



BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

Trust
in the
LORD
with all
thine heart

Proverbs 3:5

Summer Quarter
June | July | August 2025

Large-Print Edition

Bible Expositor and Illuminator

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SUMMER QUARTER

June, July, August 2025

Christlike Living

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SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

HEB. 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so *many* as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

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

NOTES

Learn from Good Examples

Lesson Text: Hebrews 11:1-2, 4-13

Related Scriptures: Genesis 4:3-7; 5:21-24; 6:9-22; 12:1-5; 17:15-22

TIME: about A.D. 67

PLACE: unknown

GOLDEN TEXT—“Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Introduction

Cooperstown, New York is the home for the Baseball Hall of Fame. People come to see Babe Ruth’s uniform, Ty Cobb’s glove, and many other artifacts and displays. It holds a collection of plaques honoring all those considered worthy of induction into the Hall.

The Bible, too, has something of its own Hall of Fame, and it can be found in Hebrews 11. What sets the Bible’s Hall of Fame apart is that it centers not on human achievement but on faith in what God can do. It is a “Hall of Faith.”

The entrance is marked by a succinct definition of faith followed by accounts

of its members as they are marked by humility and a heartfelt confidence in God’s goodness and grace.

The Bible makes it clear that faith is the essential ingredient of the Christian life. This being the case, it is important that we consider exactly what faith is. Our lesson text presents a picture of biblical faith, first by description and then by examples.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. **FAITH DEFINED**—Heb. 11:1-2
- II. **FAITH ILLUSTRATED**—
Heb. 11:4-13

Exposition: Verse by Verse

FAITH DEFINED

HEB. 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

The closing verses of Hebrews 10 remind us that the person who has faith is the one who is justified before God. The hall of faith chapter serves to encourage believers to persevere in their faith (vss. 38-39). With these facts

in mind, our writer deemed it important to explore the nature of true faith. Hebrews 11:1 is one of the most familiar verses in the New Testament because it answers a very important question: What is faith? The verse consists of two descriptive phrases. They are roughly parallel in meaning, but not exactly; the second phrase further explains the first.

{The word translated as “substance” can refer to an objective reality or to a strong confidence in something (see 1:3 and 3:14, where the word is used in these two ways). Perhaps the two senses can be combined; biblical faith is a strong confidence in something objectively true.}^{q1} It is certainly not some ethereal, unfounded feeling, as the world sometimes understands the idea of faith.

{The biblical idea of hope is also very different from the world’s conception, which is often a desperate, against-all-odds clinging to the notion that things might turn out all right. The believer’s hope is built on the firm foundation of the promises of God and His redeeming purpose.}^{q2} This biblical brand of hope is as certain as the fact that God is trustworthy and good.

Like “substance,” the word “evidence” has both an objective and subjective sense. It can refer to proof or to the strong convictions that arise in the presence of such proof. A person of strong faith believes in the unseen spiritual realities as much as if they were visible to his physical eye. These spiritual realities are of eternal value, the things that make life worth living (cf. II Cor. 4:18).

The realities in which we hope are unseen. If they were seen, we would not have hope but sight (cf. Rom. 8:24-25). Faith means we live in confidence in the promises God has given us.

Linking the truths he was teaching to the Old Testament for his largely Jewish audience, the author of Hebrews

pointed out that faith was what God was always looking for throughout Old Testament history (11:2).

The “elders” here refer to his Jewish readers’ Old Testament ancestors. (Additionally, although we do not know the author of Hebrews with certainty, he was almost certainly a Christian of Jewish ancestry himself.) {Faith was the means by which these ancestors “obtained a good report,” or were declared to be righteous in God’s sight (cf. Gen. 15:6) and thus were the recipients of God’s approval.}^{q3}

FAITH ILLUSTRATED

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

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

Abel (Heb. 11:4). The list of people of faith proceeds chronologically. The first example goes all the way back to the son of Adam, the first man. In Genesis 4:2-7 we are told how Abel, who was a shepherd, offered some of the choice meat from the firstborn of his flock, while Cain merely gave some of the fruit he had harvested. The Lord looked with favor on Abel's sacrifice. God did not look with favor on the offering of crops that his brother Cain gave.

