Hebrews 11:20-22 Commentary

Hebrews 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: Pistei kai peri mellonton (PAPMPG) eulogesen (3SAAI) Isaak ton Iakob kai ton Esau

Amplified: [With eyes of] faith Isaac, looking far into the future, invoked blessings upon Jacob and Esau. (Amplified Bible - Lockman)

KJV: By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

NLT: It was by faith that Isaac blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau. He had confidence in what God was going to do in the future. (NLT - Tyndale House)

Phillips: It was by faith that Isaac gave Jacob and Esau his blessing, for his words dealt with what should happen in the future. (Phillips: Touchstone)

Wuest: By faith, and that concerning things to come, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. (Eerdmans)

Young's Literal: By faith, concerning coming things, Isaac did bless Jacob and Esau

BY FAITH ISAAC BLESSED JACOB AND ESAU EVEN REGARDING THINGS TO COME:

BY FAITH
BLESSING PASSED ON

In these next 3 verses the writer looks at the end of the lives of the next three patriarchs after Abraham to emphasize how their lives (albeit not perfect) were examples of those who remained faithful. Remember the writer is speaking primarily to Jews who are being tested and tempted to revert to Judaism and he wants these examples of perseverance to the end to encourage his readers (cp He 11:13-note). The faith of these patriarchs was focused on the things above (unseen, spiritual, cp Col 3:1-note, Col 3:2-note), the things of heaven not in things of this world (see Abraham - He 11:9, 10-note) This begs the question - What are you looking for? What are you living for? ...Today? ...This present world (cp Gal 1:4)? ...This world which is passing away (1Jn 2:17-note)? ...What you can see with your natural eyes (2Cor 4:18-note)? ...Or what you can see with the eyes of faith (2Cor 5:7)?

We each need to take careful inventory of our lives so that we might (if necessary) re-order our priorities to the unseen and the eternal and doing so not out of legalism but out of love for God and the sure hope that the best is
yet to come! God has promised, so it will be so (cp Josh 23:14, 2Co 1:20KJV). If we believe Him, really believe Him, we will live lives governed by that belief and we will enter into the fulness of His joy even in this temporal world (Ps 16:11-note)! Remember that our life is but a vapor (Jas 4:14)...don't waste your life (Eph 5:16-note)! And it all comes down to a matter of daily, moment by moment choices! Choose for yourself today to serve Jehovah Jesus and not the gods of this present evil age (Joshua 24:15).

By Faith - All uses in NAS in Heb 11 - Heb 4:2; 10:38; 11:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33.

Each example of faith in Heb 11:3-31 is formally introduced with this specific phrase "by faith" (pistei)

Faith (4102)(pistis) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. As pistis relates to God, it is the conviction that God exists and is the Creator and Ruler of all things well as the Provider and Bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. As faith relates to Christ it represents a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom we obtain eternal salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Stated another way, eternal salvation comes only through belief in Jesus Christ and no other way.

For more discussion on the meaning of faith see commentary on Hebrews 11:1-2.

Faith is believing that God will keep His promises, despite circumstances that seem to be to the contrary! True faith that saves one's soul includes at least three main elements - (1) firm persuasion or firm conviction, (2) a surrender to that truth and (3) a conduct emanating from that surrender. In sum, faith shows itself genuine by a changed life. (Click for W E Vine's definition of faith)

Note that this discussion of pistis is only an overview and not a detailed treatise of this vitally important subject. Those interested are directed to respected, conservative books on systematic theology for more in depth discussion (eg, Dr Wayne Grudem's book Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine is an excellent, uncompromising, imminently readable resource for the lay person. See especially Chapter 35 (Click for online outline of Conversion and/or Listen to the Mp3 of Conversion) which addresses the question "What is saving faith?" in an easy to understand manner.) Much of this "definition" deals with the general word group for faith (pistis = noun, pistos = adjective, pisteuo = verb)

Wuest on Isaac blessed - Isaac pronounced a blessing, and that concerning things to come,” namely, things beyond the lifetime of Jacob and Esau. The blessing was an act of faith.
Blessed (2127)(eulogeo from eu = good + lógos = word; see cognates eulogetos and eulogia) means speak good or well. When eulogeo is used by men toward men it means to speak well of with praise and thanksgiving (English "Eulogy" = an address in praise for one deceased ). To say good or positive things. Eulogeo can be from men to God, from men to men, and from God to men. When God blesses men He grants them favor and confers happiness upon them.

