

# *A CLOUD OF WITNESSES*

December 20, 2020

Revision C

## **Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-40**

Parts of today's Epistle lesson are used in the Eastern lectionary also for the Sunday of All Saints (Hebrews 11:32-12:2) and for the 1st Sunday of Lent (Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-40). On the Sunday of All Saints, the theme is the communion of Saints; on the 1st Sunday of Lent, the theme is a vision of where we are going as we point toward Easter Sunday (or Pascha). In today's Epistle lesson, we look backward to see where we have come.

The Western lectionaries also use parts of today's Epistle lesson. Verses 8-19 are sometimes used for the 14th Sunday after Trinity and verses 1-19 are sometimes used for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany. Thus East and West emphasize different parts of Hebrews 11.

Some of the people mentioned in Hebrews 11 are also included in the genealogy of the Gospel lesson: Enoch (Hebrews 11:5), Noah (Hebrews 11:7), Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-19), Isaac (Hebrews 11:20), Jacob (Hebrews 11:21), Rahab (Hebrews 11:31) and David (Hebrews 11:32). Common to all of them is a good testimony (Hebrews 11:39) of things they did by faith. They knew God's promises (Hebrews 11:39) and the things to come (Hebrews 11:20), but they never received the promises. In their life, they were ill-treated (Hebrews 11:37-38) by a world that was not worthy of them similar to their Lord in His 33 years. The conclusion of the Epistle lesson is that "God provided something better for us that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:40). To see how this applies to us, let us look at some of the details of the lives of the Old Testament Saints and compare that with our situation.

### **Abel, Enoch and Noah**

Abel is remembered for having offered a more excellent sacrifice to God than his brother Cain (Hebrews 11:4). Since the Patriarchs before the flood were not meat-eaters<sup>1</sup>, the implication is that Abel's offering was a whole burnt offering (Genesis 4:4) similar to that later decreed in the Mosaic Law (Exodus 29:38-42), Numbers 28:3-8). The only part of the animal Abel used was probably the skin for clothing (Genesis 3:21, Leviticus 7:8). It is interesting that Abel's technique in offering the best of his flock precisely anticipates the technique specified by Moses (Leviticus 1:10-13, 3:6-11).

"The Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and for his offering, He had no regard" (Genesis 4:4-5). How could one know whether the Lord "had regard"? The usual way of offering a sacrifice was demonstrated by Elijah in his face-off with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:21-39). After the sacrifice was placed on the altar, the sacrifice was considered "accepted" if the Lord sent down fire from heaven to consume it (1 Kings 18:23-24, 38-39). When Moses and Aaron first set up the sacrificial system, the Lord lit the fire (Leviticus 9:24) and instructed Moses and Aaron to maintain it (Leviticus 6:13). The fire of the Lord also fell on

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Genesis 1:29 & 2:16-17 with Genesis 9:2-4

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some people who rebelled against Him (Numbers 11:1, 16:35, Leviticus 10:1-2). Thus it was very obvious to Cain that he was rejected!

Following the rejected offering, the Lord spoke to Cain about his sin and about how the desire of his sin was after his soul, but that he must master it. Cain's response was to kill his brother, Abel (Genesis 4:7-8). Abel was the first of a long history of martyrs and his blood cried out to the Lord from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Similarly, the voice of the blood of the martyrs killed later on cries out to the Lord from the ground (Revelation 6:9-11) in the days before the Second Coming.

The righteousness of Abel, his offering and his martyrdom still speak to us (Hebrews 11:4). The voice of Abel's blood speaking is compared to the blood of Christ speaking (Hebrews 12:24). John Chrysostom stated<sup>2</sup> that the message of the voice of Abel's blood is thus:

“Cain did not slay Abel's glory or his memory. Abel is not dead; therefore neither shall we die. The more grievous a man's sufferings are, so much the greater is his glory. These things do not take place with impunity nor lightly, neither do they pass away”.

Enoch lived five generations after Abel and benefited greatly from Abel's example. The Apostle Jude quoted a prophecy of Enoch regarding the Second Coming of Christ to judge the ungodly (Jude 1:14). How did Enoch know Christ? It was by faith and he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5). Evidently Enoch's faith was rather spectacular since he is one of only two people ever translated to heaven without seeing death (compare Genesis 5:22-24). The other was Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-12).

John Chrysostom stated that Enoch displayed greater faith than Abel. Enoch knew Abel<sup>3</sup> and how he suffered and how Cain had gotten off easy. Chrysostom said<sup>4</sup> that it would have been easy for Enoch to think that there is no point in suffering for God's sake since Abel was not rewarded in this life. “Abel honored God, yet God did not protect him. What advantage had he that was killed from the punishment of his brother?” However, Enoch knew about the resurrection and the rewards that God bestows (Jude 1:14) and his faith caused him to please God and his pleasing God caused his translation.