Hebrews emphasizes that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and that this is what prompted God's acceptance of his gift. This acceptance was a testimony that Abel was counted as righteous in God's sight, but his brother was not.

{The phrase "he being dead yet speaketh" is a figure of speech for someone's long-lasting influence.}^{q4} In Abel's case, although he suffered an early death at the hands of his envious brother, his example of faith lives on as an example and inspiration to God's people. His life had an eternal value and purpose.

Enoch (Heb. 11:5-6). {Because of his great faith, Enoch received the mys-

terious blessing of not experiencing death. Genesis 5:24 reports that Enoch "walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."}^{q5} The term "translated" in Hebrews means "to transfer, to remove from one place to another" (Rienecker and Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan). In the midst of his life, he was taken to be in the presence of the God with whom he had already been walking so closely (see II Kgs. 2:9-12, where we learn of how Elijah was also taken away to heaven while still living).

The startling nature of what happened to Enoch is reflected in the repetition of the statement that God took him away and in the statement that he "was not found" (Heb. 11:5), words that may hint at the profound impact his sudden disappearance may have had on Enoch's generation. In fact, the author's language here is that of Genesis 5:24. Enoch was honored in this way because his life brought great satisfaction to God.

Only by faith can a person please God, as Enoch did. Hebrews 11:6 explains the indispensability of faith. Enoch's life illustrates the life of faith that should be evident in all of God's people. He is said to have walked with God, so we know that he possessed the two crucial components of faith that this verse says are at the heart of a relationship with Him. {We must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.}^{q6}

Since Enoch had fellowship with God, he certainly believed that God existed. True knowledge of God is more than merely an intellectual acknowledgment of a divine being. It is an experiential knowledge of the One who has revealed Himself in His Word. The second crucial belief is that God rewards those who seek Him. The fact that Enoch continued in his fellowship with God is evidence that he was anticipating the blessings that God prom-

ises to those who are dedicated and passionate about their desire to know Him (cf. Ps. 119:2; Matt. 7:7).

Noah (Heb. 11:7). {One of the most widely known figures from the Bible, Noah demonstrated his faith by building a huge sea vessel (and building it inland!) when there was not yet any sign that it was needed.}^{Q7} He believed what God told him (cf. Gen. 6:11-22); his faith provided him with “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

The fear that Noah had was the healthy kind born out of reverence and a confidence that God would do just as He said (cf. Prov. 1:7). He acted as a responsible head of his family. Obedience to God is always the most important way to act for the good and safety of our loved ones.

As a recipient of God’s grace (cf. Gen. 6:8), Noah is a type of the person of faith being delivered from God’s judgment. His faith stands in contrast to the unbelief of the people around him when they were warned by Noah about their unrighteousness and, perhaps, about the fearsome judgment to come (see II Pet. 2:5.) Of course, the presence of the ark itself was the clearest warning of what was coming. The people’s continued unbelief doomed them, and Noah became a concrete example of a man living because of his faith (cf. Heb. 10:38). His godly life and obedience demonstrated that faith with unmistakable clarity.

Abraham (Heb. 11:8-10). {Considering that Abraham is often regarded as the father of the faithful (cf. Gal. 3:6-9, 29), it is not surprising that the author of Hebrews made a more extended study of his example of faith.}^{Q8} God commanded him to leave his homeland of Ur, in southeastern Mesopotamia, and travel to a land many hundreds of miles away. Incredibly, when he set out, he was not even sure where he was going! He went only with the promise that God

was going to give him an inheritance, many blessings, and the honor of becoming a blessing to the whole world (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).