Spurgeon - Isaac was old and blind, so that he did not know which of his sons came for the first blessing, yet he could see into the future sufficiently to bless both his sons “concerning things that were going to happen.” What wondrous power there is in faith even when it is exercised by very imperfect individuals! concerning things that were going to happen He looked into the future, although he was blind. He was a poor old man, lying upon his bed, with his eyes so dim that he could not tell one of his sons from another. But he could yet look into the future, and bless his sons “concerning things that were going to happen.” Oh, what sharp eyes faith has, even when the eyes of bodily vision have become dim! We may see far more by faith than we can by sight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrews 11:21</th>
<th>By <strong>faith Jacob</strong>, as he was <strong>dying</strong>, <strong>blessed each</strong> of the <strong>sons</strong> of <strong>Joseph</strong>, and <strong>worshipped</strong>, leaning on the <strong>top</strong> of his <strong>staff</strong>. (NASB: Lockman)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Pistei Iakob apothneskon (PAPMSN) ekaston ton uion Ioseph eulogesen, (3SAAI) kai prosekunesen (3SAAI) epi to akron tes rabdou autou.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amplified</td>
<td>[Prompted] by faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons and bowed in prayer over the top of his staff. (Amplified Bible - Lockman)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>It was by faith that the dying Jacob blessed each of Joseph's sons as he bowed in prayer over his staff. (Phillips: Touchstone)</td>
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<td>By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped upon his staff. (Eerdmans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young’s Literal</td>
<td>by faith Jacob dying--each of the sons of Joseph did bless, and did bow down upon the top of his staff;</td>
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**BY FAITH JACOB, AS HE WAS DYING, BLESSED EACH OF THE SONS OF JOSEPH, AND WORSHIPED, LEANING ON THE TOP OF HIS STAFF:** Pistei Iakob apothneskon (PAPMSN) ekaston ton uion Ioseph eulogesen, (3SAAI) kai prosekunesen (3SAAI) epi to akron tes rabdou autou: (Genesis 48:5-22) (Genesis 47:31) (Reciprocal:, Genesis 30:24 - And she Genesis 48:9 - bless them Genesis 48:15 - blessed Numbers 6:23 - General, 1 Kings 1:47 - bowed Acts 7:15 - died Hebrews 7:7 - the
On Dying Well

By Faith (4102)(pistis) for more on the meaning of faith see commentary on Hebrews 11:1-2.

Dying is a frightening thought to many because everyone knows the truth of the aphorism "You can't take it with you!" In fact as one sage succinctly phrased it...At death we leave behind all we have and take with us all we are.

Nathaniel Emmons put it this way...Death stamps the characters and conditions of men for eternity. As death finds them in this world, so will they be in the next.

Matthew Henry wrote that...Death strips the soul of all the disguises wherein it appeared before men, that it may appear naked and open before God. Our grave-clothes are night-clothes...Damned sinners in hell shall not be allowed their light, being cast into utter darkness; and glorified saints in heaven shall not need their light, for God himself will be their everlasting light...Death to a godly man is like a fair gale of wind to convey him to the heavenly country; but to a wicked man it is an east wind, a storm, a tempest, that hurries him away in confusion and amazement, to destruction.

Death is not a period
Bringing the sentence of life to a close
Like the spilling of a moment
Or the dissolution of an hour.

Death is a useful comma
Which punctuates, and labors
To convince
Of much to follow.
---John Donne

Dying (599) (apothnesko from apo = marker of dissociation implying a rupture from a former association, separation, departure, cessation + thnesko = die) literally means to die off and can speak of literal physical death (Ro 6:9-note) as in this context. It is notable that as life was never meant to be merely existence, death which is the antonym of life does not mean non-existence. The important point is that to die does not mean one is annihilated as some falsely teach. Everyone who has every been born will continue to exist, either in the presence of God or banished from His presence and destined to experience conscious eternal existence in separation from God's majesty and glory and power (see 2Th 1:9).

Apothnesko is used figuratively of a believer's death to sin (Ro 6:2-note, Ro 6:7-note, Ro 6:8-note, Col 3:3-note), self, Satan, the law (Ro 7:6-note, Gal 2:19) and the world (Col 2:20-note, cp Gal 6:14-note - crucified used instead of died) which was effected when
Christ was crucified and when by faith we believed in Him and in God's reckoning (albeit a "mysterious" teaching) were crucified with Him (Ro 6:6-note).

As John Blanchard says...When death strikes the Christian down, he falls into heaven.

The great Puritan writer Thomas Brooks phrased it this way...Death to a saint is nothing but the taking of a sweet flower out of this wilderness, and planting of it in the garden of paradise. (adding that) It is no credit to your heavenly Father for you to be loath to go home.

Worshiped - What a way to end one's life! Worshipping. The perfect preparation for entrance into the presence of the only One Worthy of worship! Jacob's example of how to die well sets the bar high but imminently attainable by faith. Faith in the Father's promise of a forever future is the only way to truly handle the prospect of death. The patriarchs trusted in God's promised resurrection, and thus were enabled to face death with a calm serenity. How else could you describe Jacob's worshipping God while resting on his staff. Mark it down that the mark of genuine believer is their approach to death with a peace that passes all human (natural) understanding because it comes from a Supernatural Source, God Himself! Death to a believer like Jacob is exchanging a prison for a palace and a putting off of our worthless rages for His righteous robes.

Jacob's attitude was a lot like D L Moody's who once quipped...Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now.

Billy Graham's comment is also apropos to Jacob's worshiping even though dying...I have talked to doctors and nurses who have held the hands of dying people, and they say that there is as much difference between the death of a Christian and a non-Christian as there is between heaven and hell. ("Amen" or "Oh my!")

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (What is DEATH) quotes from the poem by Minister James Powis Smith which expresses the triumphant attitude of Jacob (and all the patriarchs) in the face of that last enemy death...

The pale horse stands and will not bide,
The night has come and I must ride;
    But not alone to unknown lands,
My Friend goes with me holding hands.

I've fought the fight; I've run the race,
    I now shall see Him face to face,
Who called me to Him long ago
    And bade me trust and follow.