While Abel offered the proper sacrifice and Enoch preached Judgment Day, Noah went one step further in building an ark. It is often inferred that it took Noah about 100 years to build the ark<sup>5</sup>. The ark itself was 450 feet long (Genesis 6:15), had three decks (Genesis 6:16) and rode low in the water (half above, half below (Genesis 6:15, 7:20). For one family to build something this large had to have been a monumental undertaking. Modern Shipyards build ocean liners this big and bigger, but they employ thousands of people and take several years to do so. In addition to that, Noah had to get his own raw materials (fell trees) and cut them into planks for the hull and super structure of the ark as well as the interior rooms (Genesis 6:14). Modern science has

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<sup>2</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXII, 3.

<sup>3</sup> By adding up the ages of the Patriarchs in the Septuagint, Enoch was about 20 years old when Seth died

<sup>4</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXII, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Genesis 5:32, 6:10 and 7:6.

prepared<sup>6</sup> a very interesting treatise on how eight people could have cared for all the animals in the ark, and how they could have carried adequate food and water.

Noah is referred to as a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) and God warned him of things not yet seen. This was especially difficult for Noah: God told Noah to build a huge boat to survive a flood when it had never rained<sup>7</sup> in the history of mankind! Clouds and rainbows mean rain; if that didn't happen until after the Flood, it must have taken a lot of faith to prepare a boat. Not only did Noah spend 100 years building a boat to protect his family against something that had never happened, but also the means of causing the Flood had never happened either. This was truly a warning of things not yet seen. Even the positioning of the ark in dry-dock prior to the Flood was crucial. One of the causes of the Flood was the "fountains of the great deep" (Genesis 7:11, 8:2), which sounds like undersea volcanic activity. Undersea volcanoes produce huge waves (*tsunamis*), which can turn a dry-docked, wooden boat into splinters unless the boat is positioned to receive the wave properly.

Just as Enoch preached of Judgment Day (Jude 1:14), so did Noah. The Lord, Himself, used Noah as an example of Judgment Day, illustrating the suddenness and finality of the Second Coming (Matthew 24:37-39, Luke 17:26-27).

### **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**

John Chrysostom stated<sup>8</sup> that Abraham's task was more difficult than Abel's, Enoch's and Noah's. They had to go beyond human reasoning, but Abraham was asked to obey the Lord's commands even though the commands seemed to oppose the Lord's promises. For example, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country" (Hebrews 11:8-9). He was told he was going to inherit this land; yet he lived in it and never received it. This is because "he waited for the city which has foundations whose craftsman and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

In addition, the Lord had told him that his descendants would be as numberless as the dust on the earth (Genesis 13:16), yet it would be through Sarah that they would be numbered (Genesis 17:16-19). The Lord first mentioned how numerous Abraham's posterity could be when Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 66 years old (Genesis 12:1-3). It wasn't until 25 years later that Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5, 17:17). This required considerable patience on the part of Abraham. It taught Abraham to expect the miraculous in his dealings with God, since Sarah was at least 40 years past the age of child bearing when Isaac was born.

When Isaac was young, the Lord told Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on a mountaintop (Genesis 22:1-2). Hebrew tradition places<sup>9</sup> this mountaintop as the site where the Temple in Jerusalem was later built. However this was contrary to the Lord's Law (which forbade human sacrifice) and was seemingly contrary to the Lord's promise that his posterity would be

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<sup>6</sup> Woodmorappe, Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study, Institute for Creation Research, 1996

<sup>7</sup> Compare Genesis 9:13-14 with Genesis 2:6

<sup>8</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXV, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times 1987, p. 203

numbered through Isaac (Genesis 17:16-19). This did not deter Abraham; he told his two servants that he and Isaac were going to worship the Lord on the mountaintop and then return (Genesis 22:5). Isaac asked his father: “Where was the lamb for the burnt offering?” They brought wood and fire, but no animal. Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering” (Genesis 22:8). In saying this, Abraham seems to have understood the coming of the Son of God as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36). From our Epistle text, Abraham concluded that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead if that was His plan (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Commenting on the contrary signals Abraham received and comparing them to our own, John Chrysostom said<sup>10</sup> that God accomplishes His purposes by contraries of contraries.

“What are you saying? If I give drink to my enemy, do I then punish him? (Proverbs 25:21-22, Romans 12:20). If I give up my goods, do I then possess them? (Matthew 19:29). If I humble myself, shall I then be exalted? (Matthew 20:26, 23:12). Yes, He says, for such is My power to give contraries by means of contraries. I abound in resources and in stratagems: do not be afraid. The nature of things follows My Will; I don’t wait for nature. I do all things; I am not controlled by them; wherefore also I am able to change their form and order”. “He then who admires the things here slights those yonder, since he judges these worthy of exertion, even though they’re so far inferior to the other”.

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>11</sup> what was the real city that Abraham sought, and that virtue alone is the ornament of the inhabitants of the City of God. This does not compare to the beautiful, but material city of Sodom.

