

# Faith

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## A Great Cloud of Witnesses

### Introduction

Faith. To some, it is “an illogical belief in the improbable.” To others, it is the very essence of life, the path to joy in life and salvation in the afterlife.

What does faith mean to you? Would you like to have more of it? Our ultimate purpose in this study is to increase our faith. There are

at least three steps necessary to become more “faithful”:

- (1) We must understand what the concept really means.
- (2) We must learn about and emulate the lives of the faithful.
- (3) We must practice our faith on a daily basis.

In the next few weeks, we will learn exactly what the Bible says about faith and being faithful. We will examine the lives of those who lived by faith — men such as Abraham and Moses and David, and others — with a view to emulating their faith in God. Finally, we will do some exercises that will help us, first, to analyze our current level of faith and, secondly, to experience faith in action.

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**“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”**

**Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

# 1

## Don't Fall Back!



### Hebrews 10:19-32

In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer discusses virtually every aspect of the superiority of Christ over the Old Covenant—the priesthood, the tabernacle and its service, the law and its sacrifices. Those things were but a shadow of the real (10:1). They could not provide complete access to God because they were not sufficient to take away sins. But Christ, through one offering of Himself, has “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14). That being the case, there is no reason to fall back “to destruction” (10:39). The famous 11th chapter really begins here, because it is part of an overall argument that the writer is making about need for faithfulness.

This unit is divided into three paragraphs:

- 1. Three imperatives 10:19-25**
- 2. A warning against willful sin. 10:26-31**
- 3. A reminder 10:32-39**

### Three Imperatives (10:19-25)

[19-21] Under the old system, no one could enter the Holy of Holies except the High Priest. The inner sanctuary was where the High Priest came into presence of God to make sacrifice on behalf of himself and the people. The writer has gone to great lengths to demonstrate how the believer under the New Covenant has access to God through the blood of Jesus (9:6-14, 24).

In these verses, the writer points to Christ’s work as the rationale for the call to action that will follow in verses 22-25. We have confidence, or boldness (*parresian*), to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, which has secured our forgiveness of our sins. In Hebrews, the Holy of Holies is called “the holy place” and represents the presence of God. It is our sins that separate us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). For-

giveness opens the way to God, a “new (fresh) and living way.” 9:11-12 tells us how Jesus dedicated that way through His flesh, here referred to as “the veil.” Remember that the veil was the curtain which separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies. Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except by Me” (John 14:6). If one is to have access to God at all; that is, if one is to pass through the veil, he must do so by the flesh (the sacrifice) of Jesus Christ. There is no other way to God (an interesting passage is Mark 15:38, where the veil was torn in two at Christ’s death).

The writer also alludes to his discussion about Jesus as High Priest which he developed in 4:14-7:28. Here, He is said to be “a great priest” (note the singular: there are no other “great priests”) “over the house of God.” In 3:6, the writer says *we* are that house, “if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end” (cf. I Timothy 3:15, where the church is described as the household of God).

[22-25] Contemplating the great blessings we enjoy in Christ provokes a threefold “let us” from the writer—let us *draw near*, let us *hold fast* and let us *consider how to encourage one another*. Instead of shrinking back, which leads to destruction, we should be moving forward, which leads to faith from which springs hope and confidence in the day of judgment. Notice how he includes the three great concepts of Christianity—love, hope and faith—in this passage.

In light of the spiritual blessings we enjoy in Christ, *do this*: “draw near with a sincere (undivided, loyal) heart in full assurance of faith.” You are able to *draw near* (a term that the Jew would associate with sacrifice, but used here as a way of referring to entering into a relationship with God; cf. 7:19, 25) because your heart has been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and your body has been washed with pure water. The forgiveness of sins, secured by the “sprinkled blood” of Christ, has effectively cleansed your conscience (see 9:14). “Sprinkled” (see 9:18-22; 10:1-4) and “washed” are both in the perfect tense in the Greek, meaning they refer to actions in the past that have lingering results. “The bodily cleansing here is initiatory and thus refers to baptism. . . the symbolic value of Christian baptism would not have been lost on Jewish observers” (Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 670). There may be an

allusion to Leviticus 14:7-9, in which a leper, if he found that his leprosy was healed, was to show himself to the priest and the priest would sprinkle him with the blood of a live bird. After seven days, he would bathe his body in water. Afterward, we would be considered “clean.” Ezekiel 36:25-26 speaks of a similar, *spiritual* cleansing that was to take place in the new era.

In addition, we are to “hold fast the confession of our hope.” This same statement, used three other times in the letter (3:6, 14; 4:14; cf. 10:35), may almost be thought of as the writer’s theme. Here, he reminds his readers that they can hold fast to their hope because the one who has promised is faithful (the promise is referred to again in v. 36). The final “let us” tells the readers to “consider” (“giving serious thought to” or “focus intently on”; cf. 3:1) how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. “Stimulate” is a translation of the Greek word from which our English word “paroxysm” comes. It means to “sharpen” (cf. Proverbs 27:17) or incite, in a positive way, to love and good deeds.

The writer obviously believes that much of this “stimulating to love” is to take place at the assemblies of the saints. The assemblies serve the purpose of stirring each other up and encouraging one another. The writer warns his readers about forsaking the gatherings,

### Additional note on 10:25

I’ve heard brethren argue that missing the assemblies “now and then” is not a violation of Hebrews 10:25 since the word “forsaking” means “complete abandonment.” Even if we ignore the attitude that is implied by efforts to wiggle out of attending services, the writer says a couple of things that ought to make us stop and think. First, he says this is a “habit” of some. That suggests that some brethren had habitually ignored the gatherings (perhaps out of fear of persecution), not necessarily completely turned their backs on them. Secondly, he fixes the purpose of the gatherings as opportunities to encourage each other. Many who willfully miss the services of the local church seem to think that the assemblies are designed for *their* benefit and if they don’t “get anything out of it,” they are exempt from coming. The writer says that the real sin in missing is in the squandering of an opportunity to encourage others, and that is true regardless of whether we receive encouragement in return, or not.

as was the habit of some. (“forsaking” is in the Gk. present tense: “do not go on forsaking”; *forsaking* means “leaving behind”: see Matthew 27:46 and Acts 2:27 for examples of the use of the same Greek word). The writer brackets this warning by references to “one another,” suggesting that those who make a habit of forsaking the gatherings are selfishly withholding the encouragement they could provide by being present. We should be even more zealous in our attendance and the encouragement of others as we see the “day” approaching. The “day” could refer to the second coming of Christ (there was a sense of urgency among Christians in the New Testament that is lost on us today) or to the time when persecution would become more severe. In the Old Testament, “the day” usually refers to a time of judgment.