{Abraham’s faith would be tested again and again. When he got to the place where God wanted him to go, he did not immediately see much evidence that the Promised Land was going to be his. Hebrews 11:9 says he “sojourned” in the land, meaning that he lived as a stranger there. He was an alien who did not feel at home among the people he found in Canaan—people who had no intention of giving up what belonged to them.

Much time passed, and Abraham continued to have a generally nomadic existence. He lived in tents (“tabernacles”), a striking symbol of the fact that he had no real home at this point. The passage of time is highlighted by the fact that first Isaac and then Jacob—who themselves were in line to be heirs of God’s covenant and would be singled out for their faith in this chapter (vss. 20-21)—arrived on the scene and the situation did not seem to change (Jacob was fifteen when Abraham died [cf. Gen. 21:5; 25:7, 26]). During all this time, Abraham never formally owned any land except the parcel he bought for his family’s burial (cf. 23:1-20). We also cannot forget how Abraham’s faith was tested when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the child of the promise (cf. Gen. 22:1-19)! Yet Abraham trusted God, and had faith that He could even raise his son from the dead (Heb 11:19).^{Q9}

How was it that Abraham was able to hold fast to his faith under such difficult circumstances? Hebrews 11:10 tells us that he was looking forward to more than just an earthly inheritance. The cities of earth will all crumble, but the eternal city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, has lasting foundations that can never be shaken and will last forever. Here again a man of faith was living by “evidence of things not seen” (vs. 1).

Sarah (Heb. 11:11-13). Biblical scholars disagree about whether the original Greek of this verse makes Abraham's or Sarah's faith the main focus. Whichever side is correct, it surely is not unimportant that Sarah is mentioned here.

It is true that Sarah did not respond very well when first informed that she was to have a child (cf. Gen. 18:9-15), but she was around ninety years old, well past the age for bearing children. So we should ask ourselves whether we would have responded any differently. Despite her original response, Sarah must be commended for her growth in faith and willingness to trust God with the seemingly impossible. Her faith enabled her to grasp the trustworthiness of God, and she was enabled to bear the son of promise.

Because of the faith of both Abraham and Sarah, abundant life sprang forth from those as good as dead (Heb. 11:12). Abraham and Sarah were "as good as dead" as far as a reasonable hope of conceiving and having a family was concerned, but God is not limited in what He can bring to pass.

There is a contrast not only between life and death in this verse, but also between one and many. Out of just one person a numberless multitude would come. The striking imagery of the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky, borrowed from Genesis 22:17, highlights the magnitude, majesty, and beauty of how God blesses the faith of His people.

The "these all" of Hebrews 11:13 refers to everyone mentioned thus far in the chapter, including Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah. The "promises" include not only the ones given to Abraham, but also others (cf. Gen. 3:15). The patriarchs did not live to experience the fulfillment of what had been promised, but their faith remained strong until the day of their death. It was as if they could envision the reality of God's

promised kingdom off in the distance (cf. Heb. 11:1). That is what they lived for and longed for, and that is what sustained them.

As an old song says, "This world is not my home, / I'm just a passin' thru." {Every person of faith recognizes that we are spiritual pilgrims on the way to better things (cf. I Pet. 2:11). The patriarchs of old did not let themselves get too attached to what the world has to offer. Let us follow their example, living by faith for what will truly last. This world is not our home. We are called to live in the world, but we are not of the world (cf. John 17:14-16).} ⁹¹⁰

—Stephen H. Barnhart

QUESTIONS

1. What does the word "substance" in Hebrews 11:1 mean?
2. How is the biblical idea of hope different from the world's?
3. What does it mean to obtain a "good report" (vs. 2)?
4. What does "he being dead yet speaketh" mean (vs. 4)?
5. In what special way did God bless the faith of Enoch?
6. What are the two crucial components of faith that make a relationship with God possible?
7. How did Noah demonstrate that he was a man of faith?
8. Why did the author of Hebrews devote extra attention to the life of Abraham?
9. What circumstances acted as tests of Abraham's faith?
10. How should the fact that we are strangers in this world affect the way we live?