“Would you learn the truth respecting cities? What could be more illustrious than the cities of Sodom? For the houses and the buildings were splendid, and so were their walls; and the country was fat and fertile, and ‘like the Paradise of God’ (Genesis 13:10). But the tent of Abraham was humble and small, and had no fortification. Yet when a war took place, the invaders broke down and took the walled cities, and departed, carrying away their inhabitants captive. Abraham, however, the citizen of the desert, they could not resist when he attacked them! And so it was for he had true piety and a power much greater than numbers and the defense of walls. If you are a Christian, no earthly city is yours. Of our City ‘the Builder and Maker is God’ (Hebrews 11:10). Though we may gain possession of the whole world, we are but strangers and sojourners in it all! We are enrolled in heaven; our citizenship is there! Let us not, after the manner of little children, despise things that are great, and admire those which are little! Not our city’s greatness, but virtue of soul is our ornament and defense. If you suppose dignity to belong to a city, think how many persons must partake in this dignity, who are whoremongers, effeminate, depraved and full of ten thousand evil things; let us despise such honor! But that City above is not of this kind; for it is impossible that he can be a partaker of it, who has not exhibited every virtue”.

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<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXV, 4.

<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, XVII, 12.

“Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning the things to come” (Hebrews 11:20). This implies that Isaac knew the things to come (Compare Genesis 27:27-40). Chrysostom wondered<sup>12</sup> about this, and noted that many righteous men waited to see what we see.

“How, except by faith, could a man sojourning in a strange land give such blessings? Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see what we see and did not see it, and to hear what we hear and did not hear it (Matthew 13:17). “The Son of God was, with good reason, revealed to those conspicuous in virtue”.

How then does this fit Jacob, who bought the birthright from Esau (Genesis 25:29-34) and then stole Esau’s blessing (Genesis 27)? Jacob’s virtue is that he wanted the things of God more than anything else, while Esau trivialized the things of God (Genesis 25:34). To Jacob, the birthright and the blessing of his father -- which included the promises God made to Abraham -- were like the treasure buried in a field and the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46).

John Chrysostom noted<sup>13</sup> that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all had barren wives. This was not because of sin in their lives, but indicates the hand of God leading us to an appreciation of the Virgin birth of Christ.

“Isaac continued in prayer (Matthew 7:7-8) concerning Rebecca his wife, because she was barren. This first is worth inquiring into, for what cause she was barren. She lived admirably and with much chastity — both herself and her husband. We cannot say that the barrenness was the work of sin. And not only was she herself barren, but also his mother Sarah, who gave birth to him; not only was his mother barren and his wife, but also his daughter-in-law, Rachel, the wife of Jacob. What is the meaning of this band of barren ones? All were righteous; all lived in virtue; God witnessed to all of them. For it was of them that He said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ (Luke 20:37). Of the same persons Paul also speaks. ‘For which cause God is not ashamed to call himself their God’ (Hebrew 11:16). Many are the commendations of them in the New Testament; many the praises of them in the Old Testament. On all sides they were bright and illustrious, and yet they all had barren wives, and continued in childlessness until an advanced period. When therefore you see man and wife living with virtue; when you see them beloved of God, caring for piety, and yet suffering the malady of childlessness; do not suppose that the childlessness is at all a retribution for sins. For many are God’s reasons for the dispensation, and to us inexplicable; and for all we must be heartily thankful, and think that only those who live in wickedness are wretched, not those who are childless. Often God does it expediently, though we don’t know the cause of events. On this account in every case it is our duty to admire His wisdom and to glorify His unspeakable love of man”.

“This consideration is able to school us in moral character, but it is necessary to state the cause for which those women were barren. It was in order that when you have seen the Virgin bringing forth our common Master, you might believe. Exercise your mind in the womb of the barren. When you have seen the

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<sup>12</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVI, 1.

<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom, Homily on Not Publishing the Errors of the Brethren, 6-7.

womb, disabled and bound as it is, being opened to the bearing of children from the grace of God, you might not marvel at hearing that a virgin has brought forth”.

## Moses and His Parents

Moses, the brother of Aaron, was also an ancestor of Christ, although that aspect is not included in either Matthew's or Luke's genealogy. According to tradition<sup>14</sup>, the Virgin Mary's grandfather, Matthan, was a priest. Luke records Matthan's grandson-in-law, Zachariah, as being a priest of the order of Abijah, the 8th Lot (1 Chronicles 24:10) and Elizabeth as being a daughter of Aaron (Luke 1:5). Since the Virgin Mary was Elizabeth's cousin, Mary was also among the daughters of Aaron as well as being descended from David and Judah. This means that Christ, in His earthly parentage, was descended from both a Priest and a King<sup>15</sup>.

Moses' parents, Amram and his wife Jochebed (Exodus 6:20), had three children: Miriam, the oldest, Aaron and Moses. By faith, they disregarded Pharaoh's command to drown male Hebrew children (Exodus 1:22) and hid Moses for three months (Exodus 2:2, Hebrews 11:23).

When Jochebed couldn't hide Moses any longer, she made a floating cradle and hid it among the reeds by the Nile. Miriam stood at a distance to find out what would happen. When Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe in the Nile and found Moses, she had pity on him since he was such a beautiful baby. She rushed Miriam and asked Pharaoh's daughter if she should go find a nurse. Of course, the nurse she found was Jochebed. Pharaoh's daughter then paid Jochebed to nurse her own son until he was weaned, at which point Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses (Exodus 2:3-10). Thus Moses' parents gave their son up to the Lord's discretion twice: once to the Nile, which was infested with crocodiles, and once to the daughter of the evil tyrant.