#### **Warning [26-31]**

[26-27] If we take v. 26 with v. 25 (and why shouldn’t we?), the writer suggests that forsaking the assembling is an example of willful sin. In a statement reminiscent of 6:4-6, if we go on sinning after we’ve come to a knowledge of Christ, what remains? There will not be another sacrifice, because Christ has already offered the ultimate one-time sacrifice. If we reject that, all that is left is a “terrifying expectation of judgment.” Hear this: *there is no middle ground*. We either commit to Christ or we look forward to judgment (cf. 9:27). Remember, he is not speaking abstractly about non-believers here. He is talking about those who are in the body of Christ, but who are falling away. They have received the knowledge of the truth, but have become *adversaries* (opponents) of God. Hence, the fire of God’s judgment will consume them (see Isaiah 26:11).

[28-31] An appeal to the Law makes sense to these Jewish readers, so the writer directs their attention to the punishment due someone who “set aside the Law of Moses.” He was worthy of death. But, in an argument from the less to the greater (verses 28-29), he says “how much severer” is the punishment for one who rejects the New Covenant? One who seeks salvation through any other system but Jesus Christ has made a serious mistake and the writer uses strong language to describe what they’ve done: trampled under foot God’s own son; regarded as “unclean” the blood of the covenant (that which was unclean could not even

be touched; i.e., backslider treat Jesus as if he is just another dead body); and insulted the Holy Spirit which has revealed God’s grace (see Isaiah 63:10).

It is not surprising that God will take vengeance on such people; but notice the writer quotes from Deuteronomy 32:36: “The Lord will judge *His* people.” God will judge those who have never named the name of Christ and have rejected Him and run after other gods. But He will also judge those who once made a commitment and then had the nerve to turn their backs on Christ. In one sense, it is more serious to believe and then reject God, than to never have believed at all (see II Peter 2:20-22). It is a *phobia* worth having to fear falling into the hands of the living God. This is not a dumb, lifeless idol the writer is talking about, but He who has power to destroy both body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28).

#### **A Reminder From the Past [32-39]**

[32-34] After the warning recorded in 5:11-6:6, the writer said, “We are convinced of better things. . .” With a similar vote of confidence, the writer here points his readers back to former days. Exactly when these “former days” occurred is hard to fix. Many point to A.D. 49 when Jews were expelled from Rome under Claudius (see Introduction). However, remember that the writer is pointing back to some specifically *Christian* persecution, not anti-Semitic activity. Ironically, those “good old days” were days which were filled with persecution. Those who think Christianity guarantees health, wealth and safety need to consider this passage. The word translated “conflict” is *athlesin*, suggestive of the training and discipline that an athlete endures (see 12:1). Reference to being “made a public spectacle,” (v. 33) may point to the gladiatorial games of the Romans. They endured a “conflict of sufferings” through reproaches (affliction, abuse) and tribulations (Gk. *thlipsis*, “pressure”; it is an onomatopoeic term, meaning the word is formed from the sound it makes when pronounced. *Thlipsis*, the sound of crushing grapes, means “pressure”). The writer also indicates that suffering comes to those who sympathize (“show compassion”; “feel with”) with those who are suffering (v. 34; cf. 13:3, “as if in prison with them”).

One trial the readers of this letter suffered was the loss of their possessions. But they accepted it “joyfully.”

The writer is introducing a point he will drive home strongly later—this world is not our home. A characteristic common among the faithful is that they all confess that they are *strangers* here (see 11:13-16; 13:14). The writer reminds them of the time when they accepted the plundering of their goods since they knew that they have a better possession awaiting them, a possession that “abides.” Jesus referred to this abiding possession as the treasure “where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves cannot break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19). It is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to obtain what he cannot lose.



[35-39] “Therefore. . .” Before moving on to the great exposition of faith in chapter 11, the writer first urges his readers not to cast away their confidence, reminding them that it has “great reward” (the better possession referred to above). “Do not throw away” is just another way of stating his theme, to “hold fast” (3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23). We are to hang on to the confidence that comes from faith and commitment in and to Christ, and not let go for anything or anyone. Whatever must be suffered is worth it, for there is “great reward”—what God has promised—for those who are faithful to the end (see Revelation 2:10). The Bible never condones a mercenary attitude, but neither does it minimize the reward to be given later. The test is in developing the kind of faith that causes us to focus on heaven while undergoing various trials on earth (see 12:1-2).

The writer says “you need endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised” (v. 36). He is not suggesting that we earn salvation. His reference is to staying faithful to God despite persecution. In I Peter 3:17, Peter says, “For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.” It is not that God wills His people to suffer for

suffering sake (there is no virtue in that). But God desires that, if they suffer, they suffer for doing what is right (see I Peter 4:16). This is the “will of God”: to endure suffering, if required, keeping our eye on Jesus and the joy on the other side of the trial (again, see 12:1-2).

The writer uses a classic statement of faith to make his point and to introduce the great examples of faith he discusses in chapter 11. He refers to Habakkuk 2:3-4. Jewish readers would remember

that Habakkuk was concerned about the oppression of his people by his own people, and took that concern to God. God told Habakkuk that He was bringing a judgment on the oppressors, but that the judgment would come through the Chaldeans (the Babylonians). Habakkuk was shocked, since he considered the Chaldeans far worse than his own people. He wondered how God could use someone even more wicked to accomplish His ends. God assured Habakkuk that the judgment of Babylonians “will not delay.” He said, in effect, “but you Habakkuk, like any others who are just, will live by your faith.” In other words, regardless of how things looked, no matter how desperate the circumstances, God is in control. *Believe* it. Trust in it. Do not shrink back, because God has no pleasure in those who quit living by faith (verses 37-38).

The writer ends this section with a positive word. He includes himself and says, “We are not of the *shrinking back* type! We’re not going to fall back into destruction, but we’re just like those who have faith, the kind of faith that preserves the soul.” The word “preserving” can be translated “possessing.” Faith does not come by possessing the truth, but by allowing the truth to possess you. Once that truth gets possession of your soul, there is no turning back.

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*Complete the assignment starting on page 6*

# Assignment

## UNIT 1 [10:19-25]

1. What does the “holy place” refer to?
2. How do we enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus?
3. Describe how the flesh of Christ is the “veil.”
4. How and when are our hearts sprinkled clean and our “bodies washed with pure water”?
5. What enables us to hold fast our confession without wavering? Explain.
6. What exactly is v. 25 saying not to forsake?
7. What is the purpose of assembling?
8. What is the “day” of v. 25?

### Discussion

Explore the nuances of meaning of “drawing near,” a term which appears several times in Hebrews. What is the derivation of the term? What is the main idea expressed by the term?

