

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God" Acts 27:25

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Heb. 11:13

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apart from any works. However, what is the basis of how a person can receive the blessed results of God's grace? Was there any difference in OT times as compared with the present day?

They Believed God

The principle upon which sinful man can be declared righteous by a holy God was expressed clearly in Gen. 15:5, when the Lord showed Abram the starry skies and promised a man (Abram) who had no son that his descendants would be like the stars for multitude. As quoted 3x in the NT, "Abraham believed God" (Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6, Jam. 2:23). The basis for this grand declaration of his righteousness didn't depend on his works, for it was impossible for him to produce any change so far as having children with Sarah. It wasn't through circumcision, since that was an act that followed, demonstrating his commitment to the covenant that God had made. It didn't depend on obedience to the law, since the law wasn't given until 430 years later (Gal. 3:17). He simply believed God despite all evidence to the contrary and without outward indications to substantiate it. That principle prevails throughout the entire span of man's history and must govern all his relations with God. It is the requirement for any person to be declared righteous before God.

Abram was declared righteous without mention of any sin or other issue. In addition, that event preceded circumcision and the law. Paul presents another example in Rom. 4, that of David. David's case involved sin, and under the law, there was no provision for his forgiveness. His adultery and subsequent murder of Uriah required him to be stoned or put to death. Of course, being king, who would carry out that judgment? So David, for a period of time, endured the inward accusations of his conscience (Ps. 32:4, 51:3) and the knowledge that he couldn't enjoy communion with his God (Ps. 32, 51). He couldn't offer a sacrifice, or he would have done it (Ps. 51:16-17). Not until Nathan came and David confessed his sin honestly and publicly did David receive forgiveness from God (2 Sam. 12:7-13). Forgiveness wasn't by his offering a sacrifice nor any other act, since the law didn't make provision for those sins. He simply believed God and could continue in his official capacity as king and enjoy renewed fellow-

Believing God

Joel Portman

Christians often ask how believers were "saved", or better, how they were declared righteous by God prior to Christ. They may think that keeping the law was essential, or that offering sacrifices was required. The question is, what grounds could be possible, and whether there was a difference between their enjoyment of a righteous standing before God and ours.

Another question is asked: "Did such believers enjoy eternal security, since the Holy Spirit didn't indwell them as is the case in this dispensation?" And then, "What part did the law and sacrifices have with regard to their righteous standing before God?" All of these are important issues to understand, and we should seek answers to them.

Reformed theologians hold that the redemption of man and God's ultimate victory over sin and its power are the unifying elements of Scripture. They teach that man's salvation is by grace through faith, but they also fail to separate the requirements of the law from God's way of sanctification, and they teach that the requirements of the law, apart from the ceremonial aspects, also apply to believers today. Those who hold a dispensational interpretation of Scripture teach that the unifying principle of God's word is that all that He is doing is for His glory, that even the salvation of man is only an aspect that enhances His glory. As such, the law was introduced for purposes that anticipated the expression of God's grace to save souls

ship with God as a result. The child died because of that sinful act, but David could once again worship in the temple (2 Sam. 12:20).

Gen. 15 wasn't the first time that Abram, or anyone else, believed God, but it illustrates and made clear what it was to do so. Adam and Eve believed God in the garden after they had sinned. Adam believed God's Word regarding the "seed of the woman" and named her "Eve" (life-giver) since he believed what God had declared to the serpent. She named her firstborn "Cain" (acquired), in view of her belief that he was the Seed who would crush the serpent's head. Sadly, she was mistaken, but her act was her response to the Lord's declaration. Following their expressed faith in God in Gen. 3:20, the Lord God clothed the guilty pair in the skin of an animal, an act that typifies the effective covering of a sinner who believes God imputing to him the results of the sacrificial work of Christ.

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Noah built the ark and entrusted himself and his family, as well as air-breathing animals, to its safety because God had said so. And the entire account of believing men and women in the O. T. that we read in Heb. 11 describes those who believed God. There is no mention of the law or sacrifices (apart from the Passover in 11:28) in that entire chapter. They were marked out by God as those who believed Him.

So the principle prevails throughout the Bible. God is always seeking those who will believe Him, to trust Him, His character, His Word, His purposes, and His verdicts. Those who believed God arrived at the point in their hearts when all that mattered to them was what God said. They believed His verdict and agreed that their sin deserved His judgment. They believed and depended on what He has done or would do. In short, they simply believed God despite appearances or man's opinions. God was honored by their doing so, and He honored them as well (1 Sam. 2:30). That principle prevails today and is expressed in the hearts and response of believers in Christ.

