

SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Hebrews 11: 9-10, 17-23, and 32-40

Brethren: By faith Abraham sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose designer and maker is God.

•By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac; he who had received the promises was ready to sacrifice his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be called." He reasoned that God was able to raise from the dead, and so he received Isaac back as a symbol. By faith Isaac invoked for Jacob and Esau blessings that were still to be.

By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped God, leaning on the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, near the end of his life, spoke of the Exodus of the Israelites, and gave instructions about his burial. By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after his birth, thereby disregarding the king's edict, because they saw that he was a beautiful child.

•What more shall I recount? I have no time to tell of Gideon (Gi-dee-un) , Barak (Bar-ock), Samson (Sam-son) , Jephthah (Jef-thah) , of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was just, obtained the promises; they broke the jaws of lions, put out raging fires, escaped the devouring sword; though weak they were made powerful, became strong in battle, and turned back foreign invaders. Women received back their dead through resurrection. Others were tortured and would not receive deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Still others endured mockery, scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death at sword's point; they went about garbed in the skins of sheep or goats, needy, afflicted, tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered about in deserts and on mountains, they dwelt in caves and in holes of the earth. Yet despite the fact that all of these were approved because of their faith, they did not obtain what had been promised. God had made a better plan, a plan which included us. Without us, they were not to be made perfect.