

A Faith that is Precious to God

Peter, one of the twelve disciples and apostles, in his letter to the believers, wrote concerning the preciousness of real faith that has been tested and tried.

You have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 1:6-7

Our faithful love and trust in God is precious to God. He will lead us through anything to develop and exercise this faith. The history of so many faithful people that we have been given in the Bible helps us to see and understand what faith truly is. Some of the histories are little cameos such as the brief story of Abel. Others are detailed portraits of faith such as Noah and Abraham. Each though is an individual story, an individual faith, an individual child of God. Each is given as an example to help us in our walk with God, a walk impossible without genuine faith.

In the April 2017 Newsletter we learned about Abraham who is known as the father of the faithful. He was called by God to leave his home and family to go to a land that God would show him. In obedience he left "not knowing where he went"

and began his journey of faith. He was given many promises and because he believed God he was "credited with righteousness".

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." - Romans 4:13, 16-18 NIV

The promises that Abraham received and believed in were also given to his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, and his great grandsons, the twelve sons of Jacob. The record of the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11 list these people.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their fu-

ture. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones. - Hebrews 11:20-22 NIV

The story of each of these three faithful ones is told in the book of Genesis. Each is an individual and their stories of faith are diverse. Isaac was a quiet, meditative man with a quiet faith which appears to have come without great difficulty. Isaac's son Jacob, however, struggled in his faith. He tried to accomplish his goals through his own efforts and used extortion and lies to do that. Only when he was exiled from his home and family did he learn to trust God after much wrestling. One of Jacob's 12 sons, Joseph, endured many trials of his faith including hatred from his brothers, being sold into slavery, and then being thrown in prison because he was true to his God.

In this newsletter we will consider each of these children of Abraham who are among those listed as faithful by the writer to the Hebrews. What can we learn about faith from their stories?

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Ps 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. KJV

ISAAC - THE PROMISED SON

When God blessed Abraham and made a covenant with him, the fulfillment of that covenant necessitated a child be born to Abraham and Sarah. After 25 years of waiting, Isaac, the promised son was born. While much is recorded of Abraham's life and his faith in the Bible, much less is told us about this promised son. In fact, even though Isaac's name is mentioned 21 one times in the New Testament, only two of those speak of Isaac individually. Almost always when referenced in the New Testament his name appears with Abraham and Jacob in phases such as: "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". In the record that is given us it is evident that Abraham and Sarah taught him well about faith in God, about obedience, about patiently waiting, and certainly about the promises that God had given. The record shows us that he shared this faith and was obedient to God. What do we learn about Isaac?

- 1) It appears that he was very close to his mother. It was only after Rebekah became his wife three years after Sarah died that he found comfort. (Genesis 24:66-67)
- 2) He was a quiet, peaceful man and it is recorded that he was in the fields meditating when

Rebekah his bride arrived from her homeland. (Genesis 24:62-63) On another occasion when the Philistines were taking over wells that his men had just dug, rather than fight the Philistines, he moved on and dug another well. This occurred three times. (Genesis 26:17-22)

- 3) His faith was quiet but real. When Rebekah was barren after 20 years of marriage, he prayed to God and God answered his prayer. Rebekah became pregnant and gave birth to twins, Esau and Jacob. (Genesis 25:19-26) Later on, when there was famine in the land, he went to the land of the Philistines. God commanded him to stay there and not go down to Egypt. Isaac in faith obeyed and God greatly blessed him because of his obedience. (Genesis 26:1-16)
- 4) Isaac was the son of promise and God repeated to him the promises given to his father Abraham. He will inherit the land, his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, all nations will be blessed through his offspring. (Genesis 26:1-6,23-25; and

35:12. See also Romans 9:1-9 and Galatians 4:21-31)

- 5) Hebrews 11:20 tells us that it was through faith that Isaac blessed his two sons concerning the future. He believed the promises of God and so knew that these promises would be extended to his promised son, the one chosen by God. (Genesis 27:27-29, 38-40 and 28:1-5)

Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." Genesis 28:1-5 NIV

Jacob the Grandson - From Deceit to Faith

Whereas Isaac appears to have quietly accepted the faith of his father and mother, Jacob struggled with his faith. Instead of, in faith, asking God for what he thought was necessary to receive the blessings of Abraham, he used his twin brother Esau's desperation and worked with his mother to deceive his father Isaac in order to receive the firstborn birthright and the covenant blessings.

