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# NOTES ON HEBREWS

By W. E. VINE, M.A. (Lond.)

## Chapter 11: 21-40

*Verse 21. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph: and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*—In the order in Genesis the worship comes before the blessing. This brings the blessing into the same line of thought and implication as was mentioned in the case of Jacob in verse 20. The blessing was, again, an act of faith, implying an assurance of the fulfilment by God of the details of the blessing. The act of worship which preceded, was an act of faith. He bowed himself, and in leaning upon the top of his staff, he offered homage to God. His staff had been used upon an occasion fifty years earlier as a companion in his pilgrimage (Gen. 32:10). The rendering is the LXX of Gen. 47:31, where the Hebrew has 'bowed himself upon the bed's head'. The difference is a matter of vowel point. The same Hebrew letters form the word for 'bed' and the word for 'staff'. The difference in rendering does not affect the illustration of faith.

*Verse 22. By faith Joseph, when his end was nigh, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel: and gave commandment concerning his bones: So far from clinging to Egypt, he laid hold of the promises of God, in the assurance of the exodus of his people from Egypt, claiming his share in their destiny, and in their inheritance. That he gave commandment concerning his bones was no mere sentiment, it expressed his belief in, and assurance of, resurrection, and, alike with his fathers, of the possession of the land of promise. (See Joshua 24:32.)*

*Verse 23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents, because they saw he was a godly child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.*—This introduces four examples of faith in connection with Moses (vv. 23–29). The cause of the parents' faith was their realization that their child was 'goodly'. The word *asteion* came to mean beautiful, whether morally, or, physically as here. Stephen in Acts 7:20 adds that Moses was 'fair to God,' beautiful in God's sight. This gives the key to their faith. They were not merely delighted at the natural beauty of their child. Their faith enabled them to realize that God had purposes in view in regard to him, and enabled them to defy the power of the world and the decree of its king.

*Verse 24. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.*—Moses decided to leave the court and visit his downtrodden brethren; he knew that his recognition of them meant renunciation of his position and the prospects involved in his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter. The step he took that day, as recorded in Exodus 2:11, was the refusal mentioned, as is shown by the statement in both passages, 'when he was grown up'. That decision was an act of faith, with the assurance that God would fulfil His promises.

*Verse 25. choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.*—The aorist tense of the verb rendered 'choosing' marks it as a single and definite act. The verb *sunḡakoucheomai*, to be evilly treated, is used here only in the N.T. The simpler form is used in verse 37 and ch. 13:3. The latter part of the verse is lit., 'than to have a temporary enjoyment of sin'. He viewed both prospects, the voluptuous life of an Egyptian prince, and what his public recognition of his Hebrew descent involved, and he made his immediate choice.

*Verse 26. accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt:* The word rendered 'accounting' is again in the aorist tense, expressive of a single and resolute act as the result of a decisive estimate. The 'reproach of Christ' (not 'reproach for Christ') means Christ's reproach: The scoffing and mockery which Christ endured, and which His faithful followers still endure, was anticipated by the Godly long before Christ became manifested, though they may have dimly foreseen Him. Cp. 1 Cor. 10:4, 'the Rock was Christ.' The Lord said of Moses, 'He wrote of me'. Such reproach was wealth to Moses, far greater than anything Egypt and its royalty could supply. What a lesson for believers today!

*for he looked unto the recompense of the reward.*—He fixed his gaze upon what the Day yet to come will bring at the hands of the One whose reproach he endured. *Apoblepo*, 'to look off,' is used here only in the N.T. The word in ch. 12:1 is the synonym, *aphoraō*. For 'recompense of reward' see on ch. 2:2.

*Verse 27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*—This does not describe either the flight of Moses to Midian (Exod. 2) or his leading Israel in their final departure from Egypt. It follows

on closely from the preceding statements as to his decision to leave the court and identify himself with his people, for in doing so, as mentioned in verse 24, he verily forsook Egypt with all its pleasure, knowing that he would incur the wrath of Pharaoh. To endure 'as seeing Him who is invisible' is the very essence of faith. It gives courage, steadfastness, and assurance as to the future.