It seems clear that those who believed God enjoyed eternal security. Their believing wasn't simply a matter of "saying so" but was the result of truly resting upon what God had faithfully revealed to them. That belief was the result of a conviction that the Holy Spirit had made real to their hearts. Genuine belief isn't a trivial response; it is a life-changing deep-seated conviction that endures. Of course, all of God's activities with men in this way require the Spirit's work to produce this kind of conviction in the heart. Their security, as well as ours, didn't depend on His indwelling. That is the characteristic of believers in this present age that is linked with their inclusion in the body of Christ. When David feared that the Holy Spirit would be taken away from him because of his sin (Ps. 51:11), it was because the Spirit that had come upon him when he was anointed (1 Sam. 16:13) was essential to his ability to rule and lead God's people spiritually and righteously. Without that, he would have become like Saul, and he was afraid of that possibility.

One might argue that Eze. 3 and Eze. 18 describe righteous men who turn from their righteousness and become evil. It is evident to this writer, that the prophet is describing those who showed an outward righteousness that depended on their conformation to the law and covenantal requirements, but wasn't a spiritual work that had been wrought in their hearts. No doubt, there were many in Israel who fit that description and in that context, the prophet is describing actual men, even kings, who had sway in Judea.

What Did They believe?

Sometimes it is stated that they believed God's promise of the Messiah, or they believed that the sacrifices pointed forward to that of Christ on the cross. Maybe so, and it could be that some more enlightened during

that time would, at least in some cases. But it's safer to say that they believed whatever God revealed to them. Man is never responsible to believe what has been hidden from him, unless God has commanded it. Those in Heb. 11 believed God's Word and responded to it. Their believing was marked (as it always is) by their obedience to that word. We know what Abram believed, and we know what Noah and others believed, and they proved their justification by what they did (Jam. 2:21). On the basis of their believing God, they were counted righteous.

In this dispensation, we are responsible to believe whatever God has revealed in His Word. The principle of progressive revelation teaches us that truth is gradually revealed as God deals with men. That pattern can be traced throughout Scripture. Each dispensation has revealed more of God, more of His will and His character to man, more of His requirements, and more of His truth that He wants us to believe. We have more light in this dispensation of God's grace than all that those in previous eras received. So that they were not responsible to believe more than what God revealed to them, and we make a mistake when we try to define the content of their believing by what has been made known to us in our day. But again, to emphasize, man is responsible for all the light that God has given to him at that given point of time. And man will be judged by a righteous God on that basis, with the question being, "What have they done with that truth and how did they respond to it?"

Purposes of Sacrifices

But the question remains concerning the function of the sacrifices that were commanded by God and which were offered upon altars. We find that the principle of offering animal sacrifices preceded the law of Moses since Cain and Abel offered sacrifices (Gen. 4:3-4, Heb. 11:4), as well as Job in Job 1:5 and his friends in 42:8. Noah offered a burnt sacrifice following the flood (Gen. 8:20) and Abram's life was marked by his erecting his tent and building an altar to offer sacrifices to the Lord. If justification was by believing God, then why the sacrifices, especially those for sin?

We can say that the sacrifices had at least two purposes. One was that they gave a means of expressing the believer's worship of God and demonstrated his agreement with God. In doing so, those who believed God were acknowledging the greatness of God and the fact that He deserved to receive from them a token of all that He had given. Sacrifices were the response and expression of believing hearts toward God (if offered on that basis and were given by believing souls. We know that others also offered sacrifice as a ritual, such as Balaam did in Num. 23:4).

Another purpose was to show that they agreed with God that their sin deserved death under God's judgment, so they offered a substitutionary sacrifice to

die instead of them. On the ground of that act of faith in God's promise, they could leave the altar where the sin offering was offered with the assurance that their sin was forgiven (Lev. 4:31, 35). From man's viewpoint, God's requirements were met, and His promise gave assurance of forgiveness. From God's viewpoint, however, He saw that sacrifice as an anticipation of the one sacrifice at Calvary that justified His "passing over" those sins before the cross without judging the offender. Notice Rom. 3:25-26, "whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before, through the forbearance of God; for the shewing forth of his righteousness in the present time, so that he should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus" (J.N. Darby trans). Again, we read in Heb. 9:15, "And for this reason he is mediator of a new covenant, so that, death having taken place for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, the called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." (J.N. Darby trans). It is the sacrifice of Christ that counteracts the claim of some that God wasn't just to pass over sins committed prior to the cross. This is because it shows that the sacrifices under the law were provided as His means by which sins under the law could be dealt with righteously and enable His people to continue in fellowship with Him. Those sacrifices were not instituted to provide salvation; they were given to those who had already been declared righteous or redeemed (as Israel) and brought into a covenant relationship with the Lord; they speak of what is our experience since the cross in that believers today receive assurance of forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:7) through confession of sins, which, again, is man believing God.