## UNIT 2 [10:26-31]

1. What is “willful” sin? What other kinds of sin are there? What is the Old Testament background?
2. What is the point of saying that “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (if one goes on sinning willfully)?
3. What do backsliders have to look forward to?
4. A backslider is charged with three crimes in v. 29. Describe each.
5. Who will the Lord judge?
6. What does it mean to “fall into the hands of the living God”?

### Discussion

What means does the writer use to emphasize the importance of staying faithful in this section? Describe the condition of one who falls away. Describe his future.

## UNIT 3 (10:32-39)

1. How would it help the readers of Hebrews to remember past times of suffering?
2. In what specific ways had these people suffered?
3. What is “sympathy”?
4. How would someone “throw away” his confidence?

5. What is the “will of God” (v. 36)?
  
6. What is the context of Habakkuk from which the quote in vv. 37-38 comes?
  
7. What is the opposite of “shrinking back”?
  
8. What does shrinking back lead to? What does faith lead to?

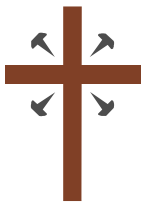
**Discussion**

Most denominations in the U.S. teach a doctrine of “eternal security,” i.e., that you cannot ever fall from the grace of God (also known as “impossibility of apostasy” or “perseverance of the saints”). What does this section say to such a doctrine?



**Research**

Read the book of Habakkuk. Read Numbers 15:22-31 for background on “willfull sin.”



**Theology**

What characteristic of God is emphasized in this unit?



**History**

What was the situation of the readers of this letter?



# Thought-Provoking

## Have you ever felt like this?

“My relationship with God seems so weak...yet I’m supposed to be helping others grow...I can’t even seem to get my own act together — how am I supposed to help others be more faithful?”

“Sometimes I feel like I’m praying to the wall. I know, at least intellectually, that God is there but I can’t seem to convince myself that my praying is really getting through...”

“I know the Bible inside-out — yet I don’t feel like I have any more faith than I did 5 years ago. , .what’s wrong with me?”

“My faith seems real strong when I’m talking with another person — maybe a Mormon or member of a denomination...but then I go out and do something I know is against God’s will...”

“Sometimes I wish we lived in a country where Christianity was a life or death situation — then I’d know for sure how strong my faith is...”

“I admit it, I’m afraid to die — I mean really afraid. I don’t think I’m so anxious for the Lord to come right now — I’m not so sure I’m ready...”

# 2

## Faith & Faithfulness



### What is “Faith”?

The word “faith” itself needs little definition; like “love,” it is better described than defined. But there are many things associated with faith, phrases like “walk by faith” or “live by faith” and these can seem ambiguous. For example, to “live” by faith can refer either to behavior, or to being justified (“alive”) by faith. The Bible speaks of a saving faith and a practical, working faith. The word may be used to describe an attitude of trust, even by itself. Abraham’s faith in Romans 4, Habakkuk’s faith, or James negative view of mere attitude without action in 2:14-26, are all examples of this use. However, while faith and obedience are separate, faith always *includes* obedience where any action is called for, even the “action” of waiting.

B. F. Westcott said, “everyone lives by faith, however he lives.” Even in the little things, like switching on a light or driving a car, we live by faith. When we talk about ancestors we’ve never seen or relatives we’ve never met, we do so by “faith,” basing it on the testimony of others. Every historical event which preceded our birth must be accepted as true by “faith.” We even accept the fact of our “birth” by faith!

What all humans have in common, regardless of religious experience or training, is a belief in some things without tangible evidence, things not experienced by the five senses. We flip the light switch because we believe it will turn on a light. Few of us know or care why the light goes on, nor about the particular process which is occurring to make it happen. We just flip the switch by faith and get a little irritated when the bulb burns out!

So faith itself is common enough. It is based upon what we learn and is simply defined as “confidence or trust in a person or thing.” If we say we have “faith” in a friend, we mean we trust them or have confidence in them. We even have faith in inanimate objects such as the computer I’m using to type this lesson. Not only that, I “trust” my Durango to get me to my destination, that my tires won’t blow out and that the metal won’t fly off the car—you get the point. We have faith in these things.

But is it that simple? Why do we have such “faith”? Is there a basis for it? Is it reasonable? Or are we all mad?! We have faith in people, and even things, because we must. Without faith, we would be absolutely immobilized by fear. Think of a world where you could not trust anyone or anything. We just cannot function without “living by faith,” at least to some extent.

But there is more to biblical faith than what we’ve described so far. A faithful friend is one who has proven himself trustworthy on previous occasions, perhaps in times of stress. We have reason to trust the person. If someone asks you why you trust your friend, you may well say, “I just do.”

Faith, then, is not a nebulous, mystical concept. On the contrary, it is part of our daily experience. In fact, faith is as real as life. The writer of Hebrews says, “But without faith it is impossible to please God. . .” (Hebrews 11:6) and, “The just shall live by faith” (Hebrews 10:38). But these passages aren’t talking about light switches, cars or even friends. They talk of a faith which is

directed heavenward and has as its goal the saving of our souls. It is a faith that’s based upon the absolute veracity of God Himself.



## Word Study

### “Faith” & “Faithfulness”

English versions of the New Testament usually use the word “faith” to translate the Greek word *pistis*, “firm persuasion.” The American Heritage Dictionary defines faith as, 1. A confident belief in the truth, value or trustworthiness of a person, idea or thing. 2. Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. 3. Loyalty to a person or thing; allegiance. 4. Belief and trust in God. 5. A system of religious belief. 6. A set of principles or beliefs. Our English word comes from the Latin, *fides*, to trust. Words like “fidelity” or “bona fide” come from the same Latin root.

“Faithful” is defined as: Adhering firmly and devotedly to a person, cause or idea; loyal. 2. Worthy of trust or belief; reliable. 3. Consistent with truth or actuality: a, faithful reproduction. 4. Having or full of faith. Synonyms: loyal, true, constant, steadfast, staunch, resolute, devoted, trustworthy.

“Faith” appears in the Old Testament only four times in the NASB (Dt. 32:51; Job 39:12; Psalm 146:6; Hab. 2:4), though the word “belief” is found more frequently. In every case, the Old Testament assumes that to hear and believe means to obey. There is no notion of faith apart from deeds. The emphasis is on faithfulness.

In the New Testament, the word occurs 246 times. While the Old Testament emphasis is on faithfulness, the New Testament frequently uses the word in the basic sense of “confident belief” or trust. Sometimes, *pistis* is used in the very simple sense of “mental assent” (Jas. 2:19; John 2:23-25).

