statements, wouldn't you agree? Very abbreviated and somewhat hard to understand if you don't know the full story. But keep in mind that this book was written to Hebrews. It was written to Jews who were familiar with the very detailed saga of Isaac and Jacob and Esau as well as Joseph. This was material they were very familiar with. It was critical for the writer of Hebrews to communicate to the readers that the only way of salvation was by faith. The most important message the world will ever hear; salvation is by faith alone, by grace through faith, not of works. Scripture makes that clear. It's always been that way.

Now remember, the Jews in the New Testament time were living in an apostate form of Judaism in which they had come to conclusion that salvation was something you earned. And so when the gospel comes along and it's preached by the Apostles and prophets of the New Testament, there are Jews who think it is a foreign message, that it is not the message of the Old Testament. So the writer of Hebrews gives us this great section to let the Jews know that salvation by faith is nothing new, has always been that way. It has always been that way. In fact, the end of chapter 10 sets this very fact in place. Verse 38, "My righteous one shall live by faith, by faith. And verse 39, "We're not of those who shrink back to destruction but of those who have faith in the preserving of the soul."

So the tenth chapter ends with a statement that one is granted righteousness by faith. And then the launch in to chapter 11 and a listing of the people who were reconciled to God not by works but faith and remarkably Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham fall into that category. And so do Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. But interestingly enough, they're marked as men who demonstrated faith in the face of death. It was Isaac who blessed Jacob and Esau and the section that we'll look at a little later in

which he introduces that...that story of his blessing begins by saying, "Isaac was very aware of his coming death." It is Jacob as he is dying that passes on the blessing to Joseph. It is Joseph, verse 22, as he is dying that passes on the promise to Israel, that as of yet has not been fulfilled. Faith faces its greatest test in the hour of death when one has not experienced the fulfillment of the promise. Abraham died without ever receiving the promise that God gave him. Isaac died without ever having received the promise that God gave him and so did Jacob and so did Joseph and so did all the rest of the people in this entire chapter. Down in verse 39, "They all gained approval through their faith and did not receive what was promised." They all died before the promise came. They all died before the promised Messiah came, before the promised Kingdom came, before all the promises that were given originally in the Abrahamic Covenant.

So, really from any of these people we could learn lessons about faith in the face of death, coming to the end of your life never having received what God had promised. But in their case, it's unique, in the patriarch's case, because the promise was of an earthly kingdom and land and blessing and salvation. But they all died not having received the promise. Matthew Henry wrote many years ago, "Though the grace of faith is of universal use throughout all our lives, it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its great work to do at the last to help believers finish well, to die in the Lord as to honor Him by patience, hope and joy, so as to leave a witness behind them of the truth of God's Word and the excellencies of His ways."

And with all the weaknesses that marked the lives of Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, they died in faith, they died in confidence that the promise would be fulfilled even though they had not yet received it. And that's why they appear among these heroes of faith. They were men who believed at the very end of their life that God who had not yet fulfilled His promise would fulfill that promise even after they were gone. God is greatly glorified, I think, when any believer leaves this world with a flag flying at full mast in confident faith. Any believer brings honor to God when the Spirit triumphs over the flesh, when the world is consciously left behind and there's an eagerness to grasp the realities of eternal heaven. And any believer who dies with a heart blazing with hope brings honor to the Lord and a great testimony to the life of faith.

And so here we see these three Old Testament men, they're like us in that they are believes and they have been justified and given salvation. They're unlike us in that they don't have the full gift of the revelation of God so their lives are not as complete in terms of the sanctification aspect as those of us who know so much more. And we can conclude, I think, from the worlds of our Lord that though the Holy Spirit was with them, the Holy Spirit was not in them and that distinction is a distinction in degree to which the Spirit of God empowers believers on this side of the day of Pentecost. But they did demonstrate a God-given, a God-sustained faith, sufficient to enable them to face death and to face death triumphantly. Psalm 37:27...rather 37:37 says, "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright." And how is he distinguished? "The end of that man is peace."

When a mature godly man, when an upright man comes to the end of his life, what marks him is peace. So it is, in a sense, with these men. And we would have to say that Isaac and Jacob and Joseph were far from perfect, for sure. Their lives were murky and muddy and cloudy and sometimes downright dark. There was always a flicker of the sunlight of faith and certainly it showed up at the end.

Now let's go back to something of the beginning, Genesis chapter 12. I'm not going to repeat everything we said last time, but I just want you to know where it all starts. God calls Abraham, called

Abram then. He is going to make of him a great people, namely the Jewish people who will be the people who will receive the Word of God and who will have the responsibility to preserve it and proclaim it to the world. And Abram is told to go forth from his country, from his relatives, from his father's house to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you, make your name great so you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and the ones who curse you I will curse. In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. That is what is known as the Abrahamic Covenant, it is a promise of a land and a Kingdom and blessing and incorporated in that is even salvation and also incorporated in that is the Savior. The writer wants us to understand, however, that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the four great patriarchs whose story fills the rest of Genesis, all died without having realized that promise.