—Stephen H. Barnhart

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

This week, we explore the hall of faith. Here we have the names of people willing to trust God in the face of opposition against all odds. They pleased God with their faith, and serve as good examples for us.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to show that we need to have faith in order to please God.

Principle: to stress that only those who have faith can please God.

Application: to emphasize the need to exercise our faith daily.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

All over the world, people of all cultures and creeds are doing whatever they think they have to do to please God. Some offer sacrifices, and others follow strict rules in order to prove their devotion; but the Bible makes it clear that all we need is to take God at His word and walk by faith in Him. Faith will show itself through obedience, but faith itself is the real issue.

DEVELOPING THE LESSON

1. Faith defined (Heb. 11:1-2). Faith is the assurance of things that have not yet come to pass. In our minds, they are as good as done because we take God at His word. If God promises something we can be confident that it will happen, for God does not lie (Titus 1:2).

Faith confirms our trust in God, Who is truth (cf. John 14:6). Ask the students to describe some of their past struggles to trust God in the face of difficult circumstances. What happened? Looking back, what could they have done differently? Was their lack of faith justified? This could be a helpful discussion. Have you ever noticed that one way God gives us courage in the present is to remind us of the ways He has worked in our lives in the past?

2. Faith in early history (Heb. 11:4-5).

The hall of faith is listed for us so that we can look back at those who trusted God in biblical history and be encouraged to do the same. They provide us good examples to imitate (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1).

Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, brought a sacrifice that was accepted, unlike his brother Cain's. Abel's heart was in the right place, having given by faith the firstborn of his flock. His attitude was right before God. Faith has its roots in a right attitude before God. Did not God remind us that man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7)? We are also told that those who are pure in heart will see God (Matt. 5:8).

Get the class to talk about hindrances to a pure heart in their lives and how those things can affect faith if not addressed.

3. Faith needed to please God (Heb. 11:6).

Here is the crux of the matter; we cannot please God without faith. In other words, if we do not trust and rely on Him, we cannot please Him. Give your students time to discuss the areas in which they find it hardest to trust Him. Think of ways to encourage faith in those areas. Are there characters in the Bible who experienced struggles with similar issues? How did God take care of them?

If we are to have faith in God, we must first believe that He exists. Further, we must believe that God is omnipresent and that He is working in our lives. We must believe that He rewards us when we seek Him. We must believe He is personal and seeks to have a personal relationship with us. He will never let us down. When we trust Him, He will provide for our needs in His own way and in His own time. The result will

always be better than what we can plan for ourselves.

4. Faith to face the Flood (Heb. 11:7). The faith that Noah exercised was incredible. First, he had the task of living a righteous life in an evil community. Noah also had to trust God that He would send rain just as He promised, even though he may have never seen rain before. Genesis 2:5-6 tells us that it had not rained at that time; instead, a mist went up from the earth and watered it. It is possible this continued up to the time of Noah.

Because of his faith, Noah continued to build the ark for over a hundred years before the flood came. He obeyed God and preached about righteousness and the oncoming punishment for the world if people did not repent (cf. II Pet. 2:5). It took faith to do that.

5. Abraham's faith (Heb. 11:8-12). Here is an account of a man who was asked to leave his country and go to an unknown land. There was no map or compass to guide him, and he did not even know the destination. He only had the promise of an invisible God that He would show the way one step at a time; but Abraham obeyed and left everything when he was already seventy-five years old (cf. Gen. 12:4).

Abraham, like Isaac and Jacob who came after him, lived in tents and moved around in the wilderness because he trusted in God's promise of a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). The hope of something truly permanent, even while they were in the wilderness, came with trusting God.