The joys of life have been His gift,
My friends I'll find when clouds shall lift;
    I leave my home and all its store
To dwell with Him for evermore.

What does He give? His cup of love
   Until with Him I rest above;
I’ll mount and ride, no more to roam,
   The pale horse bears me to my home.

**Worshiped** (bowed down) (4352) (proskuneo from pros = before + kuneo = kiss or adore) means to prostrate oneself in homage before another in the full sense of worship, not mere reverence or courtesy. When Jesus Christ was born into this world, He was attended and worshipped by angels. (Lk 2:13, 14). The word proskuneo literally means to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage, to prostrate oneself in homage, to do reverence to, to adore and so to worship and show respect. In the ancient Oriental (especially Persia) the mode of salutation between persons of equal rank was to kiss each other on the lips. When the difference of rank was slight, they kissed each other on the cheek. When one was much inferior, he fell upon his knees touched his forehead to the ground or prostrated himself, and as he was bowing down he would be throwing kisses toward the superior. It is this latter mode of salutation that is intended by the Greek writers in the use of the verb proskuneo.

In summary, proskuneo represents the most common Near Eastern act of adoration and reverence and also carries the idea of profound awe and respect. Some believe that the root word kuneo may be related to kuon which is the Greek word for dog and which then could be picturing a dog licking his master's hand.

**Ironside** quips of Jacob...A worshiper at last instead of a schemer.

**Spurgeon** - If only by faith can a dying Jacob bless his descendants, so only by faith can we bless the sons of men. Have faith in God, and the instruction that you give shall really edify, the prayers you offer shall bring down showers of mercy, and your endeavors for your sons and daughters shall be prospered. God will bless what is done in faith; but if we do not believe, our work will not be established. Faith is the backbone and marrow of the Christian’s power to do good. We are weak as water until we enter into union with God by faith, and then we are omnipotent. Faith can bless other people as well as the believer himself. It not only brings good cheer into a man’s own heart, but it enables him to speak words of love and consolation to his children. Dying Jacob pronounces living blessings upon his sons, and upon their sons generation after generation. His legacies were all blessings that he possessed by faith only. He gave to Ephraim and Manasseh a portion each—but where and what? Did he fetch out a bag from the iron safe and say, “Here, young men, I give you the same portion of ready money as I give my sons”? No, there does not seem to have been a solitary shekel in the case. Did he call for the map of the family estates and say, “I give over to you, my boys, my freehold lands in such a parish, and my copyhold farms under such a manor”? No, no, he gave them no portion in Goshen, but each had a lot in Canaan. Did that belong to him? Yes, in one sense, but not in another. God had promised it to him, but he had not yet a foot of land in it. The Canaanites were swarming in the land; they were dwelling in cities walled up to heaven,
and held the country by the right of possession, which is nine points of the law. But the
good old man talks about Canaan as if it was all his own, and he foresees the tribes
growing into nations as much as if they were already in actual possession of the country.
He had, as a matter of fact, neither house nor ground in Palestine, and yet he counts it all
his own, since a faithful God had promised it to his fathers.

Spurgeon on Jacob's staff - That staff of his!—you know why he used it. I believe he
loved it, because it made him remember the brook Jabbok where “he was limping
because of his hip” (Gen 32:31). It had long been his companion, for he said, “With only
my staff I crossed this Jordan” (Gen 32:10). But it became more necessary to him than
ever after he had won that victory and had also learned his own weakness. And now, as if
in memory of the God who had blessed him, he leans upon the top of his staff and blesses
the sons of Joseph.

Andrew Murray in The Holiest of All...

It is remarkable how much, both in this chapter and through all
Scripture, faith has to do with the relationship of parents and children.
In nature the life of the parents is imparted to the children. In the
spiritual world it may be so too; the intercourse of faith with God
reaches the children too; the man of strong faith is a blessing to his
children. We have seen in Noah and Abraham and Sarah how largely
their faith in God had to do with their children. And here we find four
more examples.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. His blessing on his children was
the manifestation of his faith in the promise of God to his father and
himself, and the transmission of the blessing to them. By faith Jacob
blessed each of the sons of Joseph, giving each of them their place in
the future that was coming. By faith Joseph made mention of the
departure of the children of Israel saying, "I die, but God will surely
visit you, and bring you up out of this land." By faith Moses was hid
three months by his parents, because they saw he was a goodly child.
Their faith in the destiny they knew was waiting for the children of
Israel, and in the mercy of God watching over his people, gave them
the courage not to fear the king's commandment. In all these cases
faith was the secret inspiration of their treatment of their children, and
the source of blessing. Faith never confines itself to the person of the;
believer himself, but takes in his home and children.

And how is it that the Christian parent can secure this longed-for
blessing for his children? There is but one answer: By faith. Our life
must be all faith—that is, the unseen things must be our life, yea,
rather, the unseen God must be our life. The blessing and the power
are His; and it is as we have more of God in our life and in our home,
there will be the hidden power resting on our children. Faith does not
only mean a knowing that there is a covenant promise for our children,
and a pleading of it in prayer. This is an exercise of faith, and has its.
great value. But the chief thing is the life; faith is the making way for
God and giving Him place in our life. And when at times the vision
tarries, and the promise appears to fail, faith understands this as only
a call to trust God more completely and more confidently. As we hold
fast our confidence firm to the end, as in patience and longsuffering
we are strong in faith, giving glory to God, we shall know for certain
that we shall inherit this promise too. I will be thy God and the God of
thy seed.