Abraham was promised the possession of a land. He never had a possession in the land. The only piece of land that Abraham owned was a grave. He was promised a great nation, he never saw that great nation. He was promised to be the source of spiritual blessing to the world. He never saw that. But Abraham believed that it would come.

Go back to Hebrews 11:13. "All these died in faith without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." In other words, they saw at a distance in the future the fulfillment of promises not realized in this life. In verse 16 they were looking for a better country, that is a heavenly one. And so God was not ashamed to be called their God and He had definitely prepared the city for them.

So Abraham didn't see the fulfillment. Abraham was a wanderer and a nomad his whole life. Isaac was the same. Isaac, the son of the promise of God, was a nomad and a wanderer. His son Jacob was to spend his life as an exile out of the promised land in Egypt. He never saw the promise. He never saw the great nation constituted. He never saw the blessings that would come to the world. Jacob's son, Joseph, obtained greatness but that greatness was still the greatness of a stranger in a strange land. Joseph again in the land of Egypt. They all lived by faith in a promise they had never seen. They never doubted the promise, however, they never doubted that it would come true. They died in every case in the...not in the despair of unfulfilled dreams, but in the confident hope that a promise would be truly fulfilled because it had come from God whose Word was always true. They never saw it. They died, in a sense, defeating death by dying not in despair but in hope and passing on the promise that what they hadn't seen could be promised to the next generation because in God's good time it would eventually come.

And this is a magnificent kind of faith in a primitive time. If we would listen to them if they could come and talk to us, they might say something like this, "God made a promise, God promised a people and a land and blessing and salvation and God never breaks a promise. And we may not live to see the promise but it will come. And we are links in the chain of its ultimate fulfillment. That's how they viewed their lives. These then are men of faith. And the Jewish readers of the book of Hebrews need to know they are men of faith. They need to know that they believed in God. In Abel, remember, we saw the life of faith. In Enoch, the walk of faith. In Noah the work of faith, in Abraham the example of faith and here we see the triumph of faith as it faces death. In the sense they're like...they're like sailors who wave their greeting from this shore and sail away to a shore that they can't see at all but they're confident it is there and they will arrive.

Now according to verse 6 of this chapter, the only way to please God is to be a person of faith.

Without faith it is impossible to please Him. So if you want to please God and therefore receive His salvation, be reconciled to Him, it is a matter of faith. Faith alone brings us into a relationship with God and these are examples of that kind of faith. Some people crumble in the face of death, but not those who have a real faith, a God-given faith.

All right, let's look at Isaac, verse 20. "By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau even regarding things to come." The operative phrase here is "things to come." Abraham had not received the promise and the promise of God given to Abraham originally in the Abrahamic Covenant is reiterated to his son, Isaac, but Isaac does not receive the promise either. Abraham had been promised the land, the nation, the spiritual blessings to the world. He never saw any of it at all and he didn't die in despair, however, Abraham died in faith, confidently passing on the promise to his son, Isaac, knowing Isaac would be the next step in the divine plan that would lead ultimately to fulfillment. Isaac does the same thing, passes it to Jacob. Jacob does the same thing, passes it to Joseph. They all knew that God was faithful. That's what believers know. They were believers and they knew it. In the language of Hebrews 10:23, "He who promised is faithful." God can be trusted.

Now I think you were kind of struck by the fact that you had quite a section on Abraham there, but you just have one verse on Isaac. We would like to have a lot more information here, it would be easy for us if there was some given in this location. However, the writer assumes that everybody who is a Hebrew reader of this letter knows the story of Isaac because it is such a familiar story to all Jewish people.

But, since you're not Jewish people...some of you are but the majority of you are not...and since you may not remember the story in the Old Testament, you may not be familiar with it, we would do well to go back and kind of take another look at the story of Isaac and see how his faith manifested itself. And I will promise you this, if you'll stick with me on this journey, it will be extremely encouraging to you. Isaac lived the longest of the four patriarchs. He lived longer than Abraham, longer than Jacob and longer than Joseph. But less is recorded about him than any of the others. Basically his life is squeezed into Genesis 25, 26 and 27.

Now in summing up Isaac, we can say this. He was not spectacular. Someone has suggested that he was an ordinary son of an extraordinary father who became the ordinary father of an extraordinary son. Which is another way of saying, he was a not so extraordinary guy sandwiched between two extraordinary people, Abraham and Jacob. He lived a relatively quiet life and was probably best known for his spiritual weakness and his somewhat passive nature.