Heb. 9:22 tells us that "without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins", but 10:4 seems to contradict that statement in that it says, "...it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." The shedding of the blood of an animal was necessary to answer for the conditions under the law and prior to the cross, but they couldn't remove sins completely since that was a work that was only anticipatory of the cross of Christ and the suffering death of an innocent Savior. The life of an animal was not a just equivalent to man's life, and God's original statement in Gen. 2:17 was that when man sinned through disobedience, he would surely die. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), so it required the death of an innocent, perfect Man to justly answer God's judgmental demands against the sinner. The sacrifices of animals on Jewish altars were God's provision of grace for their sin since He knew that they couldn't keep the law perfectly. In this way, that system anticipated the grace of God that gives a present-day believer in Jesus a perfect standing before a holy God and a conscience cleansed from a sense of guilt.

Summary

God's principle of justifying men, whether those who are not guilty of particular sin, such as Abram (Rom. 4:3) or those who were, like David (Rom. 4:6), is the same as today. It is on the ground of believing God in whatever He has revealed to us. The evidence of believing God is obedience that responds to His absolute authority and depends on His infinite power and purpose. Those OT believers enjoyed forgiveness by availing themselves of the provision of offering sacrifices because God had instituted them. And God's righteousness could be uncompromised because He was anticipating the cross and the suffering of that holy, spotless Lamb of God who would perfectly and finally take away sin (Jn. 1:29).

As a result, we are joined with those OT believers, those who lived and died in faith (Heb. 11:13, 39-40), believing the same God and resting on His unchanging Word, even though we live in a different dispensation with greater truth that God has revealed to us.

The Living God and a Living Faith

C. H. Mackintosh

There is one great substantial fact standing prominently forth on every page of the volume of God, and illustrated in every stage of the history of God's people — a fact of immense weight and moral power at all times, but specially in seasons of darkness, difficulty, and discouragement, occasioned by the low condition of things among those who profess to be on the Lord's side. The fact is this, that faith can always count on God, and God will always answer faith.

Such is our fact, such our thesis; and if the reader will turn with us, for a few moments, to 2 Chronicles 20, he will find a very beautiful and very striking illustration. This chapter shows us the good king Jehoshaphat under very heavy pressure indeed; it records a dark moment in his history. "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other besides the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then" (for people are ever quick to run with evil tidings) "there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, there comes a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea, on this side Syria" (verse 2)

Here was a difficulty of no ordinary nature. This invading host was made up of the descendants of Lot and of Esau; and this fact might give rise to a thousand conflicting thoughts and distracting questions in the mind of Jehoshaphat. They were not Egyptians or Assyrians, concerning whom there could be no question

whatever; but both Esau and Lot stood in certain relations to Israel, and a question might suggest itself as to how far such relations were to be recognized.

Not this only. The practical state of the entire nation of Israel, the actual condition of God's people, was such as to give rise to the most serious misgivings. Israel no longer presented an unbroken front to the invading foe. Their visible unity was gone. A grievous breach had been made in their battlements. The ten tribes and the two were rent asunder, the one from the other. The condition of the former was terrible, and that of the latter, shaky enough. Thus, the circumstances of king Jehoshaphat were dark and discouraging in the extreme; and even as regards himself and his practical course, he was but just emerging from the consequences of a very humiliating fall, so that his reminiscences would be quite as cheerless as his surroundings.

But it is just here that our grand substantial fact presents itself to the vision of faith and flings a mantle of light over the whole scene. Things looked gloomy, no doubt; but God was to be counted upon by faith, and faith could count upon Him. God is a never-failing resource, a great reality, at all times, and under all circumstances. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the stream whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm 46:1-7).

Here, then, was Jehoshaphat's resource in the day of his trouble; and to it he at once betook himself, in that earnest faith which never fails to draw down power and blessing from the living and true God, to meet every exigency of the way. "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and claimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord; even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not Thou God in heaven? and rulest not Thou over all the Kingdoms of the heathen? and in Thy hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee? Art not Thou our God who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever?" (2 Chronicles 20:3-7).

These are the breathings of faith, faith that enables the soul to take the very highest possible ground.

It mattered not what unsettled questions there might be between Esau and Jacob; there were none between Abraham and the Almighty God. Now, God had given the land to Abraham, His friend. For how long? Forever. This was enough. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29). God will never cancel His call or take back a gift. This is a fixed foundation principle; and on this faith always takes its stand with firm decision.

The enemy might throw in a thousand suggestions; and the poor heart might throw up a thousand reasonings. It might seem like presumption and empty conceit, on the part of Jehoshaphat, to plant his foot on such lofty ground. It was all well enough in the days of David, or of Solomon, or of Joshua, when the unity of the nation was unbroken, and the banner of Jehovah floated in triumph over the twelve tribes of Israel. But things were sadly changed; and it ill became one in Jehoshaphat's circumstances to use such lofty language or assume to occupy such a high position.

What is faith's reply to all this? A very simple but a very powerful one: God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Had He not made Abraham a present of the land of Canaan? Had He not bestowed it upon his seed forever? Had He not ratified the gift by His word and His oath, these two immutable things in which it was impossible for Him to lie? Unquestionably.