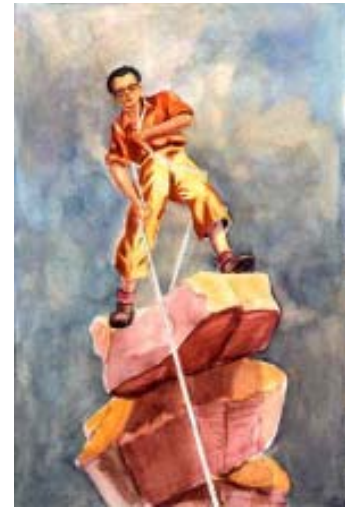
Biblical faith (sometimes called “saving faith”) has two essential components: (1) trust or acceptance — belief that Jesus is Lord with acknowledgment of His resurrection, and (2) intellectual content, the revealed truth that is firmly believed and reflected in the life of the believer. Stated another way, there must be trust, but there must also be a promise or command to trust in.

There are at least two applications of faith: (1) A mental or psychological acceptance (trust, not just mental assent) of the commands and promises of God and (2) an orientation, or reorientation, of life on the basis of what God has commanded or promised. Faith requires both mental assent and trust and action corresponding to the mental assent. Action without assent or trust cannot be faith and therefore cannot please God (Heb. 11:6; see I Cor. 13:1-3, for the same principle applied to love). But acceptance of the commands and promises without an orientation of life on the basis of them is sin (Jas. 4:17) and exposes us as “hearers of the law, not doers” (Jas. 1:19-27). Worse, it makes us hypocrites (see Matthew 23).

# 3

## Hebrews 11

### The Assurance of Things Hoped For



Hebrews 11 is one of the most famous chapters in all of the Bible. It has been called the “Roll Call of the Faithful,” the “Hall of Faith,” the “Honor Roll of Faith,” and many other titles. However, we often forget that Hebrews 11 is found in a context that begins before v. 1. In 10:19, the writer appealed to the blood of Jesus as the means by which we have confidence (*parresian*, boldness, cf. 3:6) to “enter the holy place” (the presence of God, represented by the Holy of Holies, shut off to the people under the former covenant). That confidence has “great reward” so he encourages his readers not to throw it away (v. 35).

These Christians were facing an uncertain future, even the threat of death (cf. 12:4; note the frequent reference to death in chapter 11). The writer had reminded them to think back to former days when they “endured a great conflict of sufferings” (v. 32), even accepting “joyfully the seizure of your property” knowing they had a better possession in store (v. 34). They had suffered before for their faith; they must be willing to suffer again with the same admirable attitude that they had then.

The historical context of chapter 11, then, is the suffering that these Christians were facing for Christ. “For you have need of endurance” because it will only be after they have done the will of God that they will receive what was promised (v. 36). Doing the “will of God” is what motivated Jesus (10:7; cf. John 4:34; 5:30; 8:29). He is the perfect example of one who endured suffering because he could see the joy on the

other side of it (12:2; cf. I Peter 4:1). These Christians could not quit now, because the promise will only be received by those who endure. Those who “shrink back” are headed for destruction. God takes no pleasure in those who shrink back, but He does take pleasure in those who have faith: the righteous (before God) are those who live by faith (verses. 37-39).

The words from Habakkuk 2:4, “the righteous shall live by faith,” provide the immediate context of Hebrews 11. In Habakkuk, those who “shrink back” are described as the “proud” (the arrogant or puffed up ones). The connection is clear: to shrink back in the face of trials is arrogance because you choose to put your confidence in yourself instead of in God. Only those who persevere in their trust in God can please God (11:6).

This chapter can be divided into four paragraphs, roughly along chronological lines. (1) 11:1-7 deals with pre-flood heroes of faith; (2) 11:8-22, patriarchal heroes; (3) 11:23-31, the faithful under Moses; (4) 11:32-40, the faithful under subsequent eras. 11:1-2 are introductory and the whole chapter is bracketed by the words “gained approval” in verses 2 and 39. The teaching of the chapter carries over into chapter 12, where Jesus is presented, not among the “clouds of witness,” but as the one who is worthy to be looked at and considered (12:1-2).

The subject, of course, is faith. The Greek word, *pistis*, occurs some 24 times in this chapter. While this chapter does not provide a formal definition of the

concept, it does describe it in some detail through a catalog of the faithful acts of men and women. Such a catalog would be unheard of in Greek tradition. “Only an uneducated person would suffer for what is indemonstrable” (Lane, p. 316). But God does not see as man sees. God blesses those who are willing to put their trust in Him, as these Old Testament worthies did. The aim is not to develop an abstract concept of “faith,” but to show that faith is based in the nature of God. In 10:23, the writer points out that we hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, not by gritting our teeth and steeling ourselves against various trials, but because “He who promised in faithful.” The ultimate test of faith is not our own strength, but the strength of God. Ours is but to believe Him and His promises. When Jesus told His followers that they had “little faith” (Matthew 6:30) or “no faith” (Mark 4:40) or “great faith” (Matthew 8:10), He was referring to their view of God, not the quantity of faith the man could muster. Our faith is only as good as the promise and the Promisor. Since our faith is based upon the promise of God, a God who cannot lie (6:18-20), our faith can be great, indeed!

### Hebrews 11:1-2 – The Proposition.

Faith (*pistis*) is without the definite article (“the”); the writer is speaking of faith in general, not about *the* faith as a body of doctrine which we teach and believe (cf. Jude 3). The same Greek word is used for the word “belief” in the New Testament. Verse 27 defines faith: “as seeing Him who is invisible.” A person who will only believe what he can see with his own eyes cannot be a spiritual person and therefore cannot please God since he is devoid of faith. Faith apprehends as real that which cannot be seen.

The writer tells us that faith is the “assurance of things hoped for.” Much discussion swirls about the word “substance” (*hupostasis*). Is faith a mental assurance, something that our mind grasps, and therefore primarily a psychological matter? The word can mean “foundation” or “substance” (Latin, *substantia*), and may suggest something deeper than mere mental assurance. Papyri documents have been discovered that indicate the word often carried the meaning “title deed” or guarantee. Looked at from this perspective,

faith is our *guarantee* of things hoped for (the holy place, the heavenly home: see verses 13-16), and is a reality of those things, not just a firm hope. It’s as if we have the “deed to the property, the possession” and that deed is our faith (cf. Ephesians 1:13). If we “shrink back,” it is tantamount to forfeiting the property by handing the deed back, saying “thanks, but no thanks.”

This view fits with the second part of v. 1 which says faith is the “conviction” (Gk. *elegchos*, proof, evidence). “Assurance” (substance) and “conviction” are complimentary statements (in “apposition”). Faith gives us a guarantee, faith provide proof, of things hoped for, things not seen. Our faith, then, is not just a mental exercise, but a kind of sight. God and heaven are as real to eyes of faith as if we had seen them with our own eyes. This is the kind of faith that “men of old” had by which they “gained approval” (v. 2), a point that is made in verses 2, 4, and 5.