Josephus, the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish historian, adds<sup>16</sup> some details to the above account. One of the Egyptian magicians, perhaps Jannes or Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8) or their predecessors had foretold to Pharaoh that a Hebrew child to be born soon would bring down the Egyptian kingdom, would free the Hebrews, would excel all men in virtue and would be remembered through all ages. This was why Pharaoh ordered the drowning of all male Hebrews. To enforce the decree, Pharaoh ordered the execution of the entire family of anyone who disobeyed. Paraphrasing Josephus,

“Amram spent a lot of time in prayer over this and the Lord spoke to him in a dream. The Lord reminded Amram how He provided for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and told him the same prophesy that the Egyptian magicians had told Pharaoh. In addition, He also told Amram that his child will be concealed from the Egyptians and would be brought up in a surprising way”.

“Jochebed sent the floating cradle down the Nile where Pharaoh's daughter, Thermuthis, saw it coming and saw it come to rest in some reeds. Miriam followed Moses from the riverbank and watched as Thermuthis found him. At first, Thermuthis tried to get some Egyptian women to nurse Moses, but baby Moses wouldn't accept them. It was then that Miriam offered her solution: a Hebrew nursemaid”.

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<sup>14</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, September 9.

<sup>15</sup> See Hebrews 3:1-3, 4:14-15, 5:6-10, 7:1-3, 8:1-5, 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 19:16.

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, Antiquities II, ix, 2-5.

## Moses, the Young Man

Moses spent his first forty years being schooled in all the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22). At the age of forty, he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Thus, he esteemed the reproach or reviling of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Josephus wrote<sup>17</sup> about this also. The Egyptians had grown delicate and lazy, and had given themselves up to the pleasures of life, especially the love of wealth. As the Hebrew nation was blessed by God and grew numerous and wealthy by hard work, the Egyptians grew jealous and forced them into slave labor: digging canals, building city walls and building pyramids.

In the same section, Josephus also mentioned some royal intrigue in Pharaoh's house, where the magicians recognized Moses as the threat that they had predicted. But Thermuthis was Pharaoh's only child, and she was barren. Therefore Moses also represented Pharaoh's only heir. As a result, Pharaoh disregarded the advice of his magicians to kill Moses and instead protected him and raised him as the heir to the throne.

Josephus mentioned<sup>18</sup> another account of Moses' early life, which is also quoted by Irenaeus<sup>19</sup>. The Ethiopians, who were Southern neighbors to Egypt, began marching into Egypt, conquering Egyptian territory at will. The Egyptian magicians consulted their oracles, which told them to set Moses as commander of the army to stop the Ethiopian advance. Their plan was both to save Egypt and to kill Moses in the same process.

Moses, with the backing of Pharaoh and Thermuthis undertook this task with keen insight and clever strategy. The Ethiopians were expecting the Egyptians to advance on them by way of the Nile, since the route over the desert was difficult due to the multitude of poisonous snakes. Moses chose the desert route and brought along many wicker baskets full of a certain bird that is the natural enemy of the snakes. The birds cleared the way for the army and enabled Moses to take the Ethiopians by surprise and defeat them. This early activity of Moses may be what Stephen, the Protomartyr, referred to saying that Moses "was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22) before he left Egypt at age forty.

After Moses returned as a conquering hero, the magicians entertained a greater hatred of him than before<sup>20</sup>, and were able to sway Pharaoh to beware of him as a military force to be reckoned with. At this same time, the incident occurred where Moses saw an Egyptian taskmaster unjustly beating a Hebrew. Moses struck down the Egyptian and killed him, and buried him in the sand. (From the above accounts, it is apparent that Moses was strong and skilled with military weapons and movements!). The next day, he came upon two Hebrews fighting. Trying to act as a peacemaker, Moses spoke to them. But one of them replied, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses realized that the event had become known. When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, knowing that his general

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<sup>17</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, II, ix, 1, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, II, x, 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus, "Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus", 32, in Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1.

<sup>20</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, II, xi, 1.

had now identified with the Hebrews as his magicians said he would. However, Moses left Egypt before Pharaoh could find him (Exodus 2:11-15).

John Chrysostom stated<sup>21</sup> that the “reproach of Christ” that Moses received was that spoken by his own people: “Who made you a prince or a judge over us?” (Exodus 2:14). By his rank (heir to the throne, general in the Egyptian army), they should have welcomed him with open arms as a prince and a judge. Chrysostom compared this to the reproach Christ received from His own: “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). After they crucified Him, “those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, saying, ‘if You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross’” (Matthew 27:39-40). Thus Moses and Christ suffered alike. Moses and Christ alike looked to the reward mentioned in our Epistle text (Hebrews 11:26, 12:2).

Our Epistle text states that “by faith Moses left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the Pharaoh” (Hebrews 11:2; 7). Yet Exodus 2:14 states that Moses was afraid when the event of his killing the Egyptian taskmaster became known. John Chrysostom stated<sup>22</sup> that if Moses was truly afraid of Pharaoh, he would never have come back to lead Israel out of Egypt. Thus, even flight was an act of faith. To stay in Egypt, Chrysostom said, and to be a champion of the Hebrews, who were so ungrateful, would have been a foolish and senseless thing. It would have been equivalent to the devil’s temptation of Christ to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, depending on angels to break His fall (Matthew 4:6). Our Epistle text gives the reason he left Egypt: “for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27). Sometimes we also need to have the insight to leave a bad situation behind us rather than to stand and fight for justice that isn’t attainable and only results in blasphemy.

