

26. Understanding the Faith of the Early Jewish Leaders

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand the faith of Abraham. We saw that the greatest example of the faith of Abraham was the fact that he knew that God is able to raise the dead. That same faith will give our children boldness as they share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ because they have the confident assurance that God raises the dead. Today, we are going to read about other early leaders of the Jews that had that same faith.

First, we see the faith of individuals from the three generations that followed Abraham. Hebrews 11:20-22 says, “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when 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 departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.” Isaac spoke about the future as he blessed Jacob and Esau. Isaac told Jacob, in Genesis 27:28-29, “‘Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!’” Here, we see that Isaac expected those nations that blessed his descendants to be blessed.

The blessing to Esau was a little different. Genesis 27:39-40 says, “Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: ‘Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.’” Here, we see Isaac promised Esau that one day in the future he would be able to break the yoke and no longer serve his brother.

Jacob later showed his faith in the promises of God by the blessing he gave to each of the sons of Joseph as it came close to the time for him to die. In Genesis 48:16, Jacob said, “‘The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.’” Earlier, Jacob had recognized that the Lord had spoken to him. Genesis 28:13-17 said, “‘And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: ‘I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.’ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not 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!’” When Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, he recognized that God would carry on the blessing that God had given to him through the lives of the sons of Joseph.

Joseph showed his faith in the promises of God by the words he spoke before he died. Those words are recorded in Genesis 50:24-25, where we read, “And Joseph said to his brethren, ‘I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’” Here, we see that Joseph had faith in the promise that God had given about the future of the nation of Israel.

The next example of faith mentioned from the Old Testament is the faith of Moses. Hebrews 10:23-26 says, “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.” We see that the first illustration of the faith of Moses was the faith that was shown by his parents at the time of his birth. The parents showed their faith in the promises of God by not fearing the commandments of the king.

Moses showed faith when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Acts 7:20-22 says, “At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” Moses had the best education that was available in the land of Egypt at that time. However, he chose to help his people. Acts 7:23-25 says, “Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.” Moses wanted to help his people but tried to do it his way instead of asking God what to do.

As a result, Pharaoh tried to kill him and he was forced to flee. After forty years of learning to depend on God in the wilderness, Moses showed his faith by being obedient to God. Acts 7:35 says, “This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush.” Exodus 5:1-2 says, “Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’” And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.’” The people of Israel even turned against Moses. Exodus 5:21-22 says, “And they said to them, ‘Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.’ So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?’” Still Moses was faithful and chose to suffer with the people of Israel, because he looked for the reward of the Lord, instead of enjoying the pleasures of sin that were only temporary. Moses was willing to suffer for God because he knew that the reward of God was greater than the riches of Egypt.

Hebrews 11:27-29 goes on to say, “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.” Instead of acting out of fear of the king of Egypt, Moses chose to trust the Lord.

We see that Moses endured, because his faith was in Him who is invisible. This faith was shown as he prepared to lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. The word translated “endured” means *to be strong or to be steadfast*. Moses saw the burning bush, but he did not see God. Exodus 3:4-6 says, “So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.” Moses heard the voice, but he did not see God. However, Moses had his faith in the One who is invisible.

Moses continued to show his faith, by putting blood on the top and sides of the door and keeping the Passover. Exodus 12:23 says, “For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.” In contrast, the Egyptians did not put blood on the top and sides of their doors. Exodus 12:29 says, “And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock.” God honored the faith of Moses, and the obedience of Israel, by sparing their oldest, while the death angel judged the firstborn of Egypt throughout the entire land.

Moses and the people of Israel then passed through the Red Sea. Exodus 14:22 says, “So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” In contrast, the Egyptians were destroyed. Exodus 14:28-29 says, “Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” God judged the Egyptians, because they lacked faith. God protected the people of Israel, because they showed faith by their obedience. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that as Christians they are now able to show their faith by their obedience to the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the faith of the early Jewish leaders.