“Gained approval” means that God bore witness, or testified, to their faithfulness. Faithfulness to God is the force of the term “by faith,” repeated 18 times in this passage. Faith is clearly more than mental assent, since “full of faith” means more than “full of assent.” Even the devils “believe and tremble” (James 2:19). What emerges in these examples is that mental assent to the words of God led them to trust and then action in light of that trust. Faith that stops at mental assent may yet be called “faith,” but it is a *dead* faith according to James (James 2:14ff.). Without a trusting submission that produces works, “faith” is lifeless and worthless. But a faith that starts at mental assent to the promises of God and then proceeds on to unqualified trust in Him, is a faith that is substance and conviction. It is by that kind of faith that we function from day-to-day.

This is the attitude which set apart the faithful men and women of times past. It provided them with the power to carry through despite all kinds of adversity. And because of their faith, God “bore witness” to them. It is God Himself who testifies to their faithfulness and He has recorded their names in the record of His word.

# 4

## Examples of Faith

### Pre-Flood Age: Hebrews 11:3-7

#### Commentary

[3] We “understand” (i.e., perceive with the reflective intelligence), by faith, that God created all there is. “Worlds” is, literally, “ages.” “The world—history—is not the result of blind fate, but answers to an expression of the will of God” (Westcott, p. 352). This is basic, but profound. If we are willing to acknowledge that God created the world, isn’t everything else relatively elementary? If the fact that God created the world by the word of His mouth (see Psa. 33:6) is substance and proof to us, what would prevent us from believing that nothing is impossible for God? And our faith is proof that God made the world out of things which are not visible (cf. Romans 4:17). In other words, matter is not eternal, as some scientists want us to believe.

[4] Literally, Abel offered a “greater” or “more abundant” sacrifice than Cain. The exact meaning of this is a matter of speculation since the Bible does not say how Abel’s sacrifice exceeded Cain’s. We know for certain, however, that Abel offered his sacrifice through faith and for that he is listed among the righteous (10:38 - “the just [righteous] shall live by faith”).

When the writer says “through which he obtained...” and “through it being dead...” is he talking about Abel’s sacrifice or his faith? It seems he is talking about Abel’s faith, his sacrifice being evidence that he was one who “lived by faith.” It is not that the sacrifice was the only aspect of faith in Abel’s life, but was the one act that prompted Cain’s jealousy, and cost Abel his life. His faithfulness to God resulted in his death, a message the readers of the Hebrew letter needed to

hear. Faith will get you in trouble as often as it will spare you from it (see Daniel 6). Because Abel did God’s bidding, he was counted faithful and he still speaks, though dead.

Abel recognized the natural obligations of man toward God and rendered worship to God, faithful unto death (cf. Rev. 2:10). We need to understand that our first priority is to worship God, realizing that all we do to the glory of God is worship (I Cor. 10:31). However, we do not worship God when we do those things that are not according to His will. Our worship must be in “spirit and truth” (John 4:24). That means that not only must we put our “heart” into it, it also means we must follow directions. That seems to be at least one legacy of faith that Abel has left us.

[5] We know little about the life of Enoch, but what we do know is enough—he was a man who “actively relied on the promises of God” (cf. Jude 14). Enoch “walked with God,” as did Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Abraham (Gen. 17:1). The walk of faith involves knowledge and action and we can infer that God revealed some things to Enoch. Saving faith is a working faith which starts with knowledge of God’s will. In the Old Testament, “knowledge” is often used as a synonym for “walk” (see Hosea 4:1-2, 6; 6:3-4).

Because of his faith, Enoch never tasted death. Instead he was translated, which simply means “removed” from the scene or “carried away.” Elijah was also “translated,” albeit more dramatically (II Kings 2:11). The point Hebrews 11:5, remember, is the example of faith which Enoch provides—he, through his

faith, was *pleasing* to God. Our goal is life must be to gain God's approval (I believe the primary meaning of the word "blessing" is "approved of God"; look at the beatitudes [Matthew 5:3-12] that way and see if it makes any difference).

[6] Enoch pleased God by his faith. But without faith, there is no way we can please Him: it is "impossible." What does it mean to "please God"? The answer is in this chapter. It means to gain the approval of God, to "obtain the witness." Back in 10:38, the writer quoted the LXX of Habakkuk 2:4 and said that "if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him." Our aim must be to please God (not mom and dad, our friends, our co-workers or fellow preachers, but GOD). We can only do this through faith—a trusting submission and unfailing allegiance to the Master. The writer points to two aspects of this faith in v. 6: it involves *believing* (the only use of the verb in Hebrews 11), that God is actual and that God acts—that "He is" (i.e., that He exists) and, secondly, that "He is a rewarder." Of whom? "Of those who seek Him." The construction of the Greek word, *ekzetousin*, implies that the seeker finds, or at least exhausts his powers of seeking; hence, some translations add: "diligently seek" (e.g., NKJV). Seeking Him is necessary to please Him (see Matthew 6:33; cf. Psalm 42:1-2; 63:1).

[7] Noah was "warned" by God about things "not yet seen" (a destroying flood) and acted on that word (cf. 8:5, where Moses is "warned" by God, and builds the tabernacle "according to the pattern"). The text says he "in reverence prepared an ark." "Reverence" (*eulabetheis*) means to "act circumspectly," to "beware." The sense of the verse is that Noah heard God, and upon hearing Him took great care in setting out to prepare the ark. He took God at His word. The results of this act of faith were threefold: (1) he saved his family, (2) condemned the world. "Condemning the world" was not something Noah said, nor was he the "judge"; this is just the flip side of

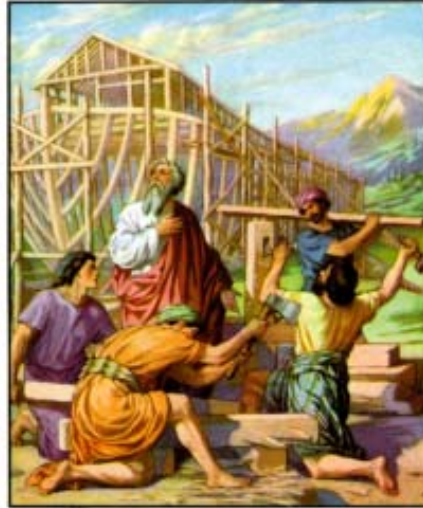
"saved his household." If only Noah's household was saved, then the rest of the world was condemned. Noah didn't do the condemning, but his righteousness is contrasted with the evil in the world and the flood-

waters made the distinction. Thus it is for all who live by faith. If our first priority is to please God, we, by our actions, "condemn" all those who insist on living by sight. Often, we irritate them, too. (3) Noah became "an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." This is similar to the statement made about Abraham in Genesis 15:6 and repeated in Romans 4: "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness." In Abraham's case, he was asked to accept something, to trust in God, and he did. In Noah's case, he was

told to build something, in light of future events, and he did. They were "righteous" by virtue of their faith.