We also read of Abraham in his old age trusting God for the child that was promised. He trusted God to keep His word, even though the situation seemed to make it impossible. Abraham waited for twenty-five years in faith before God's promise was fulfilled. Are we willing to hold on that long to the promises of God?

Ask the class members what some of their favorite promises of God are. Ask how long they pray for something before they give up. What is the longest they have prayed for something? Encourage them to hold on in faith.

6. A visionary faith (Heb. 11:13). Sometimes God does not fulfill His promises as quickly as we want Him to, but God always has a plan. We must be willing to wait for God's very best, even if it takes a little longer.

ILLUSTRATING THE LESSON

The examples of Hebrews 11 show that faith is believing God's promises and acting upon them despite temptations to give up.



CONCLUDING THE LESSON

The Bible is full of good examples that we can imitate. Christians must walk by faith, believing that God exists and that He rewards those who faithfully seek Him. Although God's timing is not always the same as ours, He is always faithful to keep His promises.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week, we will consider bad examples that we can learn from.

—A. Koshy Muthalaly

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God commends those who trust Him when they do not see His promises immediately fulfilled (Heb. 11:1-2).
2. True faith always impacts the way one worships and lives (vs. 4).
3. Faith prompts us to act in accordance with the conviction that God will reward us (vss. 5-6).
4. People of faith obey God even when they do not fully understand Him (vs. 7).
5. People of faith act on what God says, leaving the results to Him (vss. 8-10).
6. God always rewards our faith, no matter how small or faltering it may be (vss. 11-13).

—Don Kakavecos

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Define faith in your own words. Be sure to include all of the criteria found in Hebrews 11:1 and 11:6.
2. How did Abel display faith (Heb. 11:4; cf. Gen. 4:1-11)? How did Cain fail to display faith? Explain the differences in their offerings.
3. Whose faith still speaks or witnesses to you even today? What made this person's faith so impactful for you?
4. Did Abraham always obey God (cf. Gen. 12)? If not, why is he characterized as a man of faith? What does this fact teach us about faith?
5. What one truth does each of these men of faith prove (cf. Heb. 11:6)?
6. What does Sarah's inclusion on this list teach us about faith? How is that encouraging?

—Don Kakavecos

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

The substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1)

Children remember Christmas more for the getting than for the giving. I remember hopes, dreams, and even some snooping about what might be under the tree come Christmas morning. I cannot recall ever being disappointed by what was given me.

What I do remember is that often the things that I wanted materialized. I may not have had faith that I would receive a certain item, but hope is often similar to faith.

He being dead yet speaketh (vs. 4)

People often say something like “I can still hear my mother saying—” or “As my father used to say—.” Usually, the parent had died years before, yet the wisdom or advice offered long ago still reverberates in the mind of the next generation. Anyone with faith can have this influence on those around them.

The same could be said for hymn writers and authors whose works have outlived them. Though long gone from this earthly life, their influence continues to affect others.

She judged him faithful (vs. 11)

A husband said that he had often been tempted while away on business but that thus far two thoughts had prevented him from giving in to sin. First, he knew that God was against sin and that sinning could bring about God's disciplinary hand. Second, he thought of his wife and the fact that she trusted him. She had faith in his faithfulness, and that helped keep him from sin. God is infinitely more trustworthy than anyone else.

—Darrell W. McKay

Golden Text Illuminated

“Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Within the song of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy 32, is a description of God’s judgment on those who do not have faith. “When the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, . . . And he said, I will hide my face from them, . . . for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith” (vss. 19-20).

God turns His face away from those who refuse to believe in Him. He scorns them and condemns them. He is not pleased with those who do not trust Him, those who refuse to accept the truth that whatever He has spoken He will make good (Num. 23:19).

When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He was met with a commotion. Some of Jesus’ disciples had attempted to cast out a spirit from a man’s son but were unsuccessful. Jesus chided the disciples for their lack of faith and then directed His attention to the boy’s father, saying, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23).