### **Moses and the Exodus**

Our Epistle text states that by faith, Moses kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest He who destroyed the firstborn should touch them (Hebrews 11:28). This was the climax of Moses’ duel with Pharaoh in the course of the ten plagues.

The story of the Exodus began with Moses’ conversation with the Lord at the burning bush. Moses was pasturing the flock of his father-in-law Jethro in the neighborhood of Mt. Sinai, which is one of the peaks of Mt. Horeb. The Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush where the bush was burning but was not consumed (Exodus 3:1-2). Josephus adds<sup>23</sup> that the green leaves of the thorn bush and its flowers continued untouched as did its fruit branches even though the flame was great and fierce. St. Catherine’s Monastery was built on the spot of the burning bush in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century; the current residents continue to cultivate the “burning bush” which is a raspberry bush<sup>24</sup>.

At the burning bush, the Lord sent Moses back to Egypt and told him what to expect. He told Moses what to say to the Hebrews and what to say to Pharaoh. He also gave Moses three signs to use in order that the Hebrews and Pharaoh might know God sent him. These were (1) his

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<sup>21</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVI, 4.

<sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVI, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, II, xii, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Biblical Archaeology Review, July/August 1985, p. 27.

staff becoming a snake, (2) his hand becoming leprous, and (3) water turning into blood (Exodus 4:1-9). When Moses showed these signs to Pharaoh, the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate each of them (Exodus 7:11, 22, 8:7). After some of the ten plagues, however, the Egyptian magicians, Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8) recognized Moses' miracles as "the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19).

Before each of the ten plagues, Moses' request of Pharaoh was that the Hebrews might take a three-day journey into the wilderness to celebrate a feast to the Lord (Exodus 5:1-3, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, etc.). After each plague struck, Pharaoh said that the Hebrews could go do this; but when Moses ended the plague, Pharaoh reneged. Each of the plagues was increasingly severe such that after the hail (Exodus 9:23-32) and the locusts (Exodus 10:12-15) nothing green was left on tree or plant anywhere but in Goshen where the Hebrews lived. Egypt's crops were ruined and her economy was decimated, leaving nothing to feed what livestock remained.

The 10<sup>th</sup> and final plague was on the first-born of everyone in Egypt, from Pharaoh to his lowest servants to all their livestock (Exodus 11:4-5). At midnight, the Lord went through the land of Egypt and executed judgment on man, beast and on all the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12). To avoid being judged with the gods of Egypt, the Hebrews (by faith) kept the Pascha (Greek for Passover); that is, the sprinkling on their door posts of the blood of the lamb that was sacrificed that evening. This Paschal celebration was to be done every year in remembrance of this event on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, the first month of the year (Exodus 12:14-20). In 30 AD, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, Jesus was crucified as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

After Israel left Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind again and went after them (Exodus 14:5-9). Led by 600 select chariots (plus 50,000 cavalry and 200,000 foot soldiers according to Josephus<sup>25</sup>, the Egyptians overtook the Hebrews at the Red Sea. Most maps of the Exodus place the Red Sea crossing at the Northwest tip where the Southern end of the Suez Canal now exists. At that time, the Red Sea narrowed down to about a 5-8 mile wide body of water. According to Josephus<sup>26</sup>, Israel was then trapped between the Red Sea, the mountains and the Egyptian army.

According to our Epistle text, by faith, they passed through the Red Sea as on dry land (Hebrews 11:29). Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong East wind all night so that the waters were a wall on their right and left (Exodus 14:21-22). Earlier that day, the pillar of cloud moved through their midst from in front of them to behind them to block the path of the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:19-20). Paul stated that because the Hebrews passed through the cloud and the sea, "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:2).

In looking at the geography of this region, the Red Sea runs almost North-South at every potential crossing site. Therefore, a wind blowing from the East (compare Exodus 10:19) could not, by itself, push the waters back. However, it would have helped considerably in drying out the ocean bottom to allow people to cross on "dry land". The dividing of the waters had to have had supernatural help.

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<sup>25</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, xv, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, xv, 3.

After the Hebrews crossed, the entire Egyptian army, led by Pharaoh, went in after them. However, “the Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. That is, the Egyptians attempted to be baptized in the cloud and in the sea, but in their unbelief. And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve and He made them drive with difficulty so the Egyptians said ‘let us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them against us’” (Exodus 14:24-25). Too late! Just then Moses stretched his hand over the sea again and the waters returned to their normal state.

The waters returning to normal had the effect of a major tsunami. Josephus added<sup>27</sup> that there was a tremendous electrical storm that occurred as the Egyptian army was on the dry seabed.

“As soon as the whole Egyptian army was within it, the sea flowed to its own place and came down with a torrent raised by storms of wind. Showers of rain also came down from the sky and dreadful thunder and lightning with flashes of fire. Thunder bolts also darted upon them; everything that used to be sent by God upon men as indications of His wrath happened at this time”.