Let's go back to Genesis 26. The story is certainly worth telling and it will be a greatly encouraging story for you because if this man with all of his weakness is in the list of the heroes of faith, guess what? There's hope for us. That's what's encouraging.

Now there's a lot of ways to kind of start the story, but let's pick up the story in chapter 26 and verse 1. "There was a famine in the land," that's in the land of Israel, land of Canaan. It's not yet belonging to Israel, there is no nation yet. They're not going to come back there till 40 years after 400 years of exile in Egypt. There's a famine in the land where the family of Abraham is nomadic living and they have to go somewhere else to get some food. So Isaac, who is now an adult, went to Gerar."

Now Gerar was not a really good place to go because Gerar was a Philistine city sitting on the border

of Egypt...right on the border of Egypt and Egypt was not a good place to be. So the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt, stay in the land of which I shall tell you."

You know, this is sort of a concession on God's part. You shouldn't even get that close to Egypt, but if you're going to be in Gerar, stay there. Don't go beyond that place. Verse 3, "Sojourn in this land and I'll be with you and bless you for you and your descendants I will give all these lands and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father, Abraham," and here he repeats to Isaac the Abrahamic Covenant. "I'll multiply your descendants as stars of heaven. I'll give your descendants all these lands, to your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because Abraham obeyed Me, kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws."

So here is the reiteration of the Abrahamic Covenant to Isaac who is the next in line in the generations that will be the source of the fulfillment of the Covenant. Isaac was obedient, verse 6, he lived in Gerar. He never went across the border. So in one sense, that is commendable that he stopped at the border and didn't go where God told him not to go.

However, his weakness showed up immediately, verse 7, "When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' for he was afraid to say, 'My wife,' thinking the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebecca, for she is beautiful." Hum...where did he learn to conduct himself like that? From his dad, right? His father, from Abraham. Abraham did it twice. Genesis 12 records that he did it and then he did it again in Genesis 20. Abraham was afraid that somebody was going to take Sarah away from him because Sarah was also very beautiful. And there was a famine in the land, Genesis 12:10, Abram goes down to Egypt, he goes past Gerar all the way to Egypt. He says to his wife, verse 11 of Genesis 12, "See now, I know you're a beautiful woman and when the Egyptians see me they will say, 'This is his wife,' and they'll kill me and they'll let you live. Please say that you're my sister so that it may go well with me because if you...guess what....I want you to say you're my sister so they can do anything they want to you without killing me."

Oh nice. Chivalry at its finest. Are you kidding? "Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants, female donkeys and camels."

Something bad went on there. You don't give all that stuff unless you get something in exchange. "The Lord struck Pharaoh in his house with great plagues because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you've done to me? Why do you not tell me she's your wife? Why did you say she's my sister so that I took her for my wife. Now then, here's your wife, take her and go.'"

That is one of the low points of male action on behalf of one's wife. For self-protection he let some stranger ravage his own wife.

Well, it happened again in the twentieth chapter of Genesis. "Abram journeyed from there...guess what?...to the Negev and settled between Kadesh and Shur and sojourned in Gerar...same place. Abram said of Sarah, his wife, 'She's my sister,'...here we go again, I'm surprised she didn't slap him knowing what could come, more worse...So Abimelech...Abimelech may be a title rather than a name because it's the same name in the account of Isaac twenty years later or so, so any way, it may be a

title rather than an actual name...the king of Gerar came and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream in the night and said, 'Behold, you're a dead man because of the woman you've taken for she's married.' Now Abimelech had not come near here...fortunately...and he said, 'Lord, will You slay a nation even though blameless? Didn't he say to me she's my sister and she herself said he's my brother? In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands, I've done this.'" It's like fornication is okay but I'm not going to commit adultery.

So Abraham had taught his son well. And so when we come to the account over here in the twenty-sixth chapter, he behaves in precisely the same way. Verse 7, "When the men of the place see that she's so beautiful, they're going to want her." And so verse 8, "It came about when he had been there for a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines...again that's maybe an official title rather than the name of a man...looked out through the window and saw and guess what? Isaac was caressing his wife Rebecca." Guess what, you don't do that with your sister. I love the King James Version, it says, "Isaac was sporting with his wife." Well the Victorian English were veiling everything, weren't they? "Abimelech called Isaac and said, 'Ho, ho, wait a minute, certainly she's your wife, I watched how you conducted yourself with her. Why did you say she's my sister? Well because I might die on account of her. Abimelech said, 'Why have you done this, one of the people might have easily sinned with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us.'"