But then what of the law? Did not that make some difference? None whatever, as regards God's gift and promise. Four centuries previous to the giving of the law, was the great transaction settled and established between the Almighty God and Abraham His friend, both settled and established forever. Hence nothing can possibly touch this. There were no legal conditions proposed to Abraham. All was pure and absolute grace. God gave the land to Abraham by promise, and not by law, in any shape or form.

Now, it was on this original ground that Jehoshaphat took his stand; and he was right. It was the only thing for him to do. He had not one hair's breadth of solid standing ground, short of these golden words, "Thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend forever." It was either this or nothing. A living faith always lays hold on the living God. It cannot stop short of Him. It looks not at men or their circumstances. It takes no account of the changes and chances of this mortal life. It lives and moves and has its being in the presence of the living God; it rejoices in the cloudless sunlight of His blessed countenance. It carries on all its artless reasonings in the sanctuary and draws all its happy conclusions from the facts discovered there. It does not lower the standard according to the condition of things around, but boldly and decidedly takes up its position on the very highest ground.

Now, these actings of faith are always most grateful to the heart of God. The living God delights in a

living faith. We may be quite sure that the bolder the grasp of faith, the more welcome it is to God. We need never suppose that the blessed One is either gratified or glorified by the workings of a legal mind. No; He delights to be trusted without a shadow of reserve or misgiving. He delights to be fully counted upon and largely used; and the deeper the need, and the darker the surrounding gloom, the more is He glorified by the faith that draws upon Him.

Hence, we may assert with perfect confidence, that the attitude and the utterances of Jehoshaphat, in the scene before us, were in full accordance with the mind of God. There is something perfectly beautiful to see him, as it were, opening the original lease, and laying his finger on that clause in virtue of which Israel held as tenants forever under God. Nothing could cancel that clause or break that lease. No flaw there. All was ordered and sure. "Thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend forever" (verse 7).

This was solid ground, the ground of God, the ground of faith, which no power of the enemy can ever shake. True, the enemy might remind Jehoshaphat of sin and folly, failure and unfaithfulness. Nay, he might suggest to him that the very fact of the threatened invasion proved that Israel had fallen, for had they not done so, there would be neither enemy nor evil.

But for this, too, grace had provided an answer, an answer which faith knew well how to appropriate. Jehoshaphat reminds Jehovah of the house which Solomon had built to His name. "They have built Thee a sanctuary therein for Thy name, saying, if, when evil comes upon us, as a sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in Thy presence (for Thy name is in this house), and cry to Thee in our affliction, then Thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon, and Moab, and mount Seir, whom Thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not. Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of Thy possession, which Thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that comes against us; neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee." (verses 8-12)

Here, truly, is a living faith dealing with the living God. It is no mere empty profession, no lifeless creed, no cold uninfluential theory. It is not a man "saying he has faith." Such things will never stand in the day of battle. They may do well enough when all is calm, smooth, and bright; but when difficulties have to be grappled with, when the enemy has to be met face to face, all merely nominal faith, all mere lip profession will prove like autumn leaves before the blast. Nothing will stand the test of actual conflict but a living personal faith in a living personal Saviour God. This is what is needed. It is this which alone can sustain the heart, come what may.

Faith brings God into the scene, and all is strength, victory, and perfect peace.

Thus it was with the king of Judah, in the days of 2 Chronicles 20. "We have no might; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee" (verse 12). This is the way to occupy God's ground, even with the eyes fixed on God Himself. This is the true secret of stability and peace. The devil will leave no stone unturned to drive us off the true ground which, as Christians, we ought to occupy in these last days; and we, in ourselves, have no might whatever against him. Our only resource is in the living God. If our eyes are upon Him, nothing can harm us. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusts in Thee" (Isaiah 26:3).

Art thou on God's ground? Canst thou give a "Thus says the Lord" for the position which thou occupyest, at this moment? Art thou consciously standing on the solid ground of holy Scripture? Is there anything questionable in thy surroundings and associations? We beseech thee to weigh these questions solemnly as in the divine presence. Be assured they are of moment just now. We are passing through critical moments. Men are taking sides; principles are working and coming to a head. Never was it more needful to be thoroughly and unmistakably on the Lord's side.

Faith and its Foundations

W.W. Fereday

In days of agitation and doubt, such as the present, the question is of paramount importance to us all — What is Faith? Much depends, both for the present and for the future, upon the answer we are able to give our hearts to this question. Perhaps the simplest account of what faith is, is furnished to us in the works of Paul the Apostle, uttered in the midst of the violent storm which befell him on his voyage to Rome. The circumstances were most distressing. For several days the vessel in which he sailed had been tossed up and down in the Adriatic, with every prospect of total loss. When his fellow travelers were at the point of despair, he told them of the simple message that had been conveyed to him by an angel of God, that not a life should be lost of all the 276 contained within the ship, adding: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me" Acts 27:25

Here we have the whole secret of faith "I believe God". The first man and his wife lost confidence in their Creator when in the garden, preferring rather to credit the word of the Serpent; ever since it has been common with man to distrust and disbelieve his God.