Thus the Egyptian army was electrocuted as well as drowned. As John Chrysostom wrote<sup>28</sup>, the faith of Moses went beyond human reasoning, weakness and lowliness.

As a result of the Exodus, Egypt was ruined. Her crops were non-existent because of the plagues and her livestock were decimated. Her army was totally eliminated and all the surrounding nations knew it (Joshua 2:9-10). This left Egypt vulnerable to be conquered; some conquering nation could now enslave them as they had enslaved the Hebrews.

Sometimes we also find ourselves in predicaments from which there appears to be no escape: such as Moses was trapped between the sea, the mountains and a powerful army. Sometimes the only solution may be the resolve of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego as they were about to be thrown into the furnace, “The Lord can save us if He wills; but even if He does not, we will not bow to idolatry” (Daniel 3:13-27 paraphrase).

## **The Conquest of Jericho**

Before crossing the Jordan River into Canaan, Joshua sent spies in to view the land, especially Jericho, its forces and its morale (Joshua 2:1). Josephus wrote<sup>29</sup> that when they entered Jericho they were presumed to be harmless strangers who were curious about their city, and people took no notice. At evening, they retired to an inn kept by Rahab to eat supper. After eating, the king of Jericho got wind who they were and desired to examine them under torture to find out what their business was. Rahab heard of this and hid the spies under the stalks of flax on her roof. When the king’s soldiers came, she lied to them about the spies’ whereabouts (Joshua 2:2-7), even though it meant death for her and her family if she were discovered.

After the king’s soldiers left on a wild goose chase, she said to the spies that:

- She knew that the Lord had given them the land of Canaan (Joshua 2:9)

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<sup>27</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, xvi, 3.

<sup>28</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XXVII, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, V, 1, 2.

- The terror of you had fallen on everyone and everyone was completely demoralized (Joshua 2:9, 11)
- She had heard how the Lord dried up the Red Sea before them and wiped out Pharaoh's army (Joshua 2:10)
- She had heard what the Hebrews did to Sihon and Og and utterly destroyed them (Joshua 2:10, Numbers 21:21-39, Deuteronomy 3:1-11). This was very impressive since Og was a giant like Goliath (Deuteronomy 3:11)
- She recognized the Hebrews' God as the only God of heaven above and earth beneath (Joshua 2:11).

Therefore, she asked them to swear that they would treat her and her family kindly when they conquered Jericho in return for her treating them kindly. This they swore and gave her a scarlet rope to hang in her window when the city was taken in order to identify her house. Then she let them down by a rope through the window of her inn, since her inn was on the wall of the city, and they returned to the Hebrew camp (Joshua 2:12-24).

Following the destruction of Jericho, Rahab and her family were spared and lived in Israel with the Hebrews. Josephus wrote<sup>30</sup> that Joshua held Rahab in great esteem afterwards and gave her and her family certain land as part of the division of the land among the twelve tribes. From today's Gospel lesson, Rahab married Salmon, an Israeli, and was the mother of Boaz who married Ruth, also a foreigner. Ruth was the grandmother of King David (Matthew 1:5-6).

Rahab's example of faith is unusual; James, the Lord's brother used her faith as an example of faith justified by works (James 2:25). We don't usually associate intentional falsehood with faith. But yet we would also be hard pressed to state what Rahab "should have done" in order to do the Lord's will to a fuller extent. She recognized the Kingdom of God and risked her life to be part of it.

## Summary

The foregoing examples of faith from some of the better-known figures in the genealogy of Christ serve as examples for us regarding courage, faithfulness, perseverance and insight regarding the things of God. For discussion on other Old Testament figures mentioned in Hebrews 11, see the Sunday of All Saints and the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent. The Epistle lesson concludes: "God has provided something better for us that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:40). The something better is the Body of Christ and access to the mysteries of God at the Lord's Table. Just as our forebears in the faith did not take lightly the things of God that were revealed to them, we dare not do so either.

John Chrysostom wrote<sup>31</sup>, "Consider the virtue of the saints: if here in this life they do as angels do (in partaking and acting upon the mysteries of God), what then will they do above?" The same can be said of us as we partake in faith of the mysteries of God.

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<sup>30</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, V, i, 7.

<sup>31</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XXVII, 7.

Basil the Great spoke<sup>32</sup> of his early life acquiring wisdom, and his journey to perfection by imitating some of the holy men that he met. These people he met were to him living examples of the saints that Paul referred to.