It seems to me that the pagans disconnected to this family had more moral character than the members of the family of Abraham. "So Abimelech charged all the people saying...in verse 11... 'Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.'"

So he goes down and he lives on the edge of where he's not supposed to go and then he lies, he's an absolute, outright downright coward. But God is so gracious to him. Look at this in verse 12, "Isaac sowed in the land," and that's metaphoric, "and reaped," and it's not even the word reaped in the original language, it is the word found. "Isaac sowed in the land...metaphorically...and found in the same year a hundred fold." What happened? That doesn't mean he planted a crop that returned a hundred fold, we told you that can't happen. But metaphorically what happened is God blessed him incredibly. The Lord blessed him. And this is really good in the Hebrew. This is a play on words in Hebrew and verse 13, "The man became great, continued to become greater until he became the greatest." It's really a Hebrew expression for being great. He became great...he became greater until he became the greatest. He had flocks and herds and a great household so that the Philistines down in that area of Gerar envied him. God pours out blessing. And Isaac is comfortable there. Abimelech says to him, "Get out of here, you're too powerful for us, you intimidate us. Isaac departed from there and camped in the Valley of Gerar."

Oh that didn't help. He went a few miles away and settled there. He wouldn't leave. Verse 18, "Isaac dug the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father, Abraham, who was in the same area. The Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham and he gave them the same names which his father had given them. But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac's saying the water is ours, it's our land, it's our valley. So he named the well Esek, which means conflict because they contended with him. Then he dug another well, they quarreled over that so he named it Sitnah which means hostility. He moved away from there and dug another well and they didn't quarrel over that so he called it Rehoboth which means a broad place and a place where everybody can get along." But he settles there.

And at last in verse 22, "The Lord has made room for us. And then he went up to Beersheba." And then comes the word from the Lord. "The Lord appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of your father, Abraham. Do not fear for I am with you, I will bless you, multiply your descendants for the sake of my servant, Abraham.'" Here's the repeat of the Abrahamic Covenant given to him. And here's where for the first time really clearly we see the demonstration that this is a man of faith. Verse 25, "So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there."

He took up his place in the very location where the Lord had come to him and given him the promise and the covenant. "And there Isaac's servants dug a well."

The next little section talks about how they made peace with the people of Gerar. Therein is the indication of the faith of this man. But I want to take you back to one previous incident, back in chapter 25...25. Apparently...apparently the women in the family of Abraham, I don't know what it was, but they all seemed to have problems having children at first. And in the case of Isaac, his wife had a problem. Rebecca, chapter 25 verse 20, she had gone, I think, about 20 years without ever having a child. Verse 21, here's another indication of the faith of Isaac. "Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren and he Lord answered him and Rebecca and his wife conceived." And then you have the wonderful story of the two twins in her womb, right? The children struggled together within her and she said, 'If this is so, why then am I this way? Does it have to be this hard?'" She is probably saying, "I would trade this for the 20 years of tranquility. "So she went to inquire of the Lord," this is an indication again that they worshiped the true and living God. "The Lord said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, two peoples will be separated from your body.'" Through Jacob would come the Jewish people, through Esau would come the Edomites, the Arabic peoples, two great peoples will be separated from your body, one people will be stronger than the other and the older shall serve the younger. The older was Esau, the younger was Jacob but they were reversed when it came to the birthright.

So here is an indication that they followed the Lord because they prayed to the Lord and the Lord heard their prayer. And then this prophecy comes which the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 makes a big point of, doesn't he? That before they were ever born, the Lord chose Jacob and said, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated." That there was bound up in this promise a sovereign act. Two nations, one stronger than the other, one serving the other. Here you have a very good early indication of divine sovereignty, the purpose of God to give grace to one line, one person and withhold it from another. And Paul in Romans 9 says, "You can't question God's right to do this. God, after all, is God." God has a right to dispense His blessings according to His own sovereign will. God is creator of all things, has an unlimited right over all His creation. It was and is His own good pleasure that He created the world at all. There was nothing that had any claim on Him to call it into existence, or has any further claim on Him for any benefit. When the world was in chaos, no part of the matter had any claim above the rest. That was which was left...for example...inert, had no reason to complain that it wasn't given vegetative power, nor vegetables, that they were not given animal life, nor animals that they were not given human reason, nor our first parents that they were created inferior to angels. Nothing He created had any claim on its maker. That's why Paul said He had the same right or power over all as the potter has over the clay to make one vessel unto honor and another to dishonor. Nor can anyone say, "Why have You made me thus?"

If man has no claim on God when he is innocent, has he acquired some right by the Fall? I don't think so. So here is the indication of God's sovereign purpose, He chose Abraham, He chose Isaac,

He chose Jacob and through them would come the Messianic line.