*Verse 28. By faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the firstborn should not touch them.*—The perfect tense 'he hath kept,' as in the original, indicates the continuance of the ordinance and the permanent nature of the record. 'The destroyer' is a noun formed from the definite article with the present participle of the verb, lit., 'the destroying one' (cp. 1 Thess. 1:10, 'the Deliverer,' as in Rom. 11:28, not 'which delivered,' (A.V.), nor 'delivereth,' (R.V.)).

*Verse 29. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were swallowed up.*—The faith of the leaders is ascribed to the whole people. The Red Sea, first mentioned in Exod. 10:19, has frequent mention in the historical Books and the Psalms (about 20 times), but not in the Prophets. The 'which' refers to the dry land; it was that of which the Egyptians 'made trial' (as the statement is literally).

*Verse 30. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about seven days.*—The subject passes from the Red Sea immediately to the conquest of Canaan, nothing being said about events during the forty years in the wilderness, for that period was not characterized by faith. The compassing of Jericho day after day was a matter of faith. The ordinary way would be by direct attack. God's ways are not man's ways. The people were taught their complete dependence upon the Lord. The city was in no way taken by siege, as some have supposed. God overthrew it supernaturally and then the city was entered. The method itself must have appeared ludicrous to the inhabitants.

*Verse 31. By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace.*—Here was a simple faith and very elementary, but it was real. She knew what God had determined and acted accordingly. She grasped the unseen, and put her belief into action. Hence her life was lifted out from the influences of her Canaanitish condition, and her faith brought her from her alienated state into the fellowship of God's people. It is significant that, in the Epistle of James,

Abraham and Rahab are the two singled out as examples of faith justified by works.

*Verse 32. And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets:* The order is purposely not chronological. It demonstrates the fact that the writer is not writing mere history. Gideon is put before Barak as being more noteworthy, and so with Samson and Jephthah. David is put before Samuel, as the latter leads to the mention of the prophets. In each case, however, there was a distinct call from God. None were in a position of outstanding dignity of position when they were called, and that only serves to enhance the power of their faith. Dignity does not make faith efficacious; faith makes the weak and lowly strong for God.

*Verse 33. who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,—* The word *katagōnizomai*, to subdue, is used here only in the N.T., and nowhere in the LXX. It signifies to subdue by hard conflict (*agōn*, a wrestling). That they 'wrought righteousness' is a general statement including the exercise of what is right and just, and the living of a life of holiness. The obtaining of promises, especially by prayer and intercession, whether for themselves or for the nation, is illustrated in several instances (see e.g., 2 Kings 19:15; 20:2). For the fourth see Judges 14:5-9; 1 Sam. 17:34-36; Dan. 6:16-24. All four statements give evidence of the power, not of the individual enterprise and effort, but of faith.

*Verse 34. quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword,—*For the former see Dan. 3:26. The latter is exemplified in several lives, e.g. those of David, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah.

*from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens.—*The first statement applies physically, as in the case of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20), or in spiritual experience, as with Barak, Gideon and Jephthah. The three statements may perhaps be taken together; the instances of the last two are numerous. All speak not so much of human prowess as of the faith which produced it.

*Verse 35. Women received their dead by a resurrection: Lit., 'out of a resurrection'; that is, as the issue of a resurrection.* Instances are mentioned in 1 Kings 17:22-24 and 2 Kings 4:36.

*and others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance; that*

*they might obtain a better resurrection:* 'Others' speaks of the difference between these and the various ones who have been mentioned in the immediately preceding list, from verse 33 onward. The verb *tumpanizō* signifies either to beat to death (*tumpanon*, a drum, beaten with a drumstick), or to stretch upon a wheel for torture. The sense is general, i.e., to inflict any kind of torture. The 'better resurrection' primarily means better than the resurrection of those who have just been mentioned, who were raised from the dead to die again. There may, however, be an indication that their resurrection will result in a greater bliss and reward than if they had avoided suffering.