Like Enoch, Noah walked with God. He was obedient to that which he understood to be God's will. Obedience, in the Old Testament, is simply a development of the concept of "hearing." We might describe it as the *correct response to the voice of God*. To hear (effectively) is to be persuaded (see 4:2) and thus, to *obey*. The only alternative is active resistance; in the Old Testament, this is called "rebellion" while in the New, it is called "disobedience." In the Greek New Testament, the word often translated "disobedience" is *apitheo*, the same word often translated "unbelief." It is clear that disobedience is the direct opposite of faith. The point is that when God demands an action, obedience is the bottom line. There's no substitute for it, and no faith without it.

*Complete the questions for Unit 1 on page 20.*



# 5

## Examples of Faith

### Patriarchal Age: Hebrews 11:8-22

[8-12] Abraham and Sarah's life provides us with a vivid example of walking by faith and not by sight (see Genesis 11:26-12:4). Abraham "went out" (obedience to God's word), "not knowing where he was going" (trust in God to lead him), and he did it because he "was looking forward to the city with foundations" (faith based in the promise of God). While we see these concepts combined in Abraham's action of leaving the land of Ur, remember that obedience and faith are not synonymous. That is, faith is what *prompts* obedience and that obedience must be to a promise of God. Abraham could have left Ur (or Haran) without faith; he could even have obeyed God without faith. The crucial phrase in v. 8 is "he went out, not knowing where he was going." In a way he did know. He was going wherever God led him. But he didn't see where he was going because God hadn't shown the land to him yet. He had to cast himself completely on the Lord.

The reason that is given for Abraham's willingness to dwell in tents as in a foreign land (it was foreign because he had not received the promise as yet) is that he was looking for the "city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (v. 10). This theme is developed a bit more in verses 13-16, because the forward-looking, *hopeful* attitude it describes is a central element of the kind of faith that helps us endure the trials of life, and "finish the race" (12:1-2).

Before expanding that theme, however, the writer tells us that Sarah received the ability to conceive, because "she considered Him faithful who had promised" (v. 11). Thus Sarah becomes an example of what the writer encouraged us to do in 10:23, viz., "to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering."

Why? Faith is based upon the promises of none other than God Himself; "for He who promised is faithful." While Sarah's faith was somewhat shaky at the beginning (remember, she laughed to herself when she heard the promise repeated, when she was very old; see Genesis 18:12), she remembered who it was who had promised. It was God who said, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14).

[13-16] These verses describe the essential element in the walk of faith: faith is the substance of things *hoped for*, the evidence of things *not seen*. Hope that is seen is not hope (Romans 8:24). This is illustrated in these people who were willing to trust God, even though they did not receive in full measure the promises God made to them. These verses prove again that faith is more than passive belief or mere mental assent. It is an attitude about life. It gives substance to hopes, and proof to the invisible. It gives us a kind of sight—not tangible or physically visible, but an ability, nonetheless, to "see" the promises and welcome them. Because we are so certain of receiving the promise, through faith, we are able to live as strangers on the earth. Faith transforms our earthly goals into a search for a true homeland, a better country, a city prepared by God (vv. 14-15).

It is at the point of fully appreciating the "pilgrim" or "stranger" aspect of Christianity that we will experience a quantum leap in our faith. We are not here to finish and furnish the world. Instead, we are diligently seeking God, who is never ashamed to be our God.

[17-19] If we are living a life of faith we should expect trials of faith. Abraham was tested by a command of

God to offer up his only son, Isaac. Here's a case where a man had physically received the crucial part of the promise, but then was told to give it up. Abraham knew that the promises upon which he was relying were to be realized through this only son. We can only guess at how perplexed and confused Abraham must have been at God's command, besides being grieved at the prospect of killing his own son. But he did not complain, he just obeyed. Why? How? Because he "considered" — or accounted — that God was able to men from the dead (remember, Sarah "considered Him faithful," 11:11). Abraham's faith proved to him not only that God created the world (11:3), but also that he was able to "give life to dead" (Romans 4:17). The words "as a type" in v. 19 tell us that Abraham, in his heart, had completed the command. Even though the angel of the Lord stayed his hand, it was as if Isaac was killed and brought back to life.

When God speaks to us through His word, we need the faith of Abraham — just obey, knowing God will provide. We get into so much trouble when we start second-guessing God's plan, whether the discussion is about marriage, divorce and remarriage, church discipline, the growth of the church, or you name it. One secret of faith is found in the words here: "he considered that God is *able*. . ." We may not think God's way will work in "this situation." But let's take a cue from Abraham and learn to walk by faith and let God work out the details.

[20-22] Another aspect of faith is demonstrated in how we view death. We need to examine our faith under the bare light of the prospect of death. What will go through your mind as you lay dying? Intellectually, we know that Christians can die triumphantly and in full assurance of God's care. Anything less indicates a lack of trust. When we face death, we have an opportunity to glorify God in our dying; or we can glorify ourselves by calling attention to our suffering; or we can glorify Satan, by caving in and giving death all its power, it "sting" (I Cor. 15:55).

The three men listed in our text illustrate the proper way to face death. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau because he believed in the future (Genesis 27:27-29, 39-40). Jacob likewise blessed his posterity, believing there was "more to come." The writer adds the interesting information that Jacob "worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff." This refers to an earlier time (that

is, a time before the blessing took place, recorded in Genesis 47:31) when Jacob made Joseph promise that he would not bury him in Egypt, but in the land of promise. The writer quotes from the Septuagint version (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) where the Hebrew word *matteh* is translated staff. Most of our versions have the word "bed" in 47:31, translating the Hebrew word *mittah*. "Staff" is probably the better choice, but in any case this passage tells us that "worship" does not require the four walls of a church building to constitute "worship." Jacob worshipped by honoring God through his faith.

Joseph likewise demonstrated that the "things he hoped had substance" by commanding that his bones be transferred from Egypt to the promised land. All of these men exemplified the truth of Hebrews 11:13—they died without physically seeing the promises of God fulfilled in their own lifetime, yet they lived and died by their faith in those promises.

It provides no excuse for spiritual indolence, but it is helpful to realize that these men were not perfect. Perhaps Isaac best illustrates this point, though Jacob would run a close second. Isaac was basically a materialistic man, living much of his life by his wits. He often did the wrong thing in the wrong way and with the wrong attitude. Yet when it came his time to die, he faced it in faith. He understood the promise and the irreversibility of God's plans and blessed Jacob, even though he favored his rugged son, Esau. Jacob was also inconsistent in his life, sometimes faithful, sometimes brazenly faithless. It was by deceit that he procured the blessing of his father. Yet, in the end, he proved to be a man of faith. Note that Hebrews 11 is not in our Bibles for the purpose of condoning every aspect of these people's lives. What it does is call our attention to acts done by faith instead of by sight (II Corinthians 5:7).

