

Heroes of the Faith

Tony

Scriptures:

Hebrews 11

Genesis 12:2-3

The writer of Hebrews brings together stories of the most notable heroes in the Old Testament. In this he demonstrates the nature of faith for new Christian believers. These stories are grouped together in Chapter 11. He opens the chapter with this declaration which he goes on to illustrate.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by this the elders obtained a good testimony." Hebrews 11:1-2

The writer then begins his list of heroes. I recommend that you give time and thought to the whole of Hebrews chapter 11, bearing in mind that the writer only had the stories recorded in the Old Testament available to him.

When Paul explained the New Covenant to the new Christians scattered around the Roman empire, he did not firstly turn to the great law giver Moses, but to Abraham, the man of faith.

Archaeologists searching the area of Haran, Abraham's original home which he left to live in tents in obedience to God's command, have made amazing discoveries, including evidence of a very advanced civilization where houses had separate toilets in them, as ours do. There were pools for bathing and primitive versions of under floor heating. So when Abraham set out to live in tents he sacrificed more than we may have imagined.

Abraham left without knowing where he was going and when he arrived at the land God had promised to him, he and his family were treated like foreigners.

The promises to Abraham are clearly shown in Genesis 12:2-3

"Get out from your country and from your father's house to a land I will show you. I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing and I will bless those who bless you. I will curse him who curses you and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This promise however depends on something. To make Abraham a great nation he needed children and he had none. So comes the story of Isaac who was born to Abraham and Sarah at a great age after years of barrenness. Here was God's ultimate gift and assurance that God's promise would be kept.

In Genesis 22, however, God commands Abraham to take Isaac, his only son, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. At the last moment the angel of the Lord intervened and the sacrifice of the ram caught in the thicket took Isaac's place as the sacrifice.

Some commentators believe that this story is related to the practise among other nations of sacrificing their sons on the altar to influence the gods they

believed in. So the story makes it clear that this practice was definitely not part of God's Covenant with Abraham.

However, Christian believers see a powerful prophetic picture in this story of a father willing to sacrifice his only son. In our case we see a foreshadowing of Jesus hanging on a cross, but in the story of Calvary there is no ram in a thicket. Jesus was a willing sacrifice because He was the only sacrifice that could pay the price of our sin.

So what makes a hero?

- (1) A close relationship with God
- (2) Total obedience to God
- (3) Waiting patiently for the fulfilment of God's promise.
- (4) Persevering when the going is hard.

These are not easy to fulfil in any way as we live for God. The writer of Hebrews, however, leads us on to Chapter 12:22 where he gives us an amazing crescendo of wonder, as he relates our destination, and describes God's wonderful grace to each one of us. In verse 24 comes Jesus Himself, the Mediator of our faith. His blood can cleanse any sin. He became the Hero of heroes when He gave Himself willingly as our ultimate sacrifice on Calvary's cross.

Prayer: Father thank You for walking with us every day as we make our pilgrimage to the place Jesus has prepared for His followers. Thank You for the mercy and grace You have poured out on every repentant sinner through the sacrifice of Your one and only precious Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.