Faith is the return of the soul to man's original confidence in his Maker.

May the voice of God be heard today by those who desire to hear it? Most assuredly. It is conceivable that a Being of unfathomable love and goodness would leave the vast human family without some light wherewith to illuminate its darkness? The thought is unnatural and impossible. Where, then, may the Divine voice be heard? In the Scriptures, which are "God-breathed," as Paul assured his son Timothy long ago. Let us, then, cherish confidence in the sacred writings, accepting them as the very Word of God. If these be surrendered, all is gone; we are then without chart or rudder wherewith to shape our career through the intricacies of the present world. Where, too, if we refuse to hear the Scriptures, are we to turn for light concerning the unfathomable beyond?

The arch-enemy well knows where the key of the situation lies; hence his persistent efforts throughout all ages to wrest the Scriptures from human hands. His tactics change with changing times; at one season rousing secular authorities to an epidemic of Bible burning, at another season filling the religious atmosphere with unholy criticism. But whatever the tactics the aim is always the same, to destroy both faith, and that on which faith rests.

"Sirs, I believe God." In the Book He tells me of my sins, humbling me into the dust thereby. As a faithful Watchman, He warns me, in writings that will never deceive, what must be the consequences of sin, if pursued and loved. More, and better than all, He unfolds to me a heart of infinite affection, which held not back even from the sacrifice of His own well-beloved Son, that sinful men might, on a perfectly righteous basis, be saved and blessed for evermore. Surely such a God is worthy of all my heart's confidence and love!

"Looking unto Jesus"

H. A. Butcher

How important it is to have the eye on Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit! This gave us life; this sustains in the running of the race; this has transforming effect upon us here below, and this fills our souls with hope as we anticipate the future. Let us meditate upon this under five simple headings.

—THE LOOK FOR SALVATION

If we compare Numbers 21:8-9 with John 3:14-16, we see scriptural warrant for the words of the hymn-writer, "There is life for a look at the Crucified One." "And it shall come to pass", we read in Numbers 21:8, "that every one that is bitten, and looketh upon it, shall live."

"Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life," we read in John 3:15. The look of faith at the right Object, the ONE Who was lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness, brings LIFE. There was the LIFTING up of the Son of Man. (That Blessed One is now lifted up in heaven. See Acts 5:31, where "exalted" represents the Greek word translated "lifted up" in John 3). There must be the LOOK of faith, then LIFE is possessed.

May any unsaved reader, in the consciousness of his deep need, look the LOOK of faith upon HIM and receive life.

II—THE LOOK FOR FORTIFICATION

Our second theme is found in Hebrews 12:1-3. We are to run with patience or endurance, looking away unto JESUS, Who endured. "For consider Him that endured," the text goes on. We shall be fortified in the race as we look away unto JESUS, the perfect Exemplar. Steadfast looking on Him Who endured will help us to endure.

The words of verse 2 show our blessed Lord at the time of the Cross in a central position. We are told what was behind Him, before Him, beneath Him and above Him. Behind Him was the path of faith. He is spoken of as the "Author (leader) and finisher of faith." He "trode the entire path of faith from beginning to end, without a break," as William Lincoln comments on this verse. What was before Him?—the joy. What was beneath Him?—the shame. He "endured the Cross, having despised the shame." He "despised," or, literally, He "thought down" upon, the shame. What was above Him?—the Cross. He "endured," or, literally, "abode under," the Cross. Patiently He underwent all the suffering of the Cross. Thus at the Cross Christ is the grand Center, and upon that Center God would have us gaze. So shall we be fortified in the race.

III—THE LOOK FOR TRANSFORMATION

Our third theme is found in II Cor. 3:18. "Beholding the glory of the Lord we are being transformed into the same image." What a wonderful possibility is this! Finally, in accordance with God's purpose, we shall be "conformed to the image of His Son" (see Romans 8:29) ; but here and now something of that end may be accomplished in us. In this one verse we have brought before us personal application, gradual transformation and the Holy Spirit's operation. We need to look. That requires personal application. As we look, we are being transformed from glory to glory. The change is a process. The work is that of the Lord, the Spirit. In this life what greater possibility for us can there be than the experience of being changed more and more (from one degree of glory to another) according to HIS image?

IV—THE LOOK OF EXPECTATION

We have been considering the importance of having the eye on Christ; by faith we look upon Him. Yet not only

so, we look too for His return (Phil. 3:20). We look for Him. The Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ is coming out of Heaven, and we await Him. Indeed, we should eagerly expect Him. Constantly we should, with upward look, be echoing the last prayer of the Bible, "Come, Lord Jesus."