The father did have a measure of faith, but he humbly begged, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (vs. 24). How like this father we are at times! We believe, but our faith is not strong. Jesus told His disciples, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20).

The mustard seed is tiny, yet it produces a large plant. A small faith that is genuine and growing is a faith that is pleasing to the Lord. How do we grow our mustard-seed faith? The father of the boy looked to Jesus for help in overcoming his unbelief. So did the

apostles, who on another occasion turned to Jesus with the plea “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). We must likewise look to Him who is the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). As the Author, He is the source of our faith. As the Finisher, He brings our faith to completion. As the chief cornerstone of all the faithful who “as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:5) of God, Jesus Christ is Head of the house of faith (Eph. 4:15).

How can we help our faith grow? The apostle Paul wrote, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). To develop our faith, we must read the Bible and meditate upon it.

We must be ever vigilant lest the enemies of the truth lure us away from the gospel of Christ. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, . . . be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13).

Being assured that God exists, that He loves us and wants us to approach Him, and that we approach Him through our Great High Priest, we can “therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16). As we come openly and honestly to God, laying before Him our every concern, we can be confident that He will respond to us in the way that is best for us. As we seek to better know our Lord and follow His perfect will, our faith will grow. As the faithful of old “obtained a good report” (Heb. 11:2) through faith, so our faith will come to completion and find approval before God.

—Margaret Hicks

Heart of the Lesson

When approaching a non-Christian with the message of the gospel, it is necessary to share its detailed contents and invite the unbeliever to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Among the responses that I have received are “I have faith,” “I go to church,” and “I am a religious person.” You will notice that the object of the person’s faith is not clearly specified.

The writer of Hebrews’ main purpose was to highlight the supreme qualities of the Son of God, the object of the Christian’s faith, thus emphasizing why He is worthy of our total confidence. Jesus is better than angels, Moses, the Old Testament priesthood, and anyone and anything else.

It was not sufficient for the author or his readers to use obscure terms to talk of faith. In Hebrews 1, he carefully spelled out the credentials of the Son of God, who is presented in the ensuing chapters as Messiah, High Priest, Savior, and the Inaugurator of the new covenant. With the hall of faith of Hebrews 11, the author gave more examples of why his wavering Jewish brethren should maintain their faith in Christ.

The Old Testament characters listed in Hebrews 11 did not know many of the details about Jesus that are recorded in the New Testament. The first-century readers needed to be reminded by those good examples that faith involves complete trust in the God we know, even when His plans are not fully known and His promises are not yet realized.

1. A definition of faith (Heb. 11:1-2). The basic nature of faith is the “substance,” or assurance, of our Christian hope and the “evidence,” proof or confidence, that we will receive what cannot now be seen. Believers have been

given a title deed to the written promises of God. The writer reminded his Jewish-Christian readers of the faith of their ancestors. It was by faith that they had obtained a “good report” (vs. 2).

2. The importance of faith (Heb. 11:4-6). Abel and Enoch are examples of men who pleased God, but they would not have been pleasing to Him without faith. Indeed, “without faith it is impossible to please him” (vs. 6).

This verse explains the key issue that pleasing God requires faith and that faith begins with both acknowledging that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. Whether a person lived under the old covenant or the new covenant, faith was always basic and necessary to a proper relationship with God.

3. Some examples of faith (Heb. 11:7-11). These verses tell of various people who exercised great faith. Noah, Abraham, and Sarah all believed God’s promises although they had to wait many years to see those promises fulfilled. The rest of the chapter lists many more excellent examples of people of faith.

4. A providential result of faith (Heb. 11:12-13). Verse 12 refers to God’s Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17) concerning the future greatness of God’s chosen people. The faithful of the Old Testament had believed God’s promises even though they did not live to see their fulfillment. The Jewish believers addressed in Hebrews (like us) could now look back at Christ, who had come in fulfillment of God’s covenant promise. They had every reason to remain faithful to the Lord, as do we.