Well, we don't have time to go over this entire story. Where are we now? Let's go down to verse 23 again, "The Lord appears and gives him this covenant. He builds the altar there. He makes a pact with the Philistines in the area of Gerar and they have a peaceable relationship in that place." His....(His) son, Esau, at 40, verse 34, marries Judith, the daughter of Beerli the Hittite and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite." Bad choice. First one is enough, secondly, these are pagans. And they brought grief to Isaac and to Rebecca.

It doesn't take us long to establish the character of Esau. That's why Hebrews 12:16 calls him a profane man. The Greek word "profane" means "outside the threshold." What does that mean? Outside the house. The walkway, the common walk. He was a very common earthy man. And so in the case of Esau, things went bad at the birth, they went bad through the whole story of Jacob and Esau which we'll take a look at.

Now, move a little more rapidly, if we can, let's look at chapter 27. Isaac was old, 137 if you do all the calculation, if you have a MacArthur Study Bible I give you some things that will help you do that. By the way, if you have a MacArthur Study Bible, you're probably all reading the footnotes to explain all these things. "It came about when he was 137, etc. his eyes were too dim to see. He called his older son, Esau, and said to him, 'My son,' and he said to him, 'Here I am.' Isaac said, 'Behold now I am old and I do not know the day of my death.'"

You know, he's getting a little bit melancholy here. He lived 43 more years, come on. Well he...this is an indication of how he felt about Esau. God said, "The older will serve the younger," and the older was Esau, that was the prophecy. God said, "That's how it's going to be." And if you go back to chapter 25, for a moment, verse 24, "When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, there were twins in her womb and the first came forth red all over like a hairy garment." That would be a huge disappointment. "And they named him Esau," like wolfman. "Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel so his name was called Jacob, relating to that. And Isaac was 60 years old when he gave birth to them. Now the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field. Jacob was a peaceful man living in tents."

So there's a great distinction between the two. Isaac loved Esau, he liked that ruddy man. You know why? He could deliver a good steak. Isaac was a pretty based kind of guy when it came to things in life and he liked Esau because he brought in the good meat, because he had a taste for game. "But Rebecca loved Jacob. When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished and Esau said to Jacob, 'Let me have a swallow of that red stuff there for I am famished.' Therefore his name was called Edom, meaning red. But Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright.'" Wow, how hungry to you have to be to do that? Well you don't have to be any more hungry than he was, you just have to be both hungry and treat your birthright with disdain.

"Esau said, 'Behold, I'm about to die, so of what use then is the birthright?' I'm going to die of starvation. And Jacob said, 'First swear to me,' so he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew and he ate and drank and rose up and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright."

Now there is a man of the world. There is a man who has no view of the future at all, right? None.

That is why he is called a profane man. Bottom line, he is a profane man. It is also true that Jacob didn't need to do that. God had promised in the prophecy that he would be heir that though him would come the reiteration of the Abrahamic Covenant, he would be the chosen son. He didn't need to gain the birthright by this very unkind act. It was unnecessary. It fomented all kinds of problems in the family, all kinds of deception, all kinds of lies, all kinds of animosity and hatred that was absolutely unnecessary. It is true Esau had no thought for God, he was passionate about earthly things, impulsive, incapable of estimating the true worth of anything that didn't immediately appeal to his fleshly senses. He preferred the animal to the spiritual and thus is profane.

So the prophecy that Jacob would receive the birthright was true. God would have made it happen. Jacob didn't need to do it this way. And so now we come to chapter 27, old Isaac knows about this sale of the birthright but he still favors Esau. So in verse 3 he says, "Take your gear, your quiver and your bow and go out in the field and hunt game for me. Prepare a savory dish for me such as I love and bring it to me that I may eat so that my soul may bless you before I die." Come on, he lived another 43 years, he just wants a steak and he wants it now. "And Rebecca was listening while Isaac spoke to his son, Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, Rebecca...we all know...hatches her plot."

Listen, Isaac has ignored God's Word in the prophecy. Isaac has ignored the fact that the birthright has been exchanged. Isaac has ignored the profane character of Esau. He has ignored his marriages to pagan idolatress women. He ignores all that just because he likes him, because he provides what satisfies his appetite.

Well Rebecca is not going to let this happen and it's an amazing story. "She says to Jacob, 'Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother, Esau, saying bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me that I may eat and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death. Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. Go to the flock, bring me two choice young goats from there that I may prepare them for a savory dish for your father such as he loves, then you shall bring it to your father that he may eat so that he may bless you before his death.'" The idea, the father, was you bring me the meal, I'll give you the fatherly blessing, the right of primogenitor, the right of being the heir. "Jacob answered his mother, Rebecca. 'Behold, Esau, my brother, is a hairy man and I'm a smooth man. How do we pull this off? My father will feel me then I will be a deceiver in his sight and I'll bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing.'" He doesn't mind lying and cheating, but he doesn't want to just expose himself to a curse.