Joseph, on the other hand, is a remarkable figure. He lived all of his adult life in Egypt, much of it as an official of high rank in the government. It had been about 200 years since the promise was given to Abraham, and yet there was no fulfillment in sight. In spite of this, Joseph, by faith, gave instructions concerning his bones. Like Jacob, he was convinced that God would fulfill his promise; he relied on it!

*Complete the questions for Unit 2 on page 20.*

# 6

## Examples of Faith

### Mosaical Age: Hebrews 11:23-31

#### Commentary

[23] It is the faith of Moses' parents that draws the attention of the writer at first. The fact that Moses was a "beautiful child" (the word suggests a "beauty or a comeliness that is unusually striking," Hughes, p. 492) is not meant to suggest that they would have given him up if he wasn't beautiful; it may mean, in an "Old Testament" context, that they believed God had great things planned for Moses. In any case, they made a *choice* which demonstrated their faith in God. The key language here is that they "were not afraid of the King's edict." It illustrates that a firm faith will always overcome fear. This is the same kind of faith that set Moses and Rahab apart (vv. 27, 31) since they too feared God more than their respective kings. Jesus reminded his disciples not to fear those who are able to kill the body, "but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Whenever we are faced with a choice between what man can do to us and serving God, we must choose to do the latter (cf. Rom. 8:31-39). This theme is illustrated more completely in verses 36ff.

[24-27] It is ironic, but instructive, that the writer of Hebrews utilizes a poor choice of Moses to illustrate an instance of his faith. Moses, out of a zeal for his people,

committed a murder. God did not, and does not, condone murder, regardless of the circumstance. But we are directed to the motive of Moses: he committed the act because he loved his people and he was upset about the burden they were bearing under the Egyptian yoke (see Exodus 2:11-15). He was found out and had to flee Egypt to save his life. Interestingly, we're told he did this "by faith" (vv. 24-27). Perhaps this is all to

bring our attention back to God, who uses us even in our weakness, whether self-inflicted or not (cf. II Corinthians 12:7-10). But keep in mind that Moses did make a choice to serve his people, ready to forfeit his Egyptian privileges, even if his means of serving leaves something to be desired.

There are a couple of crucial points about faith in this example. First, it requires a turning back on the world and an embracing of the future promises of God, as we've already seen (verses. 13-16). Here, the writer says Moses' faith was in his refusal to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (an admission that

sin is pleasure—that's what makes it tempting!). To *endure ill-treatment* instead of *enjoying pleasure* takes a great deal of faith. Secondly, it involves considering (there's that word again!) the reproaches of Christ greater than the riches of the world. Whether Moses had a complete concept of the Messiah at this point in



his life is doubtful; but he was “looking for the reward” and that reward was not to be found in the treasures of Egypt.

This is a significant point, especially when we realize the position Moses had and the nature of his surroundings. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that Moses was a great general in the Egyptian army and was a hero in Egypt. Stephen said he was “educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). But when he reached the age of 40, it entered his heart to help his brethren (Acts 7:23). Why? Obviously he had been taught by his family about the promises of God to the descendants of Abraham. His faith in those promises caused him to act, albeit in an unwise manner. But it illustrates that a heart full of faith cannot be held back for long. It would have been easy for Moses to “sit tight” and finish out his life enjoying the riches and honor due the son of Pharaoh’s daughter in the wealthiest part of the world. But his faith wouldn’t allow him to trade temporal riches for what, in the long run, is far greater: the reproaches (sufferings) of Christ.

[28-29] Verse 28 brings us back to the source of faith. Two examples are mentioned: the keeping of the Passover and the sprinkling of blood on the doorposts (Exodus 21). Moses did these things *by faith*; that is, he did them because of his view to the future and he did them because God *said* to do them. In its purest sense, faith is doing God’s bidding: “faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

In v. 29, the writer turns attention to the people whom Moses led. Moses’ faith rubbed off on the Israelites and they all passed through the Red Sea. The Egyptians, however, were drowned, not because they didn’t have faith (they must have, or why would they have entered between the walls of the water? Their problem was that they had no promise from God to rely on. The promise was made by God to the Israelites, and they survived.

So, in the life of Moses we see the value of correct decisions. The choices he made were by faith. Some of the choices were based upon his outlook and condition of heart, even though they were imperfect, perhaps

even sinful at times. Others were based upon a specific revelation of God (such as the Passover and its implementation and the incident at the Red Sea). In any case, Moses was a man of faith and demonstrated it in the choices he made. He put God first.

[31-31] The writer continues his recital of faith with two examples from the days when Israel finally entered the promised land, under the leadership of Joshua. The first example is expected: the Israelites encircled the city of Jericho for seven days and the walls fell down, just as God had promised. It wasn’t their faith that made the walls crumble; it was God. But God required that they show their trust in Him by doing exactly as He commanded.

The second example is somewhat surprising. We might expect more about Joshua or Caleb, but the writer chooses instead to present a Gentile, Rahab as an model of faith. The event is recorded in Joshua 2:9ff. Word had gotten to Rahab about the exploits of the people of Israel under God’s rule. And thought she was not an honorable woman, she displayed her faith first, by believing the words about that God and, second, by choosing to fear the unseen God of Israel instead of the visible king of Jericho. The writer chose her as an illustration for good reason—it shows that faith rests in the word of God and about God. For a pagan harlot to believe and risk her life because of her faith is amazing, especially when considered in light of Israel’s own repeated failures (cf. Numbers 13-14).

*Complete the questions for Unit 3 on page 20.*

# 7

## Examples of Faith

### Other Examples: Hebrews 11:32-40



#### Commentary

[32] The writer begins this section as if he is admitting that it would be impossible to review every worthy example of faith throughout Israel's history. The sermonic nature of the letter is illustrated by his comment that "time would fail me," a problem every preacher faces! So he must be content to simply mention such giants of faith as Gideon and David and Samuel and the prophets. From what we know from the Old Testament accounts, we might question the choices of men like Barak, Samson and Jephthah. But since they are included, we know that they subdued kingdoms because of their faith, which was displayed in their acts of courage. We should not assume that because a person is listed in Hebrews 11 that God is putting His stamp of approval on their whole lives. But in each case, there were times in their lives when they acted on the basis of what God had said, and with an eye toward the unseen future; hence, they did it "by faith."

