

• True children of Abraham

The life of faith is the very heart of what it means to be among the people of God. Abraham is the great model of what it means to be a believer, and for many centuries it was among his descendants that faith in the God of the Bible was to be found. Hebrews goes on to mention Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. However, not every descendant of Abraham was a true believer. Those who crucified Jesus said, 'We are the seed of Abraham', but Jesus said to them, 'You are of your father the devil!' Not all are true 'children of Abraham' simply because they descend from Abraham. Our writer picks out those who were notable for their faith.

1. Isaac had faith for the future of both his children

• Influence that extends to future generations

1. **Isaac had faith for the future of both his children.** ²⁰By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. Faith looks to the future of the kingdom of God. We note that the examples being given to us at this point all concentrate on the end of someone's life. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau when he thought he was dying¹. Jacob's faith was seen 'when he was dying'². And so was Joseph's³. The point is again being made that our faith has to extend out into the future. If we are men and women of faith now, our influence will extend into future generations and the future of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaac looked into the future and had faith for 'things to come'. When we read the story in Genesis 27 we find that Isaac blessed Jacob primarily and Esau only secondarily. The main line of the people of God was destined to flow through Jacob. Isaac would have preferred the blessing to have passed through Esau. But this is precisely where Isaac is seen as a man of faith. Jacob's deceitfulness was used by God (Jacob had to break away from it eventually but for the moment God used it). When Isaac found out how he had been deceived he trembled violently and said, 'I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed'⁴. His faith could see that God had overruled what he personally would have wanted. This is what faith is – letting God use us as he wishes, allowing God to be God!

• His faith could see that God had overruled what he personally would have wanted

2. Jacob's faith expected the unexpected

• Jacob blessed Joseph with crossed hands

2. **Jacob's faith expected the unexpected.** ²¹By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. The Hebrew word might be *matteh* ('on his staff') or *mittah* ('on his bed'), since the original was written without vowels. The scribes who put vowels into our Hebrew Old Testament took it one way¹; the Greek translators (followed by Hebrews) took it another way. Strangely both may have been true, for Jacob certainly had a 'staff'² and he certainly was in bed³. However, it is not an important matter. More important is the fact that Jacob blessed Joseph with crossed hands⁴. It was his way of expressing the fact that God was likely to choose the unexpected person. Faith expects God to be the God of the unexpected!

¹ Genesis 27:2
² 11:21
³ 11:22

⁴ Genesis 27:33

¹ see Genesis 47:31
² see Genesis 32:10
³ see Genesis 47:31
⁴ see Genesis 48:14

3. Joseph's faith was confident about exodus and God-given land

- Even our mistakes do not abort God's purpose

3. Joseph's faith was confident about exodus and God-given land. ²²By faith Joseph, as he was coming to his end, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel: and gave commandment concerning his bones. Again our writer focuses on something that comes at the very end of Joseph's life (see Genesis 50:24–26, the last three verses of Genesis). One might ask: would it not have been more interesting for him to mention some item of faith in Joseph's earlier life? But the author knows what he is doing in writing to these Hebrews. Joseph had a tough life in his earlier years but he was about to say to his brothers, 'you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good'. Faith sees God's purpose flowing through our lives. Even our mistakes do not abort God's purpose. Joseph made mistakes when he was younger. But Joseph knows God's plan continues and so he knows about the future also. If God has predicted an exodus of the Israelites back to Canaan, then Joseph knows it will happen! If God is giving the people land, then it will surely come to pass. Faith is 'confident assurance about the things we expect to happen'; it is taking God at his word.

4. The faith of Moses' parents was instinctive

- They knew that there was something very special about this child
- They knew the character of God
- Faith delivers us from fear
- Faith can lead us to be disobedient!

4. The faith of Moses' parents was instinctive. ²³By faith, when Moses was born, he was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that he was a beautiful baby, and they were not afraid of the king's command. Joseph's hopes began to be fulfilled in Moses, but our writer must mention Moses' parents first for they had faith also! Faith arose in the hearts of Moses' parents because their baby was so beautiful! This is a good example of the way in which faith is not so much based upon a specific word from God but on a kind of instinctive knowledge of what is God's will. They knew that there was something very special about this child. They knew the character of God was against child-murder. This was the kind of situation where they needed no special further word from God. Their faith was instinctive.

We also have here an example of the way in which faith delivers us from fear. Interestingly it is also an example of how faith can lead us to be disobedient! We obey secular authorities but not when they command us to murder babies! Then faith helps us to defy the authorities!



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