From the patriarchs we learn what the atmosphere and what the soil is
in which there grows such a faith that blesses the children. They were
living in the land of promise as strangers and pilgrims, or in Egypt as
strangers and pilgrims too, longing for the return to the land. Their
whole life was hope in God and what He would do. They were men
whom God had taken hold of, to prove in their history how gloriously
He would fulfil His promise. And they had nothing to live on but God. It
is a law of nature that no body can be in two places at the same time.
This is just as true of the heart. When God took Abraham and his seed
out of their country, it was that the land of promise, the land of
separation from men, of separation unto God, might be to them the
training-school of faith. They went out from the fellowship of home and
family, to live in the fellowship of God. It was there they learned by
faith to bless the children.

Separation from the world, a being set apart unto God, the denial of
self and its life, the imitation of Abraham in his going out, of Christ in
His self-sacrifice,—this is the only way to the land of promise where
the faith-life flourishes. To live wholly for God, to hope alone in God,
always to walk with God, in all things to hearken to God,—this is the
new and living way into the inner sanctuary, in which Jesus our High
Priest leads us. What the land of promise was to the patriarchs, as the
place for the life of separation and obedience and faith, that the
Holiest of All is to us. That is the place of which God has said to us: Get
thee out of thy land, to a place that I will show thee, and I will bless
thee,—that is the only place where our faith can grow freely, and God
can prove all His power in us, so that we, like they, can be a display of
what God can do. And that is the place where our faith will in full
measure be a blessing to our children.

It is only by faith we can bless. God is willing to bless us to larger
circles than our own house. He is calling for vessels, empty vessels not
a few, in which He can multiply his blessing. He is the only fountain of
blessing; as our faith yields to God, and allows Him to be all, His
blessing will flow. Let the Christian who would be a blessing be a man
of faith,—that is, a man who has nothing and is nothing in himself, and
in whom God has free scope to work, and the blessing will not be wanting. Oh that God might have the place that belongs to Him in this His own world. And if that may not yet be—oh that He might have that place in the hearts of His people. And if it is as if even that will not yet be—oh let Him have that place, my reader, in your heart and in mine. Let faith see and consent and prove that God is all, and He will prove that He is a God of blessing for thee and all around thee.

1. Parent, teacher, worker, the secret of blessing in the work, the power to Influence, is—faith. Not simply the faith in some promise at times, but the habit of a holy faith that makes God the All of our life. Have faith In God as the God of thy life, the God who maintains His life and presence within thee He will work through thee.

2. How blessed to be an Instrument in the hands of God, with which He works out His purpose; to be a vessel He fills with His love.

3. Learn to regard thyself as set to be a blessing, and let faith and love mark thy whole life.

Hebrews 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones. (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: Pistei Ioseph teleuton (PAPMSN) peri tes exodou ton uion Israel emnemoneusen, (3SAAI) kai peri ton osteon autou eneteilato. (3SAMI)

Amplified: [Actuated] by faith Joseph, when nearing the end of his life, referred to [the promise of God for] the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his own bones. (Amplified Bible - Lockman)

KJV: By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

NLT: And it was by faith that Joseph, when he was about to die, confidently spoke of God's bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt. He was so sure of it that he commanded them to carry his bones with them when they left! (NLT - Tyndale House)

Phillips: It was by faith that Joseph on his death-bed spoke of the exodus of the Israelites, and gave confident orders about the disposal of his own mortal remains. (Phillips: Touchstone)

Wuest: By faith Joseph, when coming near to the end of his life, remembered the exodus of the sons of Israel and so gave a command concerning his bones. (Eerdmans)

Young's Literal: by faith, Joseph dying, concerning the outgoing of the sons of Israel did make mention, and concerning his bones did give command.

BY FAITH JOSEPH, WHEN HE WAS DYING, MADE MENTION OF THE EXODUS OF

By faith - Faith is trusting in the Word of God and the God of the Word and obeying Him implicitly, regardless of the circumstances or consequences. Joseph even while staring death in the face, did not suffer dimming of his spiritual eyesight for he kept his eyes of faith firmly fixed on His faithful Father! His body may have been dying, but not his faith. Joseph's faith is even more remarkable because he had been sold into slavery and out of the promised land of Canaan at age 17 (Ge 37:2) and lived in a foreign land until his death at 110 (Ge 50:26). But despite his time away from the promised land, his faith remained sure because it was based on the faithful promise of God.

Joseph even to the very end of his life demonstrated an unshakable faith (even his exalted position and prosperity did not dim his faith) and confidence in God's prophetic promise to Abraham and his offspring (that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan - cp God's covenant in Ge 15:13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, cp Ge 17:4, 5, 6, 7, 8) and that God would fulfill this promise in His perfect timing which explains why he left instructions about his burial. Calvin comments that this

sharpened the desire of the people so that they would look more earnestly for their redemption. (Ed: Because only their redemption from the subsequent Egyptian bondage would allow them to fulfill this wish of Joseph).

The writer of Hebrews makes clear that Joseph and the other patriarchs (Isaac, Jacob) died without entering into the promise that God had made. And yet they had Heb 11:1 faith manifest by the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen! The witness of these patriarchs of a firm faith and solid hope in God and His promises should stir and encourage a similar confidence that God will do good to us in the future (which is the definition of Biblical hope)! (cp "looking for the blessed hope" Titus 2:13- note)

Matthew Henry...