—P. Fredrick Fogle

World Missions

Something was wrong. This never happened at the state penitentiary. There were no guards in the room. Sandi, a young Christian woman, was there to share her gospel music with the inmates, but she had been assured she would never be alone with hardened criminals. Sandi prayed, stood on a chair, and sang “Jesus Loves Me.”

Eight hundred boisterous men, animated by a brief reprieve from their cells and prison duties, were lulled to silence by the sweet voice and the tender words.

Sandi had a multifaceted ministry in that maximum-security unit some eighty miles from her home. Music was an important part of her work, but she also helped inmates in other ways. She supported the separate sections devoted to the arts, education, and preparation for commercial careers for inmates after release.

The most important work of the prison team was the explanation of the gospel and the invitation to receive Christ. Friday through Sunday, a Christian team entered the prison for gospel soul-winning, Bible teaching, and discipleship.

Sandi shared her vision for prison ministry with her best friend, Dottie. For several years, Dottie knew the Lord wanted her in this ministry, but she refused to go. Finally, she relented. Dottie was a job placement specialist at the time. She found her niche in weekend retreats for the prisoners who were due for release.

Dottie taught prisoners how to write résumés and how to handle job interviews. She had the expertise that is sorely needed by men and women who are sometimes less than appealing to prospective employers.

Not all believers can simply begin to do prison evangelism. Regulations governing such ministries differ from state to state. The Christian should expect to undergo a background check and to provide references.

Nothing may be carried into the prison except one’s own Bible and the materials needed for ministry. Dottie gave a Bible to an inmate on her first visit to the penitentiary. A guard immediately confiscated the gift, assuming that a weapon or contraband can be concealed in anything given to a prisoner. Personal jewelry, like wedding rings, must be left at home in order to avoid the risk of theft.

Harold and Bonnie do not consider themselves to be good at evangelism. They believe their ministry is meeting people’s needs. Their calling, however, has resulted in at least one soul entering the body of Christ, and likely more. Harold and Bonnie’s grandson got into trouble with the law and was sentenced to jail. The grandparents visited the grandson they loved so much every two weeks.

“Grandpa, Grandma, there is a young man here who has no one to visit him. Will you see him?” the grandson pleaded. Harold and Bonnie did so and led the lonely young man to faith in Christ, even as their own grandson continued to reject the gospel.

Our text this week speaks of believers as “strangers and pilgrims” (Heb. 11:13). Perhaps the realization of this truth is helpful in prison ministry. We who broke God’s law and were forgiven owe it to other convicts to show them the way of deliverance. Jesus Himself spoke about visiting those in prison (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

—Lyle P. Murphy

The Jewish Aspect

Hebrews 11 has been called the Bible's Hall of Faith. The word "faith" appears more than twenty times here. This chapter reminded the first century Jewish Christian readers that the Old Testament heroes not only had faith for salvation but also had faith that resulted in sacrifice, separation, and service.

The words "faithful," "faithfully," and "faithfulness" appear frequently in the Old Testament. The verb "believe" also is common, such as when Abraham "believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). The concept of faith therefore clearly should have been known throughout the Old Testament.

Hebrews 10 ends by declaring that it is the person who lives by faith who pleases God. God takes no pleasure in those who shrink back and fail to persevere in faith (vs. 38). Chapter 11 demonstrates that persevering in faith despite various obstacles and hardships is possible. The heroes of faith listed here have been honored by Jewish people throughout history.

After defining faith in Hebrews 11:1, the writer turned his attention to the "elders" of the past who "obtained a good report" (vs. 2) from God as a result of their faith. He specifically named sixteen of those heroic "elders" and alluded to many others. Their good examples demonstrated both the possibility of faith, and the faithfulness and goodness of God to His people. The Jewish Christians needed that reminder.