In all of this Rebekah and Jacob, instead of, in faith, seeking God's help and guidance, took matters into their hands and used deceit to accomplish their goal. Because of

their lack of faith and resultant sin there were consequences for both Rebekah and Jacob. When his brother Esau realized that he had been deceived and that there was no blessing left for him he was furious and bitter. He was ready to kill his brother for the deception. In fear that Esau would kill Jacob, Rebekah again plotted to send Jacob away from Esau's anger. At Rebekah's urging, Isaac blessed Jacob with the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant and sent him on his way to Haran where Abraham's and Rebekah's family had come from in order to find a wife. So Jacob was banished from his home and there is no Biblical record that Rebekah ever saw her

son again.

It is during this journey to Haran and his return at least 20 years later to the Promised Land that we see Jacob's faith develop. From thinking of God as the God of his father and grandfather, he finally realized that God was his God also. While fleeing from his brother's wrath, God appeared to him through angels ascending and descending on a ladder from heaven. God extended the covenant promises to him but Jacob responded with a need for faith:

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a
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certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth... All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Genesis 28:10-15

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking... so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house..." Genesis 28:20-22 NIV

Jacob responded that if God would be with him on his journey and that he would return safely, then God would be his God. Jacob wanted proof. He was not going to believe just because he was told to believe. Although Jacob's faith was weak at this time, God worked with him and helped him to see and to believe. This was a journey to faith.

Jacob arrived in Haran and worked for Laben, his mother's brother. He had met Laben's younger daughter, Rachel, and knew he loved her. He agreed to work for seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. However, after the marriage feast, Jacob found that he had been given her older sister, Leah as his wife. The deceiver is deceived! So Jacob worked another seven years in order to marry Rachel. After this he worked another six years for Laben and during this

time his flocks and wealth increased due to God's blessings.

Finally, after 20 years in exile, God told Jacob to leave Laben and return home. However, out of fear Jacob deceptively fled from Laben while he was off shearing his sheep rather than tell him he was leaving. He worried that Laben would take some of his flocks and wealth and not let him take his wives and children with him. Although he obeyed God in returning to his home, he still was not trusting enough and tried to take things into his own hands.

As Jacob returned home with his wives and children, his next worry was his brother Esau. Was Esau still angry and wanting to kill him? Jacob sent messengers to Esau to tell him that he was returning and to ask that he "find favor in his sight". The messengers came back telling him that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men! Jacob made plans but also prayed to God for help. This is a step forward in faith for Jacob. However, notice that he still thinks of God as the God of his fathers and perhaps not his God?

In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac... Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'" Genesis 32:6-12 NIV

That night, after Jacob had sent ahead gifts of herds for Esau and had ordered the rest of his household to cross over the ford at the Jabbok stream ahead of him, he was left by himself. There was little sleep for him that night.

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till day-break...

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome..." Then he blessed him there. Genesis 32:24-30

The meeting with Esau went well and they parted peacefully. After this Jacob fully believed that God is his God. God repeated again that his name was changed to Israel. This is a new name for a new man. The name Jacob means "supplanter" but Israel means "God prevails".

So Jacob said to his household..."let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone."

After Jacob returned from Padan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel. And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." Genesis 35:2-4 & 9-15 NIV

Israel (Jacob) called the name of the place where he worshipped God "Bethel" which means the house of God. Jacob had tried to gain the inheritance and the promised blessings of Abraham and Isaac through deceit and cunning. At first he thought of God as the God of his fathers' only but step by step his faith developed. Finally, God was his God and he became the true grandson of Abraham in faith. With Abraham and Isaac he received the inheritance of the promises made to them by God.

Great Grandson Joseph - in Faith Saved his Family

Joseph and his brother Benjamin were the sons of their father Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. Jacob had ten other sons by his other wife, Leah, and his wives' maidservants, but it was Joseph and Benjamin that he loved more than these others and showed his favor to them. To Joseph, even though he was not his firstborn, he gave a beautiful, richly colored coat that he had not given to any other son. This, of course, bred jealousy and hatred among the brothers.

To complicate the situation, Joseph told everyone of dreams that he had had. In one, the sheaves of grain that his brothers had harvested bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. In another, the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. At 17 years of age it's not difficult to imagine that Joseph had no hesitation in throwing this in the face of his brothers who hated him so much even to the point that Jacob his father rebuked him. It doesn't appear at this time in his life that Joseph displayed a godly attitude or was particularly faithful and, yet, the dreams that he had dreamed prophesied of things to come. God was speaking to him and through him. As Joseph's life unfolded, it became clear that God was working in Joseph's life to bring about his purpose.