Now Joseph gave this order, not that he thought his being buried in Egypt would either prejudice his soul or prevent the resurrection of his body (as some of the rabbis fancied that all the Jews who were buried out of Canaan must be conveyed underground to Canaan before they could rise again), but to testify,

[1.] That though he had lived and died in Egypt, yet he did not live and die an Egyptian, but an Israelite. 

[2.] That he preferred a significant burial in Canaan before a magnificent one in Egypt.
[3.] That he would go as far with his people as he could, though he could not go as far as he would.

[4.] That he believed the resurrection of the body, and the communion that his soul should presently have with departed saints, as his body had with their dead bodies.

[5.] To assure them that God would be with them in Egypt, and deliver them out of it in his own time and way.

Jamieson writes that...

Joseph's eminent position in Egypt did not make him regard it as his home: in faith he looked to God's promise of Canaan being fulfilled and desired that his bones should rest there: testifying thus:

1. that he had no doubt of his posterity obtaining the promised land: and

2. that he believed in the resurrection of the body, and the enjoyment in it of the heavenly Canaan. His wish was fulfilled

When he was dying (teleutao = to end, finish, complete) - The Greek more literally is "coming to an end" (from telos = the goal - which congers up the picture of one who has run the race well and crossed the finish line! The related verb teleo is used in 2Ti 4:7-note in which Paul affirmed "I have finished [teleo] the course").

Vincent - Compare (use of teleutao in) Ge 6:17 ("shall perish"), Septuagint (LXX). The verb means to finish or close, with life understood. Always in this sense in NT See Mt 2:19; 9:18; Lk 7:2, etc. Never used by Paul. Rendered "when near his end."

Spurgeon - Death is a great tester of a man’s sincerity, and a great shaker down of bowing walls and tottering fences. Men have thought that it was all well with them, but when the swellings of Jordan have been about them, they have found matters quite otherwise. Here we see Joseph so calm, so quiet, that he remembers the covenant, falls back upon it, and rejoices in it. He speaks of dying as though it were only a part of living, and comparatively a small matter to him. He gives no evidence of trepidation whatever. No fear distracts him, but he bears his last witness to his brothers who gather about his bed concerning the faithfulness of God and the infallibility of his promise.

Made mention - Wuest notes that "Made mention is the translation of emnemoneuo "to remember." Joseph on his death-bed remembered the promise of God to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham (Ge 12:7, 13:5, 15:7), and also the prediction that Abraham's descendants should spend 400 years in bondage in a strange land, and should afterward be brought out thence (Ge 15:13, 14)."

Made mention of the Exodus - A deathbed prophecy by Joseph, a saint who persevered to the end! (cp Mt 10:22)

Moses records "Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take
care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. (Genesis 50:25, 26)

**Exodus** - appears in three places Lk 9:31 and 2Pe 1:15 referring to death and in this verse to the literal "Exodus" of Israel out of Egypt. In the book of Exodus we read...

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you." (Exodus 13:19)

In **Joshua** we read that...

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him (How long? For 40 years!), for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you." (Josh. 24:32) (His bones were buried within the land allotted to the tribe of Ephraim).

Ironside comments that "the bones of Joseph were buried at last in the parcel of ground that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. There Joseph's bones rest until the morning of the first resurrection. Joseph's faith evidently looked expectantly toward this resurrection. This hope enabled him to maintain his alienage in Egypt, a type of this present evil world. And so this series ends, and in the next verse another begins.

**Concerning his bones** - This is a metonymy (an expression used as substitute for something with which it is closely associated, e.g. Washington for the US government) which conveys the idea of his burial.

Hughes writes that "The overall point is that all these patriarchs ended well, for they had learned to trust God's bare word. They were sure regarding what would happen after their deaths.

Wiersbe makes the point that "We have to admire the faith of the patriarchs. They did not have a complete Bible, and yet their faith was strong. They handed God's promises down from one generation to another. In spite of their failures and testings, these men and women believed God and He bore witness to their faith. How much more faith you and I should have!

Spurgeon on concerning his bones - A sure proof that he believed they would come out of Egypt. He would not be buried among the Pharaohs, though a prominent place would have been assigned to him there; but he would have his bones lie with those of his ancestors, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. He wished his unburied body to share with the people of God in their captivity and their return. He was so certain that they would come out of the captivity that he postpones his burial until that glad event, and so makes what would have been but a natural wish a means of expressing a holy and gracious confidence in the divine promise.
John MacArthur has an excellent point of application reminding us that "All three of these men believed God in the face of death. Their faith had sometimes wavered in life, but it was strong and confident in death. Death is the acid test of faith. For hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, courts of law have taken a dying man’s word at face value. The need for lying and deception is over, and what is said on a deathbed is usually believed. So with our testimony of faith. Not only is the need for hypocrisy and pretense over, but it is extremely difficult to fake faith when you know you are facing eternity. A dying man’s faith is believable because a sham cannot stand this test. A Christian who fears death has a serious weakness in his faith, for to die in Christ is simply to be ushered into the Lord’s presence. "For to me, to live is Christ," Paul says, "and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). For those who believe, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

Steven Cole's sermon...