"His mother said to him, 'Your curse be on me, I'll take your curse, my son, just do what I tell you.' So he went out and got the animals, brought them to his mother. His mother made savory food such as his father loved. Rebecca took the best garments of Esau, her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob and she put the skins of the young goats on his hands." Now that will tell you how hairy Esau was, folks. Wow. She put the skins on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. "And she gave the savory food and the bread which she had made to her son, Jacob." Remember now, Isaac can barely see, as we read at the beginning of the chapter. "And so he comes in. He came to his father and said, 'My father,' and he said, 'Here I am, who are you, my son?' Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau...I am Esau,' or whatever he did. 'I have done what you told me. I get up, please, sit and eat of my game that you may bless me.'" He hadn't shot any game, this was domesticated goat but with the right spices and his mother knew how to do it. "Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?' And he said, 'Because the Lord your God caused it to happen to me.'" Oh boy, now bring God in on it. One lie follows another lie and another lie.

“Isaac said to his son, ‘It’s just so quick, how did it happen?’ ‘Well, the Lord did it.’ And Isaac said to Jacob, ‘Please come close that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son, Esau, or not.’” A little bit of incredulity on the part of Isaac. “So Jacob came close to his father, felt him and said, ‘The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.’ He did not recognize him because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands, so he blessed him.”

Amazing, he passed on the blessing to him. And in that society, that was everything. “And he said, ‘Are you really my son, Esau?’” He’s struggling with this. “And he said, ‘I am.’ So he said, ‘Bring it to me and I will eat of my son’s game that I may bless you.’ And he brought it to him and he ate and he also brought him wine and he drank and his father Isaac said to him, ‘Come close and kiss me, my son.’ So he came close and kissed him and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, ‘See the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. Now may God give you the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth and an abundance of grain and new wine. May people serve you and nations bow down to you. Be master of your brothers and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed by those who curse you and blessed be those who bless you.’”

In effect, as he passes on this blessing, he is investing the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant in this man Jacob, thinking he is Esau. Verse 30 then, “It came about as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac, his father, that Esau, his brother, came in from hunting. He also had made savory food and brought it to his father and said to his father, ‘Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game that you may bless me.’ Isaac his father said to him, ‘Who are you?’ And he said, ‘I am your son, your firstborn Esau.’”

This is one of the real spiritual indications in Isaac’s life. “He trembled violently. He trembled violently.” This is conviction. He knew what he had done. “When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out...verse 34...with exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me, even me also, O my father.’ And he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing.’ And he said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright and behold, how he has taken away my blessing.’ And he said, ‘Have you not reserved a blessing for me? Give me something.’”

So down in verse 39, Isaac, his father, turns and says to him, ‘Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling and away from the dew of heaven from above.’” You’re going to have a hard life. “By your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve. It shall come about when you become restless that you will break his yoke from your neck.” You’re going to free yourself up from your brother, you’re going to be a rebel, you’re going to be an enemy, you’re going to live by the sword.

The fallout of this is obvious, in verse 41. “Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him. And Esau said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near and then I will kill my brother, Jacob.’”

The only bright spot of the story, the only thing you can say when you read a story like this and you see...Well wait a minute, here’s a guy named Isaac who is in the list of heroes of faith, how did he get there with this kind of stuff? And the answer is, that there was a time when he prayed to the Lord on

behalf of his wife and indicated his confident faith in the Lord, there was a time and that is so very important, it's the most important little piece of the story. In a sense, I save it for now.

Go back to chapter 26 and verse 24, "When the Lord appears to him and says, 'I am the God...that is to Isaac...of your father Abraham, do not fear, I'm with you, I will bless you, I will multiply your descendants the sake of my servant Abraham.'" We see the demonstration of Isaac's faith in the next verse. "So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there." He took up his residence in the place where God had appeared. He built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. That is a statement for really expressing your faith in the Lord. You might even conclude that that was the point of a real true conversion.

And so, in spite of the horrors of the life these people seemed to live and the lies and the deception that is going on...and by the way, it continued. Do you remember what the fallout of this was? First of all, Jacob never saw his mother again. He was alienated from his brother and lived in mortal fear that his brother was going to kill him. But eventually he met again with his brother and his life was spared.