*Verses 36, 37. and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins: being destitute, afflicted, evil entreated.*—The tradition is that Isaiah was sawn asunder. That they were tempted refers to efforts on the part of their persecutors to make them abandon their faith and deny their God, For the remainder of the sufferings mentioned cp. Mark 13:13; John 15:18, 19; 17:14.

*Verse 38. (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves; and the holes of the earth.*—*Axios*, worthy, signifies of value, worth. The statement expresses the Divine estimate. The world counts those who are true witnesses to God not worthy of itself. God reverses the comparison. Separation from the world and its ways always brings its contempt. The world will one day be compelled to acknowledge that God is right. For the remainder of the verse see, e.g. 1 Kings 18:4.

*Verse 39. And these all, having had witness borne to them though their faith, received not the promise,*—That is, all from Abel to the last believer referred to in O.T. times had God's witness given to them in Holy Scripture, by means of (not because of) their faith, but they did not receive the fulfilment of the promise, not merely of future earthly blessing, but of that which they will receive in resurrection life and glory.

This is not contradictory of the statement in ch. 6:15, concerning Abraham, that he 'obtained the promise,' for that refers to the fact that God did make good His word to him in his earthly circumstances.

*Verse 40. God having provided some better thing concerning*

*us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*—Firstly, the Hebrew believers whom the writer was addressing, whilst they had to walk by faith as O.T. believers had, yet had greater privileges than they. God had reserved some better thing for the times of the rejected Messiah. Heavenly things have become the possession of believers now through their union with Christ, and access into the Holiest by His blood. Our citizenship is in heaven. That was not the case with the saints of old. But, secondly, while none are yet ‘made perfect,’ they and we are to be glorified together in resurrection power and conformity to Christ’s body of glory, and thus we shall be perfected, as the Lord prayed in John 17:23. Christ has Himself been made perfect in this way (Heb. 5:9 and 7:28, R.V. ‘perfected for evermore’).

The subject of the Church and its special position and glory is not in view in this Epistle. Hence the full unfolding of the ‘better thing’ is not here given.

The verb rendered ‘provided’ is in the Middle Voice, indicating the special interest God has taken in doing this.



#### Prof. A. T. Robertson on the Incarnation

‘Both in Paul and John, the main problem is *the incarnation of Christ the Son of God*. The Virgin Birth is a detail of the Incarnation. Paul and John do not mean that God entered by spiritual impression into the heart and life of Jesus, so that He became a God-filled man and was lifted into fellowship and communion with God. The rather they both give us the picture of One who was *already in existence before the Incarnation as the Son of God*, and who voluntarily came to earth to do His redemptive work for men. It is plain, without any reference to the Virgin Birth, that Paul and John set before us the conception of *One who is more than man; who lived as God’s Son before He became the Son of man; and who today is both Son of God and Son of Man*. He has taken back to heaven His humanity, as He brought to earth His Deity. He was both God and man on earth, even as He is now in heaven Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man.’

It is commonly asserted by those who deny the Virgin Birth of our Lord that only two of the Gospels declare it. And particularly they urge, as if it were evidence against the doctrine, that neither John nor Paul refer to it. But, as Prof. Robertson points out in the article from which the above extract is taken, both John and Paul declare in the clearest and strongest terms the *pre-existence of Jesus* (John 1:1; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-17). And the Virgin Birth is implied in the Incarnation. Indeed it is not easy to conceive how the incarnation could have been effected otherwise. That is the explanation given in explicit language in two of the Gospels, which must have been known to both John and Paul, and which certainly they do not contradict. And no other explanation of the mystery of the Incarnation has ever been advanced.