[33-38] In these general descriptions of the effects of faith, the writer shows that there were physical victories and defeats. Faith does not guarantee physical deliverance, but it does act on the basis of a better future ("a better resurrection," v. 35). Some of the specific names left off the list are surprising, but they are referred to indirectly through a description of what

they did. Most obvious are the references to "shutting the mouths of lions" (Daniel) and "quenching the power of fire" (Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego). The other references are to more general "feats of faith," including torture, mockings and imprisonment. In some cases, the faithful lost their lives, sometimes in violent ways (legend has it that Isaiah was "sawn in two"). In other cases, the faithful were doomed to wander, homeless, as it were, because of their faithfulness to God. The writer editorializes that "the world was not worthy of such" (v. 38).

[39-40] The writer closes out this famous chapter with the reminder that all of these people, though far from perfect, had "gained approval through their faith" (39). Faith—the substance of things hoped for and the proof of things not seen—really is the key to pleasing God (11:6). While the writer has mentioned a couple of times that the faithful had not received the promises, emphasizing their faith in the "heavenly country," he mentions it here for another purpose. In v. 40, we're told that they could not receive the promise because they could not be made perfect apart from us. Why? The answer is found in chapter 12, as the writer fixes our attention on the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ (12:2). In 2:10, Jesus was called the author (or "pioneer") of our salvation. God spoke in the past in various ways and through various spokesmen, but

now speaks entirely through His Son (1:1-2). The promises were to be received through Him, and until He pierced history, the promises remained unfulfilled. We are now perfected through Him, and those faithful people of old are perfected through Him as well (see 9:15).

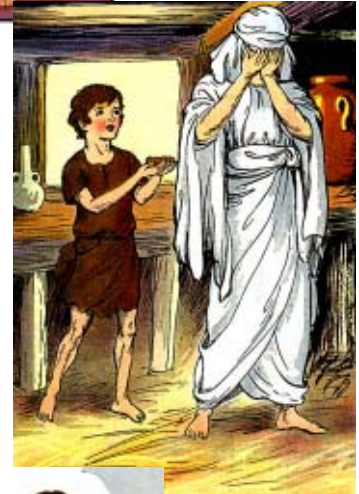
### Summary

While we look forward to the reward which God has promised us, we must never forget that persecution is the lot of the Christian. Jesus has promised that such will be the case (Jn. 16:33; II Tim. 3:12; Rom. 8:17). Why? Simply because there is such a stark contrast between this world and the next. Those who are of this world stand opposed to those who are “in the world but not of the world.” That creates a tension of eternal dimensions (see John 15:18-21; 17:14-17). Conflict is part of the Christian life and it takes courage to deal with such conflict.

The writer presents ample truth that those who lived by faith also lived courageous lives. He talks of Israel and the faith they demonstrated when the walls of Jericho were brought down. He mentions Rahab’s faith in believing God more than the idolatrous kings of her own land. Many others are mentioned and commended for their faith which was displayed through their courage. Some fought against foreign enemies and some waged their war against the immorality and idolatry of God’s own people. But in all cases, courage was common.

We should notice that the focus of this chapter is not really on these people who showed such outstanding faith. The real Hero is God Himself. It is His high and holy character in which these people placed their trust and, whether or not they survived the physical trials, God proved faithful. But the ultimate object of faith was still a promise when these people were “stoned ...sawn in two...slain with the sword.” Yet they were faithful “unto death” (Rev. 2:10). We have it so much better! Christ has come and sealed the promise for us. Now our faith can look backward to the fulfillment, which should give us strength and courage for the journey. Perhaps we need the reminder that faith without risk is not a biblical, saving faith.

*Complete the questions for Unit 4 on page 20.*



# Assignment

## Unit 1 [11:1-7]

1. What does faith do for the faithful, according to v. 1?
2. What does “gained approval” mean? Whose?
3. Faith begins with an acceptance of what great fact?
4. Why was Abel’s sacrifice better than Cain’s?
5. What is required to please God?
6. How did Noah condemn the world?

### Discussion

What exactly are we “hoping” for?

## Unit 2 [11:8-22]

1. What had Abraham left behind? Why did he leave?
2. Why was Sarah’s faith noteworthy?
3. All the faithful made a certain “confession.” What was it?
4. What is the better country to which the faithful aspire?
5. What gave Abraham the strength to offer Isaac? Did he offer him?
6. What is similar in the account of the faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph?

### Discussion

What are some of the obstacles to considering ourselves “strangers” on earth, even though we gleefully sing the song, “I just a passin’ through”?

## Unit 3 [11:23-31]

1. What was the nature of Moses’ parents’ faith?
2. Contrasting terms are used to describe Moses’ faith in vv. 25-26. What are they?
3. What motivated Moses to try to help his people?
4. Why did he keep the Passover and sprinkle the blood on the doorposts?
5. The Israelites passed safely through the Red Sea, but the Egyptians drowned when they tried. What was the difference?
6. What did the Israelites do that made the walls fall down?
7. Who was Rahab, and why was her faith so remarkable?

### Discussion

How does faith overcome fear?

## Unit 4 [11:32-40]

1. Does faith always spell v-i-c-t-o-r-y in the physical realm? How do you know?
2. In what way is the “world not worthy” of the faithful?
3. Why had these faithful people not received the promise?
4. What does “perfect” mean in v. 40?

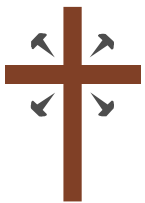
### Discussion

Have we received what was promised?



### Research

- Read some of the accounts of faith referred to in this chapter. Compare the actual events (i.e., the humanness of the faithful) with the way their faith is reported in Hebrews 11.
- There are things that are mentioned in the Bible as “opposed” to faith. Look at the concepts listed below and explain (1) their proper use, if any and (2) how they can become “anti-faith.”
  - Law: Galatians 3:12
  - Works: Romans 3:20–4:6
  - Fear: Mark 14:40
  - Doubt: James 1:6
  - Self-Assertiveness: James 4:13-16
  - Self-reliance: Mark 9:14-29
  - Fruitlessness: John 15



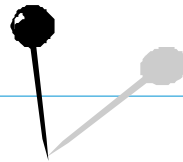
### Theology

Who is the real “Hero” of Hebrews 11? What argument is the writer *preparing* his readers for?



### History

Virtually the whole OT is covered in this chapter. Why were these OT stories so valuable to people who were facing suffering in the first century, and even today?



## Practical Exercise

Keep a journal during the class. Track of every instance of the operation of faith in your life. E.g., whom did you take at his or her word? What or whom did you trust? What did you believe, without logical proof or presentation of physical evidence? What “laws” did you obey, even though you can’t explain them? What actions did you perform because of your loyalty or allegiance to a person (to employer, child, parent, friend) or idea (politics, religion, “world view”). What actions, if any, were based completely on faith, either in God or another person? Mark down your experiences.

**FAITH**