In the opening verses, the writer encouraged his readers to remember the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham and Sarah. Each of them had a particular connection with Christ, whose superiority to things of the Old

Testament is the focus of the book of Hebrews.

Abel offered a sacrifice acceptable to God. By faith, Abel offered the firstborn of his flock and the choicest portions (Gen. 4:4). When this book was written, the temple in Jerusalem was still standing, and animal sacrifices were offered each day. The author warned his readers not to go back to those sacrifices, however, which could never take away sin. The ultimate sacrifice for sin was made by Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:10), who "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (vs. 12). After having been saved by faith through Christ's blood, the believer must show faithfulness by walking with God in a wicked world.

When Hebrews was written, Rome may have very recently been burned, which Nero blamed on Christians. Roman legions were in Palestine to suppress a Jewish rebellion, which eventually led to Jerusalem's destruction. Suffering was nothing new to the Jewish Christians (10:32-33).

In that wicked time, those examples challenged believers to please God by walking with Him through trials. Walking with God in faithful obedience in a wicked world requires a person to believe what God says. Noah is a reminder of that truth (11:7). He accepted God's word of judgment and obeyed in faith, even if it didn't make sense.

Believing God's Word gives confidence to follow God into the unknown. Abraham is an example of this truth. He faithfully obeyed God, leaving Ur and traveling to Canaan. His spiritual eyes, however, looked beyond this world to God's city (vs. 10). God's people must sojourn in this world by faith (vs. 9).

—R. Larry Overstreet

Guiding the Superintendent

Many people learn best by example. Our lesson this week has been about faithful living. Many heroes from the Old Testament lived faithful lives.

Faith is not an emotional state or merely a feeling. No, faith is a matter of the will. It is taking God at His word and living accordingly.

DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

1. Characteristics of faith (Heb. 11:1-2). First, a life of faith is characterized by an unshakable inward assurance. Our response to life can be to trust only what we can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel. But a person of God trusts in something more durable and dependable.

Faith is like a foundation. It is the assurance that one has that God exists and that His promises are sure.

A foundation is meant to be built on. Faith is certain “evidence” of unseen things. Faith tests and validates things that are not physically visible. God’s people in the Old Testament tested God’s promises and found them good for their lives.

The rest of the lesson will examine multiple Old Testament heroes to learn how faith is to be seen and used in our daily lives.

2. Characters of faith (Heb. 11:4-13). In these verses there are four examples of people who lived by faith. The first example is Abel. Abel’s faith was a worshipping faith.

Both Cain and his brother, Abel, offered sacrifices. That was not the issue. Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, the choice meat from the firstborn of his flock, and thus God accepted it. Cain merely offered some of his fruit. He offered the best he had.

Enoch is the next example of faith. He had a walking faith (vss. 5-6). The

idea here is one of fellowship. Only a life of fellowship and faith will allow a person to walk with God.

To believe people means to take them at their word. Noah is a good example of this. Following God required Noah to be out of step with his generation. Many times a life of faith will not make any sense to the world. A personal faith in Christ will be costly, particularly in relation to the world.

The fourth example of a person of faith is Abraham (vss. 8-13). Abraham’s faith allowed him to see the bigger picture. Because of his belief in God, he was able to understand that God’s plan included him but also went far beyond him. He therefore moved when God asked, even though he did not know where he was going. He believed that God would give him a son through his and Sarah’s aged bodies. Abraham died in his faith not having received all that God promised but being assured that eventually all would be fulfilled.

AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

Children: Many children know stories from the Old Testament. This lesson will help them see the important lessons that are behind each of them.

Youths: Many teens have trouble seeing the bigger picture. This lesson will help them focus on God’s bigger picture, and walking by faith even when we do not understand everything.

Adults: Remind your students that many times rewards for godly living are not experienced in this life. Like Abraham, they need to develop a pilgrim attitude. This world is not our home. This world is not our home.

—Martin R. Dahlquist