I had spent much time in vanity, and had wasted nearly all my youth in the vain labor of acquiring the wisdom made foolish by God. Then like a man roused from deep sleep, I turned my eyes to the marvelous light of the truth of the Gospel, and I perceived the uselessness of ‘the wisdom of the princes of this world, that comes to nothing’ (1 Corinthians 2:6). I wept many tears over my miserable life and I prayed that guidance might be granted me to admit me to the doctrines of the true Faith. First of all I was minded to make some mending of my ways, long perverted as they were by my intimacy with wicked men. Then I read the Gospel, and I saw there that a great means of reaching perfection was the selling of one’s goods, the sharing them with the poor, the giving up of all care for this life, and the refusal to allow the soul to be turned by any sympathy to things of earth. And I prayed that I might find someone of the brethren who had chosen this way of life, that with him I might cross life’s troubled strait. And many did I find in Alexandria, and in the rest of Egypt, others in Palestine, and in Syria, and in Mesopotamia. I admired their continence in living, and their endurance in toil; I was amazed at their persistency in prayer, and at their triumphing over sleep. Subdued by no natural necessity, ever keeping their souls’ purpose high and free, in hunger, in thirst, in cold, in nakedness (2 Corinthians 11:27), they never yielded to the body. They were never willing to waste attention on it; always, as though living in a flesh that was not theirs, they showed in deed what it is to sojourn for a while in this life (Hebrews 11:13), and what it is to have one’s citizenship and home in heaven (Philippians 3:20). All this moved my admiration. I called these men’s lives blessed, in that they showed in deed that they ‘bear about in their body the dying of Jesus’ (2 Corinthians 4:10). And I prayed that I, too, as far as in me lay, might imitate them.

Basil also spoke<sup>33</sup> of how the Church has guarded the dignity<sup>34</sup> of the mysteries (*dogma*), while proclaiming the Gospel (*kerugma*). We pray standing and facing East toward Paradise on the first day of the week, as we look for the Resurrection. The first day of the week is the 8<sup>th</sup> day, which is the same as the 1<sup>st</sup> day before the Fall. Pentecost also speaks toward this.

“The Apostles and Fathers, who laid down laws for the Church from the beginning, guarded the awesome dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence; for what is clamored randomly among the common folk is no mystery at all. This is the reason for our tradition of unwritten precepts and practices, that the knowledge of our teachings may not become neglected and despised by the multitude through familiarity. ‘Dogma’ and ‘Kerugma’ are two distinct things; dogma is observed in silence; kerugma is proclaimed to the entire world. One form of this silence is the obscurity employed in Scripture, which makes the meaning of ‘dogmas’ difficult to be understood for the advantage of the reader. Thus we all

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<sup>32</sup> Basil the Great, Letter Against Eustathius of Sebasteia, CCXXIII, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Basil, On the Spirit, XXVII, 66.

<sup>34</sup> *Kerugma* means “proclamation”; *dogma* means “decree”. Examples are for kerugma: Romans 16:25; for dogma: Acts 16:4.

look to the East at our prayers, but few of us know that we are seeking our own old country (Hebrews 11:14), Paradise, which God planted Eastward in Eden (Genesis 2:8). We pray standing, on the first day of the week, but we do not all know the reason. On the day of the resurrection<sup>35</sup>, we remind ourselves of the grace given to us by standing at prayer. This is not only because we rose with Christ, and are bound to ‘seek those things which are above’ (Colossians 3:1), but because the day seems to us to be in some sense an image of the age which we expect. Therefore, though it is the beginning of days, it is not called by Moses ‘the first day’, but ‘one<sup>36</sup> day’ (Genesis 1:5). For he says, ‘There was evening, and there was morning, one day’, as though the same day often recurred. Now ‘one’ and ‘eighth’ are the same, the state which follows after this present time, the day which knows no evening, and no successor, that age which doesn’t end or grow old. Of necessity, the Church teaches her own foster children to offer their prayers on that day standing, that through continual reminder of the endless life we may not neglect to make provision for our departure there. Moreover the whole of Pentecost is a reminder of the resurrection expected in the age to come. That one and first day, seven multiplied by seven, completes the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost. Beginning at the first, Pentecost ends with the same, making fifty revolutions through the intervening days. And so it is a likeness of eternity, beginning as it does and ending, as in a circling course, at the same point. On this day the rules of the Church have educated us to prefer the upright attitude of prayer, for by their plain reminder they make our mind dwell no longer in the present but in the future. Moreover every time we fall upon our knees and rise up, we show by deed that by our sin we fell down to earth, and by the loving kindness of our Creator, we were called back to heaven”.

John Cassian connected<sup>37</sup> the City that God prepares for us to our participation in this City after we pass from this life. The life in our souls begins to taste beforehand something of what is reserved for them at the Last Judgment. This contrasts with the heretics, who claim that we are deprived of perception after our departure.

“There are then many who while still living in this body are dead, lying in the grave, and cannot praise God. On the contrary there are many who though they are dead in the body yet bless God in the spirit, and praise Him, according to this<sup>38</sup>, ‘O you spirits and souls of the righteous, bless the Lord’, and ‘every spirit shall praise the Lord’ (Philippians 2:10; Psalm 150:6). The souls of those that are slain are not only said to praise God but to address Him also (Revelation 6:9-10). The Lord said with still greater clearness to the Sadducees, ‘Have you not read that which was spoken by God, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead but of the living: for all live to Him’. Of whom Paul said, ‘wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city’ (Hebrews 11:16). That they are not idle after the separation from this body, and are capable of feeling, the parable in the Gospel

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<sup>35</sup> or “standing again”

<sup>36</sup> Many English translations phrase Genesis 1:5 “the first day”, but Basil is correct and the English translations are wrong.

<sup>37</sup> John Cassian, 1<sup>st</sup> Conference of Abbot Moses, I, 14.