When Joseph was 17, his father sent him to find his 10 brothers who were grazing their sheep in another area. As Joseph was approaching them, the brothers saw him coming and plotted to kill him. Reuben, the oldest, tried to rescue him by telling them to leave him in a deep cistern instead actually killing him. When Joseph reached them, they grabbed him, tore off his special

coat, and threw him in the cistern. However, later when Reuben was not with them, they found a way to make a profit. They sold him to some Midianite merchants who were on their way south and pocketed 20 pieces of silver. Now they had the problem of what they would tell their father. As with so many dreadful sins, lies were used to cover it up. They took the special coat and dipped it in goat's blood and told their father they had found it. Jacob, when he saw the bloody coat, concluded that Joseph must have been mauled by a wild animal and was dead. He went into mourning and didn't recover until many years later. What were his sons thinking when they saw their father in such deep mourning and tried to comfort him?

Joseph, meantime, was taken in shackles down to Egypt. There he was sold to an Egyptian official, Potiphar. What was Joseph thinking when this happened? Did he feel deserted by the God of his fathers, the One who had sent him dreams that seemed to promise him prominence? God was with him and he prospered. Potiphar found him trustworthy and hardworking and entrusted all that he had to Joseph's care. However, Potiphar's wife tried to entice him but Joseph refused because it was a sin against his God. For this obedience to God he was thrown into prison when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of rape.

So, from enforced slavery to imprisonment, Joseph's life seemed to be getting worse, not better. As God's servant he was unjustly persecuted but his faith did not waiver. He continued to be faithful and trustworthy even in prison and the record says that God was

with him. (See Genesis 39:20-23)

God again used dreams to bring about his purpose through Joseph. While in prison two of Pharaoh's servants were also imprisoned: the chief baker and the chief cupbearer. Each had a dream and wanted to know the meaning. Joseph just happened to be there and by God's direction was able to tell them the meaning of their dreams. The baker was to be executed but the cupbearer would be restored to his position. All Joseph asked was that the cupbearer remember to say a good word for him. Of course, the interpretation that Joseph gave of both dreams was correct but the cupbearer forgot to help Joseph for two years. At that time Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, had a dream. Even though he sought the council of all his wise men, no one could tell him the interpretation. The cupbearer finally remembered Joseph and he was called from prison. Joseph carefully told Pharaoh that he could not interpret the dream but that the God that he serves will give the answer. In each step of Joseph's life his connection to and dependency on the God shines through.

Joseph told Pharaoh that the dreams that he had dreamed foretold a period of great abundance for seven years to be followed by seven years of severe famine. He advised Pharaoh to prepare for the years of famine and laid out a plan for storing grain during the good years so that the bad years could be weathered. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he made Joseph second in charge of all Egypt and gave him the responsibility to carry out his plan. By now Joseph was 30 years old. His journey from favored son to

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slave to prisoner to ruler in Egypt took 13 years. During that time Joseph matured into a man who trusted God through unimaginable trials and who patiently waited for God to work out his purpose with him.

The seven abundant years ended and the seven years of famine came. It affected not just Egypt but the whole region including Canaan. In desperation Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to find food. So the ten brothers who had hated him and had sold him into slavery went to Egypt seeking food. They came into the presence of the Egyptian ruler, bowed down, and requested to purchase food. Joseph recognized them but his brothers did not recognize him. Surely he remembered the dreams that he had had as a child. He would remember that God does fulfill his prophecies and his promises. He realized that his exile in Egypt had a purpose.

After his brothers made several trips to buy food in Egypt, Joseph revealed himself to them. His brothers must have been completely flabbergasted but Joseph, instead of holding a grudge, assured them that all of what had happened to him was God work-

ing in his life to save his family:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph...God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Genesis 45:4-8

His brothers went back to Canaan and brought their father Jacob and all of their families back to Egypt. Jacob's joy in again seeing Joseph whom he had believed was dead for more than 20 years had no bounds. Joseph not only believed that God existed but he also believed that God was working in his life, that he would bring about ultimate good even in the face of tremendous trials, and his connection and trust in God brought him to have forgiveness, compassion and mercy for his brothers.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the

wrongs we did to him?...But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives... And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Genesis 50:15-21 NIV

Even though Joseph had been an exile in Egypt for almost 100 years by the end of his life, he understood and believed that God had promised the land of Canaan to his family for an everlasting possession. His final request was to be buried in the Promised Land.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." Genesis 50:24-25 NIV

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Faith is a Personal Thing

Son, grandson, and great grandson. Each followed in Abraham's footsteps of faith but each in his own way. Isaac quietly prayed for a son and received that promise times two. Jacob's faith developed over his lifetime and only after much tribulation, wrestling and questioning realized that the God of his fathers was his God. As a very young man Joseph's faith was tried through exile, slavery, and prison but he was obedient to his God through it all. His faithful obedience brought salvation for his family and in the process he learned compassion for his brothers. Each of these died in faith not having received what was promised. But they will.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Hebrews 11:39-40 NKJV