V—THE LOOK FOR GLORIFICATION

Our meditation has been in relation to the pilgrim journey. Throughout that journey we should be looking upon Him and for Him. Beyond that journey our sight of Him will be literal. As the hymn writer put it, we shall "gaze and gaze" on Him. II Cor. 3:18 brings before us a gradual transformation into His image, as we have considered a little. However, here below the transformation will never be complete. The literal sight of Him will immediately effect the completion. (Our bodies too will be changed). "We know ... that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3:2). The sight of Him will transform us into His glorious likeness. To have the eye upon Him will have its value then, just as it has its value now.

Contrasted Ambitions

"Let us return to Egypt" (Numbers 14:4).

The narrative parts of the Bible are historically true. They are authenticated records of divine dealings with individuals or nations. Their chief importance to us, however, lies not in the proofs that they are dependable as accurate statements (these proofs have a value of their own from another viewpoint), but in the fact that they embody and illustrate moral principles which govern life in all generations. Such is the attitude that New Testament writers adopted towards the Old Testament Scriptures, declaring that "whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning". It is the eternal truth enshrined in them that leads us to the conclusion that they are divinely inspired. The passage from which our meditation is taken is a mine of instruction for later pilgrims through another wilderness. It is history pregnant with allegorical teaching.

Israel had reached a dramatic point in her history. Egypt had long since been left. Weary miles of torturing desert sand lay between them and their once-loathed prison home. For months God had fed them with angels' food, and had guided them by supernatural signs. Never had people been so blessed. Forbearance and goodness had strewn their pathway in spite of their restless desire for something other than the will of God. Now the supreme moment of their lives had arrived. In the years of bondage when the iron was

in their soul, and the cruel lash of the taskmaster's whip broke the spirit of hope, they had cried unto God, and their inarticulate groans had been heard. Deliverance came, God graciously intervened. They followed with unhesitating will the pathway of His choosing. The exuberance of a divinely-achieved victory brought an initial impetus which bore them triumphantly over their first obstacles. Soon, however, the supernatural ceased to be miraculous, the interventions of God became mere commonplace events in their experience, and in their unthinking ingratitude they magnified their difficulties beyond all proportion. A thankless heart always provokes a disastrous reaction in its possessor's outlook on life, and, sooner or later, draws forth the displeasure of God. It did so in the case before us.

Now they are faced with another crisis. They stand on the verge of the long-promised success. The land, "flowing with milk and honey," the land of their dreams and their hopes, lay beyond the hills, beckoning them in, for God was their Leader and their Guide. They failed, as so often men in such circumstances do fail, because they lost sight of God and abandoned faith for human caution; and when they discovered that they were unwilling to go in and possess the land about which their spies gave glowing reports, they wept all night. Intense feeling always wells up in some kind of audible expression. In Egypt the bitterness of bondage was recorded in groans and cries; beyond the Red Sea the exultation of victory found vent in rapturous song; and now the sorrow of self-discovery expressed itself in a night of senseless and useless weeping. How often tears burn their furrows down human cheeks, not because of repentance and grief, but because of reproaches we heap upon ourselves when we discover that at heart we are too cowardly to take the next step in a pathway of God's own choice!

A comparison of Numbers 13 and Deuteronomy 1 is interesting. The latter narrative indicates that the dispatch of the exploration party was the result of Moses' compliance with the expressed wish of the people, whereas Numbers 13 states that God commanded them to take that precaution. The explanation of the seeming contradiction is simple. God, knowing the perverseness of the human heart and its pride in its own wisdom, acquiesced in the wish, and, in order to disclose the faint-heartedness of the people, commanded that the scheme, originating from the fear of the nation, should be put into execution. His intention evidently was that when the report had been furnished, the wisdom of the flesh might be put to naught. Prudence, as in this instance, always walks with caution, deliberates itself into disguised compromise, and treads an unexplored path with hesitant step and trembling heart. Faith goes as far as it can see, then sees how far it can go. "Great occasions," writes another, "do not make heroes or cowards, they simply reveal them. Silently and imperceptibly, as we wake or sleep, we grow and wax strong, we grow

and wax weak; and at last some crisis shows us what we have become."

The reports of the spies agreed in all details, but the deductions of the ten were false. The nature of a man's conclusions about matters where God is concerned is revealed in the reservations he makes when he is faced with a decision full of danger. The "nevertheless" (Num. 13. 28) is a disclosure of the vacillation of the majority's mind in the face of the hardships associated with the consummation of their hopes. They had not learned in all their wilderness experiences that 'Tis better not to be at all Than not to be noble.