Dying Faith
He 11:20, 21,22

The Puritans used to emphasize the importance of dying well. With the apostle Paul (Phil 1:20-note), they desired that “Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” Matthew Henry wrote,

Though the grace of faith is of universal use throughout our whole lives, yet it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its greatest work to do at last, to help believers to finish well, to die to the Lord, so as to honor him, by patience, hope, and joy-so as to leave a witness behind them of the truth of God’s word and the excellency of his ways ... (Matthew Henry's Commentary [Revell], 6:946).

When he was on his own deathbed at age 52, Henry said to a friend “You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men-this is mine: that a life spent in the service of God and communion with Him, is the most pleasant life that anyone can live in this world.”

Facing death is the acid test of our faith. Will it sustain us at that time? As the author of Hebrews gives multiple examples of those who lived and died in faith, he briefly mentions Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He calls attention to incidents from each man’s life just before he died. In Isaac’s case, he does not state specifically that he was near death, but this incident happened when he was very old, feeble, and blind. In the case of the other two men, the author states specifically that they were dying. In each case, as they faced death, none of God’s promises was near fulfillment. Circumstances seemed contrary to their fulfillment. These men had lived all of their lives hearing about and believing in God’s promises, but God had not yet delivered. Even so,
they all died with their faith and focus on things to come, believing that God would keep His word. They teach us that...

Faith faces death trusting God to fulfill His future promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises.

While there are some different lessons to be learned from each man, the author uses each example to drive home the same basic point. Each one died with faith in God’s promises, even though circumstances seemed to contradict those promises. In the cases of Isaac and Jacob, they both had many failures in the life of faith, and yet, by God’s grace, they crossed the finish line with a strong flourish of faith. They illustrate what Paul wrote (Phil. 1:6-note),

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

If, by God’s grace, you and I have begun the life of faith, by that same grace we will die strong in faith, testifying to others that God’s promises are true, in spite of our circumstances.

1. Isaac’s blessing of Jacob and Esau shows faith in God’s promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises (He 11:20).

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.”

The story comes from Genesis 27. Isaac was old and blind. He called his favorite son, Esau, and requested that he bring back some fresh game and cook it up his favorite way. Then he would bless Esau.

The father’s blessing involved conferring a double portion of the family inheritance on the firstborn son, coupled with prophetic words about his future. At the birth of the twins, God had directly told Rebekah (Ge 25:23),

Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.

Jacob, the father of the nation Israel, was the younger. Esau, the father of the nation Edom, was the older. Isaac, however, had a natural liking toward Esau, whereas Jacob was a mama’s boy.

When mama overheard that dad was about to confer the family blessing on the older son, she went into action with a plan to secure the blessing on her favorite son. Whether she thought that she was rescuing God’s prophetic word from oblivion or whether she just was running interference for her favorite son, we do not know, but the
emphasis was probably on favorite son. Isaac probably was not deliberately going against God’s revealed word. Rather, he probably didn’t understand the significance of that word and was just following custom with his favorite son. But he had not exerted much effort to inquire of God as to the meaning of the prophecy or how he should apply it. He seems far more interested in tasting his favorite meat than in following God’s ways.

I assume that you know the story, how Jacob dressed up in his brother’s garments and took mama’s stew to his aged father to con him and his brother out of the blessing. Being deceived, Isaac inadvertently fulfilled God’s earlier prophecy to Rebekah by conferring the blessing on Jacob.

You may wonder, “How did Isaac act by faith when he was deceived? He didn’t even know what he was doing!” But the author doesn’t go into such details or to the difference between the blessings on Jacob and Esau. His emphasis is rather that by blessing his sons, Isaac was acting in the faith that God would fulfill the prophetic aspects of the blessing in the future. To his credit, when Isaac discovered that he had been deceived, he did not revoke the blessing in anger. Rather, he seemed to realize that God’s word to Rebekah at the birth of the twins would truly come to pass. So he told Esau that he had blessed his brother and then affirmed, “Yes, and he shall be blessed” (Ge 27:33).

Just before Jacob fled to Haran, Isaac charged him not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Then he said to Jacob,

May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham (Ge 28:3, 4).

Jacob didn’t even have a wife, let alone a company of peoples descended from him! Neither Isaac nor Jacob owned a square foot of the promised land, except for a burial cave! But by pronouncing the blessing, Isaac demonstrated faith that God’s promises would not fail, even though there was no indication at that time that they ever would be fulfilled.

The story behind Hebrews 11:20 is not flattering to any of the participants, except for Isaac’s faith regarding things to come. Isaac seemed to be more interested in a tasty meal than in God’s prophetic word. Esau was a profane man, who had despised his spiritual heritage for a bowl of stew. Rebekah deliberately deceived her husband and encouraged her son to lie. Jacob agreed to go along with the lies, taking advantage of his blind father.
But God used the whole soap opera, with each character acting selfishly without regard for God, to fulfill His sovereign purpose. God had chosen Jacob and rejected Esau. His purpose according to His choice will stand (Ro 9:11, 12, 13-note). It does not depend on people fully understanding His purpose. Isaac obviously did not understand it at first. It doesn’t depend on people obeying Him, although they should obey. But He used Rebekah’s and Jacob’s deception to fulfill His purpose. Paul relates this story and then says that God’s purpose does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Ro 9:16-note).