<sup>38</sup> “Song of the Three Children”, 63 in Brenton, Lancelot, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990.

shows, which tells us of the beggar Lazarus and Dives clothed in purple. One of these obtained a position of bliss, i.e., Abraham's bosom; the other was consumed with the dreadful heat of eternal fire (Luke 16:19-25). But if you care to understand the words spoken to the thief, 'Today you shall be with Me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43), this clearly shows that not only does their former intelligence continue with the souls, but also that in their changed condition they partake of some state which corresponds to their actions and deserts! For the Lord would certainly never have promised him this, if He had known that his soul, after being separated from the flesh, would either have been deprived of perception or have been resolved into nothing. It was not his flesh but his soul, which entered Paradise with Christ. We must avoid, and shun with the utmost horror, that wicked punctuation of the heretics, who do not believe that Christ could be found in Paradise on the same day on which He descended into hell. They thus punctuate 'Truly, I say to you today', and making a stop apply, 'you shall be with Me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). They imagine that this promise was not fulfilled at once after he departed from this life, but that it will be fulfilled after the resurrection. They do not understand what He declared to the Jews before His resurrection, where they fancied that He was hampered by human difficulties and weakness of the flesh as they were. 'No man has ascended into heaven, but He who came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven' (John 3:13), by which He clearly shows that the souls of the departed are not deprived of their reason, and they have such feelings as hope and sorrow, joy and fear. They already are beginning to taste beforehand something of what is reserved for them at the last judgment, and that they are not, as some unbelievers hold, resolved into nothing after their departure from this life. They live a more real life, and are still more eager in waiting on the praises of God".

**APPENDIX A**  
**Genealogies in the Scriptures**

<b>LUKE</b> <b>(Legal tree of Joseph)</b>	<b>MATTHEW</b> <b>(The Kings of Israel)</b>	<b>2 KINGS &amp; 1</b> <b>CHRONICLES</b>	<b>GENESIS</b> <b>(Hebrew)</b>	<b>GENESIS</b> <b>(Septuagint)</b>
Adam		Adam	Adam	Adam
Seth		Seth	Seth	Seth
Enosh		Enosh	Enosh	Enosh
Cainan		Cainan	Cainan	Cainan
Mahalalel		Mahalalel	Mahalalel	Mahalalel
Jared		Jared	Jared	Jared
Enoch		Enoch	Enoch	Enoch
Methuselah		Methuselah	Methuselah	Methuselah
Lamech		Lamech	Lamech	Lamech
Noah		Noah	Noah	Noah
Shem		Shem	Shem	Shem
Arphaxad		Arphaxad	Arphaxad	Arphaxad
Cainan				Cainan
Shelah		Shelah	Shelah	Shelah
Eber		Eber	Eber	Eber
Peleg		Peleg	Peleg	Peleg
Reu		Reu	Reu	Reu
Serug		Serug	Serug	Serug
Nahor		Nahor	Nahor	Nahor
Terah		Terah	Terah	Terah
Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham
Isaac	Isaac	Isaac	Isaac	Isaac
Jacob	Jacob	Jacob	Jacob	Jacob
Judah	Judah	Judah	Judah	Judah
Perez	Perez	Perez	Perez	Perez
Hezron	Hezron	Hezron	Hezron	Hezron
Ram	Ram	Ram		
Amminadab	Amminadab	Amminadab		
Nahshon	Nahshon	Nahshon		
Salmon	Salmon	Salmon		
Boaz	Boaz	Boaz		
Obed	Obed	Obed		
Jesse	Jesse	Jesse		
David	David	David		
Nathan	Solomon	Solomon		
Mattathah				
Menan	Rehoboam	Rehoboam		
Melea				
Eliakim	Abijah	Abijah		

<b>LUKE</b> (Legal tree of Joseph)	<b>MATTHEW</b> (The Kings of Israel)	<b>2 KINGS &amp; 1 CHRONICLES</b>	<b>GENESIS</b> (Hebrew)	<b>GENESIS</b> (Septuagint)
Jonan	Asa	Asa		
Joseph	Jehoshaphat	Jehoshaphat		
Judah	Joram (Jehoram)	Joram (Jehoram)		
Simeon		Ahaziah		
Levi		Joash		
		Amaziah		
Matthat	Uzziah (Azariah)	Uzziah (Azariah)		
Jorim	Jotham	Jotham		
Eliezar	Ahaz	Ahaz		
Jose	Hezekiah	Hezekiah		
Er	Manassah	Manasseh		
Elmodan	Amon	Amon		
Cosam	Josiah	Josiah		
Addi		Jehoiakim		
Melchi	Jeconiah	Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin)		
Neir				
Shealtiel	Shealtiel	Shealtiel		
Zerubbabel	Zerubbabel	Zerubbabel		
Rhesa				
Joannas	Abiud			
Judah	Eliakim			
Joseph				
Semei	Azor			
Mattathiah				
Maath	Zadok			
Naggai				
Eslì	Achim			
Nahum				
Amos	Eliud			
Mattathiah				
Joseph	Eleazar			
Janna				
Melchi	Matthan			
Levi				
Matthat	Jacob			
Heli				
Joseph	Joseph			