Our attitude to life depends upon the direction in which we look. Some people see circumstances, that is, things mutable and material, and mistake them for facts. In this case the majority professed their fear because of what they had seen to counterbalance the inducements of the land offered for immediate entrance. The truth is that their trepidation and inaction were traceable to their lack of vision. Their physical eyes saw difficulties—walled cities, giants, the sons of Anak—and they felt like grasshoppers. Spiritual sight was blinded. They did not see God, the one unchanging Fact. That feature of their report differentiates them from Caleb and Joshua, and sums up the nature of the contrasted ambitions. Caleb's heartening counsel was, "Let us go up at once"; the protesting demand of the people was, "Let us return to Egypt." Is the juxtaposition of such glaringly opposite desires from members of the same community not a painful reminder that neutrality is impossible in a spiritual warfare? Our mind is set either for progress or for a policy of drift towards a former state of ignoble servitude. "Back to Egypt" is the alternative to immediate advance.

From Caleb's declaration a necessary lesson emerges. Promptitude in action is the cure for heart failure. Retreat brings its own reward. Spiritual debacle supervenes, for rearguard actions in warfare against foes that are merciless rears no permanent opposition. Fear always, and purposely, exaggerates difficulties. We tremble on the brink of new claims upon our loyalty to God's demands. Faith, on the other hand, steps out, reckoning with the difficulty, estimates it at its true value, and, advancing in confidence on divine resources against all foes, triumphs magnificently.

The alternative is startling in its disastrous implications.

I. Faith failed because it temporized with difficulties. The people disregarded the courage of their true leaders. They dismissed the guidance of an unquestionable Providence, and displayed a disappointing spirit of incompetence despite the records of their past. Disguised fear masqueraded as prudence which suggested the mission of the spies to report as to the possibilities of success in an invasion of the land. Distrust brought disaster, and imperilled the whole nation. Israel's history

would have been less ignoble if the wilderness march had ended in a glorious occupation of Canaan. And many a Christian man, confronted in the same way with a similar problem in the spiritual realm, has taken the course of inaction which was tantamount to declaring, "Let us go back to Egypt." Shame and confusion of face belong to us all as we review the disastrous choices we have made as alternatives to immediate advancement to victory over deadly enemies in the moral sphere.

II. Fear triumphed because it overestimated its foes. An unsuspected bogey raised itself in their pathway—not the giants. These were but an occasion for the discovery of the people's greatest adversary. The modern theory of relativity operated in this incident in a more than physical realm. Enemies are great when we ourselves feel small, and we do feel small when our confidence is in the arm of flesh. "Inferiority complex" may be a pet phrase of modern psychologists, but the experience for which the words have been coined is of very ancient standing. Here it is seen operating in the heart of almost an entire nation, and leading it to an ignominious retreat.

III. Forgetfulness is often due to careless thinking. How revealing is the cry, "Back to Egypt"! It was the demand of a people that loved slavery more than the exhilaration of advance to certain conquest. Had the people forgotten the way back—through an arid desert? Had they no recollection of the bitter experiences of servitude in the land of the Pharaohs? Surely they had forgotten to think! A moment's meditation would have terminated their base proposal abruptly. They did not really mean what they demanded. Nor do we in moments of wrong decision when chagrined over some thwarting of our cherished ambitions; but the set of the mind discloses the trend of the desire. The best way to escape from a love for "Egypt" is to remember the cruel spiritual impositions endured there. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," advises John.

Steps of Faith

(Rom. 4:12)

Tom Glancy, "Assembly Testimony", Nov/Dec 2025

Abraham is an outstanding example of the men of Faith. True it is that he failed on several occasions, e.g., he stopped short of God's will and dwelt at Haran, Gen. 11:31; when tested he went down into Egypt, Gen. 12:10; and, in association with Sarah, he endeavored to bring about the fulfillment of God's promises by fleshly devices.

These three instances in the life of Abraham should speak volumes to each of us as we seek to follow the path of faith. How very much like him we have been: firstly, by stopping short of Divine revelation; secondly, by going beyond it; and thirdly, by acting in the flesh when we should stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

However, while there are occasional failures in the life of this great giant of faith, yet, in the main, his walk was one of obedience to the revealed will of God. His steps of faith we shall now consider, and may we seek to emulate them in days to come.

(1) Saving Faith—Rom. 4:12

Justification by faith is the theme of that section of Romans, which begins at Chap. 3:21 and ends at Chap. 5:11. Chap. 3:20 declares that justification cannot be obtained by the deeds of the law, and verses 21-22 present to us a righteousness of God's providing, appropriated by faith. The inspired writer in verse 21 boldly asserts his doctrine to be in harmony with that of Moses and the prophets, and in Chap. 4 supports his assertion by quotations from both. Thus in Chap. 4:3 we read of Abraham: "He believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." This Scripture makes it clear that by one simple act of faith, Abraham was justified before God, or in New Testament language, he was 'converted,' the first essential step to the life of faith which followed.