The story of Isaac blessing his sons is in the Bible so that we will learn to trust God, even when circumstances seem to contradict His promises. We may look at the sinfulness around us, even of those who claim to be His children, and think, “There is no way that the Great Commission will ever be fulfilled or that the church will bring glory to God’s name.”

But God has said that there will be some from every tongue and people and nation, purchased with Jesus’ blood, gathered around His throne (Rev. 5:9-note). He has said that the church will be a pure and spotless bride, made ready for her husband (Eph. 5:27-note; Rev. 21:3-note). In spite of all of our shortcomings and failures, His purpose will be fulfilled. That should not cause us to shrug our shoulders in apathy or to sin that grace may abound. It ought to encourage us to be faithful in spite of disappointments with sinful people or ominous world events. It should cause us to be steadfast and immovable in the Lord’s work, knowing that our work is never in vain in the Lord (1Co 15:58).

2. Jacob’s blessing of Joseph’s sons and his worship show faith in God’s promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises (He 11:21).

There are two incidents here, in reverse chronological order.

A. Jacob’s blessing of Joseph’s sons shows faith in God’s promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises.

This event is recorded in Genesis 48. Jacob and all of his sons and their families had migrated to Egypt to endure the famine. Joseph heard that his father was ill and took his two sons to visit his aged father. Jacob recalled God’s appearance to him, when the Lord reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant. Then he claimed Joseph’s two sons for himself as heirs. In effect, this meant designating Joseph as the firstborn, who received a double portion of the inheritance. Reuben, the natural
firstborn, had forfeited his position by having relations with his father’s concubine, Bilhah (Ge 35:22; 49:4). So now Joseph’s two sons each receive a full portion of the inheritance.

But, when Jacob went to lay hands on the young men for the blessing, he deliberately crossed his hands, laying his right hand on Ephraim, the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh, the older. This troubled Joseph, who tried to correct his father. But Jacob replied that he knew exactly what he was doing. Jacob predicted that while both sons would be great, the younger son’s descendants would be the greater of the two (Ge 48:19). So he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

There are three applications of this story.

(1) God’s ways are not man’s ways; God’s ways according to His sovereign choice, will triumph over man’s ways.

The natural order would have been for Manasseh, the first-born, to have preeminence over his younger brother. But Jacob himself demonstrated the same point, that God’s choice of the younger over the elder would thwart man’s ways. In spite of human ignorance and sin to do things man’s way, God’s way and His choice always triumph.

This applies to the way of salvation. Man’s way is according to human choice and human merit. Good people who make the right choices are in; bad people who make the wrong choices are out. But God’s way of salvation is according to His choice and purpose, not according to man’s choice (Lk 10:22; Jn 1:13; 6:65, 70; Ro 9:11-note, Ro 9:15, 16, 17, 18-note). As James 1:18-note puts it,

“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.”

Salvation rests on God’s will and God’s power.

(2) As parents and grandparents, we should seek spiritual blessings for our children above worldly success.

Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of the second most powerful man in Egypt. They had been raised in the most luxurious conditions in the world. No doubt they were personal friends with Pharaoh’s children. Servants attended to their every need. They had received the best education available at that time. They were heirs to a huge financial estate. They easily could have succeeded in whatever careers they chose in Egypt. In these circumstances, it would have been natural for a grandfather to bless his grandsons by saying, “May you prosper in Egypt even as your father has prospered. May you amass great fortunes and enjoy the best that the world has to offer!”

But instead, Jacob, the lowly shepherd, who is a pilgrim in Egypt to
avoid starvation in the famine-stricken Canaan, adopts these two princes as his own and confers on them the blessing of Abraham. A worldly-minded parent could have thought, “Whoopde-do! You’re giving them a double portion of the famine-stricken land of Canaan, but you don’t own a square foot of it, except for your burial cave! Here in Egypt, they’ve got everything that anyone could dream of having, and you’re giving them a piece of dry ground that you don’t even own to give away!”

But what was Jacob really giving his grandsons? By faith in God’s yet unfulfilled promises, he was giving the boys the spiritual blessings of Abraham, which were far better than the worldly blessings of Egypt. Even though there was not a shred of tangible evidence that God would give the land to Jacob’s descendants, Jacob believed God’s promises and handed this off to his grandsons.

It is a tragedy that many Christian parents today hope more that their children and grandchildren will succeed materially than that they will succeed spiritually! They would be thrilled to hear that one of their kids got accepted into medical school or landed a fat contract with a professional sports team. But if they heard that the kids were headed for the mission field in a poor country, they would try to “talk some sense into them.” They wouldn’t want them to “throw their lives away” with nothing (materially) to show for it. Besides, they’d rather have the grandkids nearby. That is a thoroughly worldly attitude! First and foremost, we should want our children to walk with God, wherever that may lead them in terms of a career or a geographic location.

(3) God is sovereign in assigning different gifts and places to His children, both materially and spiritually.

The story of Jacob and Esau shows that God is free to distinguish between individuals in the matter of salvation, according to His sovereign purpose (Ro 9:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18-note). But the story of Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh shows that God is free to give different material and spiritual blessings to those who are His children, according to His purpose. Some are wealthy, some are not. Some have powerful spiritual gifts, but others have lesser gifts (1Cor 12:4, 5, 6, 7). Each of us is responsible to use what the Lord has given us to advance His kingdom, and not to compare ourselves with others or be envious that we had what they have been given.