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and thus the Gentiles glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Because of this I will confess you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praises to your name." Romans 15:8-9 NET



Daily Bible Readings for July, August and September

Read the Entire Bible in One Year

JULY			AUGUST			SEPTEMBER		
DAY	Old Test	NewTest/Psa	DAY	Old Test	NewTest/Psa	DAY	Old Test	NewTest/Psa
1	II Sam 15, 16	II Corinth 13	1	Isaiah 49, 50	John 1	1	II King 14, 15	Psalm 97
2	II Sam 17, 18	Psalm 74	2	Isaiah 51, 52	John 2	2	II King 16, 17	I Thess 1
3	II Sam 19, 20	Galatians 1	3	Isaiah 53, 54	John 3	3	II King 18, 19	i Thess 2
4	II Sam 21, 22	Galatians 2	4	Isaiah 55, 56	John 4	4	II King 20, 21	I Thess 3
5	II Sam 23, 24	Galatians 3	5	Isaiah 57, 58	Psalm 85	5	II King 22, 23	I Thess 4
6	Song Sol 1-3	Galatians 4	6	Isaiah 59, 60	Psalm 86	6	II King 24, 25	I Thess 5
7	Song Sal 4-6	Galatians 5	7	Isaiah 61, 62	John 5	7	Jonah 1-4	Psalm 98
8	Song Sol 7, 8	Galatians 6	8	Isaiah 63, 64	John 6	8	Micah 1-3	Psalm 99
9	Isaiah 1, 2	Psalm 75	9	Isaiah 65, 66	John 7	9	Micah 4, 5	Psalm 100, 101
10	Isaiah 3, 4	Psalm 76	10	I King 1, 2	Psalm 87, 88	10	Micah 6, 7	II Thess 1
11	Isaiah 5, 6	Ephesians 1	11	I King 3, 4	John 8	11	Nahum 1-3	II Thess 2
12	Isaiah 7, 8	Ephesians 2	12	I King 5, 6	John 9	12	I Chron 1, 2	II Thess 3
13	Isaiah 9, 10	Ephesians 3	13	I King 7, 8	Psalm 89	13	I Chron 3, 4	Psalm 102
14	Isaiah 11, 12	Ephesians 4	14	I King 9, 10	John 10	14	I Chron 5, 6	Psalm 103
15	Isaiah 13, 14	Ephesians 5	15	I King 11, 12	John 11	15	I Chron 7, 8	Psalm 104
16	Isaiah 15-17	Ephesians 6	16	I King 13, 14	John 12	16	I Chron 9, 10	I Timothy 1
17	Isaiah 18-20	Psalm 77	17	I King 15, 16	Psalm 90	17	I Chron 11, 12	I Timothy 2
18	Isaiah 21, 22	Psalm 78	18	I King 17, 18	John 13	18	I Chron 13, 14	I Timothy 3
19	Isaiah 23, 24	Psalm 79	19	I King 19, 20	John 14	19	i Chron 15, 16	I Timothy 4
20	Isaiah 25, 26	Philippians 1	20	I King 21, 22	Psalm 91	20	I Chron 17, 18	I Timothy 5
21	Isaiah 27, 28	Philippians 2	21	Joel 1, 2, 3	John 15	21	I Chron 19, 20	I Timothy 6
22	Isaiah 29, 30	Philippians 3	22	Amos 1-3	John 16	22	I Chron 21, 22	Psalm 105
23	Isaiah 31, 32	Philippians 4	23	Amos 4-6	John 17	23	I Chron 23, 24	Psalm 106
24	Isaiah 33, 34	Psalm 80	24	Amos 7-9	Psalm 92	24	I Chron 25, 26	Psalm 107
25	Isaiah 35, 36	Colossians 1	25	Obad, II King 1	John 18	25	I Chron 27, 28	II Timothy 1
26	Isaiah 37, 38	Colossians 2	26	II King 2, 3	John 19	26	I Chron 29 Hos I	II Timothy 2
27	Isaiah 39, 40	Colossians 3	27	II King 4, 5	Psalm 93, 94	27	Hosea 2-4	II Timothy 3
28	Isaiah 41, 42	Colossians 4	28	II King 6, 7	John 20	28	Hosea 5, 6	II Timothy 4
29	Isaiah 43, 44	Psalm 81	29	II King 8, 9	John 21	29	Hosea 7, 8	Psalm 108
30	Isaiah 45, 46	Psalm 82, 83	30	II King 10, 11	Psalm 95	30	Hosea 9, 10	Psalm 109
31	Isaiah 47, 48	Psalm 84	31	II King 12, 13	Psalm 96	31		