How did he demonstrate his faith? The writer of Hebrews says he demonstrated his faith concerning things to come. All that can be said about this man in the listing that occurs in Hebrews chapter 11 and defines him as a man of faith, is that he believed God for what he did not receive. He blessed Jacob with the true blessing, gave a secondary blessing to even...to Esau, even regarding things to come. This is the essence of faith, when he faced the end of his life and hadn't received the promise and hadn't received the land, and hadn't received the nation and hadn't become a blessing to the world, he nonetheless passed it to the next generation knowing it was yet to come. Yes he tried to do things his way, but as soon as he perceived the providential hand of God crossing his natural will, and his natural affection, instead of murmuring and rebelling, he yielded, he submitted to the Lord, he didn't reverse the blessing and this is an evidence of his faith. He finally succumbed to what was right.

Verse 28...er...chapter 28 verse 1, "Isaac called Jacob, blessed him, charged him, said to him, 'Don't take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, don't do what your brother did, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.'" Get somebody that's from the family, a relative. "May God Almighty bless you," and here's a repeat of the promise, "Make you fruitful, multiply you so that you may become a company of peoples. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you that you may possess the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham."

So in the end, dear old Isaac rolled over, accepted God's providential purpose through all the sinful machinations of that bizarre set of circumstances and he died in faith that the promise would be fulfilled and that his son, Jacob, was the next link.

Now that takes us to Jacob and we'll make it quick. That will have to do because our time is gone. But let's go back to Hebrews 11, it's kind of hard to jump between Genesis and Hebrews, isn't it?

Verse 21, "By faith, Jacob as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." Life of faith. For Jacob was like his father Isaac. It was not the shining of the sun on a calm and clear day. Oh no, his life was murky and muddy and cloudy and dark and

foggy and all of those things. But he walked by faith, like Isaac. He encountered many struggles, many challenges, victories came very, very hard for him. The fog in his life was thick, sin was heavy, but his faith never waned.

Turn to chapter 28, for a moment, and let's see what we can know about him. Verse 10, "Jacob departed from Beersheba, went toward Haran, came to a certain place, spent the night there because the sun had set. He took one of the stones of the place, put it under his head and lay down in that place. He had a dream and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. The Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac, on the land in which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants." Here's a reiteration of the Abrahamic Covenant to the next in the genetic flow, the genetic line, the descendants. "Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth. You'll spread out to the west, the east, the north, the south and you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Almost verbatim the Abrahamic promise. "Behold I am with you. I will keep you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you."

Wow. "And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place and I didn't know it.' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place? This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.' So Jacob rose early in the morning, took the stone that he had put under his head, set it up as a pillar, poured oil on its top and he turned it into an altar, a place commemorating the encounter with God. He called the name of it Bethel, that's house of God, previously the name of the city had been Luz. Jacob made a vow saying, 'If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take and give me food to eat and garments to wear, I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God.' The stone which I have set up as a pillar will be God's house and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Here is indication of his faith. He wants the Lord to be his God. He wants to give generously. He is...he is dependent on the Lord, and we see that in...well, way over in chapter 32. He is terrified of his brother, Esau. Jacob in verse 9 of chapter 32, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Return to your country and your relatives and I will prosper you...which we've just read...I am unworthy of all the loving kindness and all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant, for with my staff only I cross this Jordan and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children, for You said I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea which is too great to be numbered. We're not going to be able to do that if Esau shows up and massacres us all.'"

So when you look at the life of Jacob, you see a lot of problems in his life, obviously, all the duplicity, all the lies, all the deception...yet he is anxious for the Lord to be his God. He is anxious to give to the Lord. He seeks the Lord in his hour of desperation. And he trusts the Lord to be the source of his life and the source of his protection.

And He was. He was. The time came for Jacob to pass away and he passes on the birthright, he passes the birthright on to Joseph. Let's look at chapter 48 of Genesis. Now you know we're getting to the end...only 50 chapters. And you also know we skipped a lot.

"It came about after these things, Joseph was told, 'Behold, your father's sick.' So he took his two

sons, Manasseh and Ephraim with him.” Joseph had two sons...I don’t want to get too complicated here, folks. We talk about the twelve tribes of Israel, don’t we? Well when they came into the land, the twelve tribes were allotted land, there actually were 13 tribes of Israel because one of the tribes was Joseph but his portion was split into two parts, Ephraim and Manasseh and the Levites, the tribe of Levi, had no land. They were the priestly tribe. So Joseph appears with his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. They will...they will be critical to the purposes of God; that is why many times the prophets refer to Israel as Ephraim.

So they come in, your son Joseph has come, Isaac...I’m sorry, Israel...Jacob has his name changed to Israel, collects his strength, sat up on the bed. “Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz back at Bethel in the land of Canaan, blessed me. He said, behold, I’ll make you fruitful and numerous and make you a company of people, give you this land to your descendants for you for an everlasting possession.’” Had he seen it? No. Had he seen a great nation? No. Had he seen people like the sand of the sea? No. It was a promise he died believing that promise was true.