B. Jacob’s worship shows faith in God’s promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises.

Jacob’s worshiping on the top of his staff happened before he blessed Joseph’s sons (Ge 47:29, 30, 31). Joseph had heard that his father was
near death, and he visited him privately. Jacob asked Joseph to swear that he would not bury him in Egypt, but rather in the Cave of Machpelah with his ancestors. When Joseph swore that he would do so, Jacob bowed in worship.

There is a discrepancy in that the Massoretic text, which lies behind our Old Testament, says that he worshiped at the head of his bed, whereas the LXX says that he worshiped on the top of his staf. The Hebrew language was written with consonants only until the sixth to eighth centuries, A.D., when Hebrew scholars added the vowel points. The noun in question reads bed if pointed in one way, but staf if pointed another way. Since the LXX was translated about nine centuries before the Massoretic pointing was added, it probably best reflects the original text, staf (Philip Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [Eerdmans], pp. 488, 489).

Either way, the point is to show an old man whose body is weak, but whose faith is strong in God’s promises. Although all of his descendants are now living comfortably in Egypt, he doesn’t want to signal that that is okay. When Joseph agrees to bury him in Canaan, he worships God because he sees in Joseph’s promise a glimmer of hope that God will fulfill His promises. The staff may be symbolic for the pilgrim life that Jacob had lived as an heir of the promise to Abraham. His hope was not in this life, but in God’s promises for a better country, namely, a heavenly one (He 11:16). So even though he was dying as a poor man in a foreign land, he died in faith in God’s promise.

3. Joseph’s mention of the exodus and his order about his bones show faith in God’s promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises (He 11:22).

Both things refer to the same incident (Ge 50:24, 25). As he was dying, Joseph told his brothers (fellow Jews) that God would bring them back to the land which He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then he made them swear that they would carry his bones with them when they returned to Canaan.

Joseph demonstrated many instances of strong faith in God throughout his lifetime. He had resisted the seductive attempts of Potiphar’s wife. He remained true to God while imprisoned unjustly. His faith enabled him to interpret dreams on more than one occasion. He dealt in a godly manner with his brothers who had wronged him. He administered the food relief program fairly, without greed. But the author of Hebrews skips all of these examples of faith and picks out the one about Joseph’s bones! Why?

The main reason is that it shows us a man facing death at a time when God’s promises seemed unlikely ever to be fulfilled. God had given the
promises to Abraham more than 200 years before, but here were his
descendants living in Egypt, not in Canaan. They were doing quite well
in Egypt at this point, thanks to Joseph. Their enslavement followed his
death. It would still be over 200 years before Moses led them out of
Egypt and 40 years after that before they entered Canaan. Yet Joseph
made mention of the exodus, and ordered that they take his bones
when they left Egypt.

By so doing, he was disassociating himself from all of his success in
Egypt and associating himself with God’s people and God’s promises.
He didn’t want a grand tomb in Egypt, where future generations of
Egyptians could pay homage to the man who had saved their country
from ruin. Instead, he wanted his final resting place to be in the land of
God’s promise. His burial instructions were a strong exhortation to his
people not to be satisfied with the blessings of Egypt. They should only
be satisfied with God’s promises for the future.

The temptations of success and comfort are often much greater than
the temptations faced by those in poverty. The poor man more readily
sees his need to trust in the Lord, but the rich man can easily trust in
his riches and forget the Lord. The story of Joseph’s bones should
remind us not to put our hopes in material success, but to realize how
empty riches are when we’re on our deathbed. But how rich we truly
are if our hope is in God’s promises about eternity! What does it profit
to gain the whole world and yet to lose your soul (see Luke 9:25;
12:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21)?

**Conclusion**

Many years ago, a ship known as **Empress of Ireland** went down
with 130 Salvation Army officers on board, along with many other
passengers. Only 21 of the Salvation Army people survived. Of the 109
that drowned, not one had a life preserver. Many of the survivors told
how these brave people, seeing that there were not enough life
preservers, took off their own and gave them to others, saying, “I
know Jesus, so I can die better than you can!” (In “Our Daily Bread,”
Fall, 1980.)

A young woman was about to be operated on for throat cancer. Her
chances of survival were slim. At best, she might lose the ability to
speak for the rest of her life.

“We’re going to begin now,” the surgeon told her, “so if you have
anything you’d like to say....”

For a moment or two the young woman remained silent, though her
mouth moved several times as if to speak. Finally, she said in a calm,
clear voice, “Blessed be the name of Jesus.” I don’t know the outcome
of her surgery. I do know that she trusted God’s promises, even though circumstances seemed contradictory.

Faith faces death by trusting God to fulfill His future promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises. By so doing, we join Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, who all “died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance” (He 11:13).

**Discussion Questions**

Why is belief in God’s sovereign election essential for solid assurance of salvation?

How would you answer the charge that if God’s purpose in salvation will be accomplished, then we don’t need to witness?

Should Christian parents leave a large inheritance to worldly children? Why/why not?

Why must a believer’s hope be in God’s promises for heaven, not on health and wealth in this life? ([Index to Pastor Steven Cole's sermons by Bible book - Highly Recommended - They read much like a verse by verse commentary](#))