(2) Separating Faith—Heb. 11:8

In conjunction with this step and in obedience to the call of God, Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went. We might note some other occurrences of the Greek word, translated in our English text, "went out." For example, in 2 Cor. 6:17, relative to the heathen temple, the Apostle says, "come out" and, by way of emphasis, adds, "be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing." This is followed by God's promise to receive and to be a Father unto all who obey, teaching us that God Himself is outside of it. Then again, in Heb. 3:16 we read of Israel: "Howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses." Here we have a nation separated from Egypt with the Red Sea rolling between, making them also a distinct and separated people. Finally, in Heb. 13:13, it is translated, "go forth," this instance being the calling of the Hebrew Believers to separation from a religious system which had been disowned by God, unto the person of our rejected Lord. Abraham "went out" never to return, also desired that his son Isaac should follow in his steps, as is clearly seen from the instruction given to his servant in Gen. 24:6: "Only bring not my son thither again."

(3) Sustaining Faith—Heb. 11:9, 10

The language used in Heb. 11:9, suggests very strongly that Abraham lived loosely to the things of

time, and did not allow himself to become unduly interested in temporal affairs. In the land of promise he was a stranger dwelling in a tent as did his offspring, Isaac and Jacob. Verse 10 gives us the source of strength which enabled him to lead such a life—"He looked for the city which hath the foundations whose builder and maker is God." Thus Abraham, like others of the worthies of our chapter, with his eye fixed on the future, was presently sustained and enabled to live for God.

(4) Surrendering Faith—Heb. 11:17

The grand climax of Abraham's faith is now seen in verse 17, where he is given credit by the Lord for offering unto Him his only begotten son. What a sacrifice for the man of faith! The word of the Lord to him was, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest." Abraham fully intended to offer Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him again to fulfil the promise previously made—"In Isaac shall thy seed be called," Gen. 21:12, as we would learn from Gen. 22:5 and Heb. 11: 19.

(5) Self-evidencing Faith—James 2:14-26

In this portion of Scripture the complement of Faith is Works. They are inseparable twins which must ever go hand in hand. Verses 14-17 show the unprofitableness of kind words when not accompanied by gracious acts. In the following verse we are faced with the impossibility of showing our faith apart from works, the figure of spirit and body being used in verse 26 to convey the close connection between the two. In v. 21-24 James cites Abraham as the example of true faith, i.e., faith accompanied by works, when he offered Isaac. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect." His faith was not a passive one but an active one, by which he was energized to carry out the Divine Will.

Such a life of faith could not but have permanent and far reaching results, and to a few of these we would draw attention. In 1 Peter 3:6 we read: "Even as Sara obeyed Abraham calling him" Lord," thus suggesting her respect for her husband, and her submission to his authority. In Gen. 23:6 he is addressed as a ' Prince of God ' by the ungodly children of Heth. The separated man of verse 4 evidently has, by his devotion to the Lord, gained the respect of the worldlings around. This is, no doubt, in striking contrast to Lot, the man of compromise, in Gen. 19:14. Finally, we would observe that on three occasions in Scripture Abraham is designated, "The Friend of God." This title is referred to in Jehoshaphat's prayer—2 Chron. 20:7—and is afterwards confirmed by God the Holy Spirit in Isa. 41:8 and James 2:23. Thus, Abraham, who walked the path of faith in the living God, and humbly submitted to His Word, became a powerful testimony, not only in the home, but in the world. Above all, he gained that place

of affection and intimacy with the Almighty, which very few others could claim.

Surely such results should inspire us, the spiritual children of Abraham, to follow in his steps, and with our eyes fixed by faith on the Eternal, seek to submit and separate ourselves unto Him, "Who loved us, and gave Himself for us," knowing that if we do, we shall in some small way, be a witness to those around, and above all, come into a deeper knowledge of God Himself.

Compromise is Costly

A. W. Tozer

Christianity today is so entangled with this present world that millions never guess how radically they have missed the New Testament pattern. Compromise is everywhere-but actually no real union between the world and the Church is possible. When the Church joins up with the world it is the true Church no longer but only a pitiful hybrid thing, an object of smiling contempt to the world, and an abomination to the Lord! Nothing could be clearer than the pronouncements of the Scriptures on the Christian's relation to the world. The confusion which gathers around this matter results from the unwillingness of professing Christians to take the Word of the Lord seriously. This whole thing is spiritual in its essence. A Christian is what he is not by ecclesiastical manipulation but by the new birth. He is a Christian because of a Spirit which dwells in him. Only that which is born by the Spirit is spirit, no matter how many church dignitaries work on it!

True evangelical faith is of such a nature it cannot lie dormant, but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love. It dies to flesh and blood; it destroys all lusts and forbidden desires; it seeks, serves, and fears God in its inmost soul; it clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters the destitute; it aids and consoles the sad; it does good to those who do it harm; it serves those that harm it; it prays for those who persecute it; it teaches, admonishes, and judges us with the Word of the Lord; it seeks those who are lost; it binds up what is wounded; it heals the sick; it saves what is strong (sound); it becomes all things to all people. The persecution, suffering, and anguish that come to it for the sake of the Lord's truth have become a glorious joy and comfort to it.

--Menno Simons January 1561