“Now your two sons that were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt are mine. Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine as Reuben and Simeon are mine. But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours, they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance.” And he goes on...and the key thing is the promise that is pronounced there at the very beginning. It is passed on through him to the next generation namely, Ephraim and Manasseh. I’m not going to read all the rest of this but go down to verse 12, “Joseph took them from his knees and bowed with his face to the ground. He took both of them, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left, Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel, or Jacob’s right and brought them close to him. Stretched out his right hand, laid it on the head of Ephraim who was the younger, his left hand on Manasseh’s head, crossing his hands. Although Manasseh was the firstborn, he blessed Joseph and said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,” and there’s another indication of Jacob’s true faith, “the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads and may my name live on in them and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

“When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim’s head, it displeased him and he gasped his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.’ But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know. He also will become a people, he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.’ And he blessed them that day saying, ‘By you, Israel will pronounce blessing saying, May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’ Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh so Ephraim becomes another name for Israel as Israel becomes another name for Jacob. Israel says to Joseph, ‘I am about to die, but God will be with you and bring you to the land of your fathers.’”

There’s Jacob’s faith, he had heard from God, he couldn’t change his mind, you couldn’t move his hands, he died in faith never having seen the results. That leaves us only Joseph and what does it say in verse 22 of Hebrews chapter 11? Simply stated about Joseph, it tells us that he also while dying, when he was dying made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel and gave orders concerning his bones. He’s dying now, he has not received the promise. The promise now is very old, it’s very old. It’s 200 years since it was given to Abraham. Nobody has yet seen it. They’ve all died without seeing it fulfilled.

Look at Genesis 50, the last chapter in Genesis. Joseph, verse 22, is in Egypt, he and his father's household lived 110 years. Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons. Joseph said to his brothers in chapter 50 verse 24, "I'm about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land." He promised you that land, we're still in Egypt, they're all nomads, they're all wanderers, they've never been in the land, they've never possessed the land, they've never had the Kingdom, they've never been a blessing. They've never experienced deliverance and salvation as a people. They aren't yet a people. "I'm about to die but God will do what He promised, He promised an oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear saying, 'God will surely take care of you and you should take my bones from here.' So Joseph died at the age of 110, was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt." Wow. Died a stranger, never having received the promise.

Now what is the writer of Hebrews telling us? You get it now, don't you? These are people of faith. I mean, their whole lives were built around this promise that had been given to Abraham and passed on to these three other patriarchs. And everything in their lives focused on the confidence they had that God would do what He said He would do because God could be trusted. They never saw it. I mean, this is faith at its highest level, is it not? These aren't people who live at a low level. Sinful? Absolutely. Duplicitous, deceitful? Absolutely. Weak, vacillating, sometimes immoral? Absolutely. Living in a primitive time without the full revelation or the full riches of the Spirit that we know today. They struggled perhaps in ways that we don't and maybe that's why there was more...a little more tolerance of those things as Scripture indicates in the past. But what may be true about that part of their lives doesn't cancel out what's true about the commitment they made to trust God. They could not be deterred from giving the blessing to whom the blessing belonged. Abraham would not give it to Ishmael, it went to Isaac. Isaac would not give it to Esau, it went to Jacob. Jacob would not give it to Manasseh, it went to Ephraim. They all died never having seen it. They died as strangers, wanderers, nomads, a couple of them in foreign lands.

That was the evidence of their faith. They believed God for what they couldn't see, all the way to death. Unless you think that's something very unusual and heroic, that's how you believe, too, because the heaven that holds you to Christ is a heaven you have never seen. That's what it means to live by faith.

Lord, thank You again for the testimony that we've heard in this great story. We are grateful for these examples of human weakness and human frailty and yet in each case these men were the recipients of sovereign grace, covenant promise, covenant blessing and the faith that they exercised was a faith that saved them, that brought them into a relationship with you in which you became their God and they worshiped You and loved You and served You. Someday we'll get to know them when we see them in Your presence. May we have the same confidence as we live and as we come to the inevitable hour facing death that what has been promised we know You will fulfill, even though we haven't seen it. Like Abraham, we look for a city whose builder and maker is God, for a better country than the one that is here, we set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. We lay up our treasure in heaven because we know that's where we're going to receive that eternal reward. We're like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, we live on promise unrealized. This is the faith that You grant us that anchors us to the glories of the future and frees us up from being preoccupied with a passing world. We don't want to be profane like Esau, mundane. We want to be people of faith, we put our hope in Your promise. Thank You that Your promise is clear and it is anchored in the Word of God and anchored in our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thank You for this mighty work, we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

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