



INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 11:4-35a

We sometimes do not see the forest because we are intently looking at the trees. So it is with this great “faith chapter.” It is easy to get lost in the details and to miss the big picture. The heroes and heroines of faith have much in common. Often their faith is directed to the future, which is unseen: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (v. 1). Why this emphasis? The answer lies in the historical occasion of the book. The writer motivates those who have professed Christ under the threat of persecution. He wants them to endure to obtain God’s unseen, future promises. This is the accent when he introduces the concept of faith in 6:12: he wants his readers to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” That is what Abraham did (11:15) and that is what the witnesses to faith in chapter 11 do too. “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household” (v. 7).

Because the original readers of Hebrews would not receive the full benefits of their faith in this life, the author focuses on heroes whose lives highlighted the future dimension of faith. Abraham, for example, “was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (v. 10). In fact, the writer summarizes the witnesses to faith up to and including Abraham in this way: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (v. 13).

If ever there was a biblical chapter that prosperity theology teachers should avoid, this is it! The heroines and heroes of faith hardly “named it and claimed it.” To the contrary, “They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about. . . . destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy” (vv. 37–38). The chapter ends still focusing on the future promises of faith: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (vv. 39–40). These words draw attention to the final salvation accomplished by Christ’s priestly ministry. Old Testament saints looked forward to this ministry and, amazingly, Christians now enjoy its fruits, solely by God’s grace.

Sometimes Hebrews 11 is referenced as the New Testament’s “Hall of Heroes,” but it is important to remember that the “heroes” identified were often quite fallible in character. They became heroic not by their abilities or advantages but by the eternal purposes of the One in whom they placed their faith. The strong medicine of chapter 11 is applied to hearers’ needs in the first four verses of chapter 12.¹

Watch It  Bible Principles

Watch Bible Principles #17; Heb. 11:1-40 www.villagebible.church/bibleprinciples

¹ *ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version*. Crossway, 2019.

Open it

1. What is your favorite museum to visit?

Read it

Hebrews 11:4-35a

Explore it

2. It is impossible to please God without _____.
3. What are the names of each person in Chapter 11 who lived by faith?
4. Faithful people of the Old Testament longed for their eternity with God. How is their heavenly home described in verses 13-16?
5. What does our passage say that Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and David did through faith?
6. What is one shocking result of faith from verse 35?

Apply it

Abel Offered a More Acceptable Sacrifice

In contrast to the way of Cain is the way that his brother, Abel, approached God. Hebrews 11:4 explains, “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts.” Although Abel was the first man in human history to die, “though he is dead, he still speaks” to us today. We do not have any of his recorded words, but his story plainly tells us...

By faith in God’s revelation, we obtain His witness that we are righteous, so that our lives count for eternity.²

7. What do these verses say was the defining difference between Abel’s acceptable offering and Cain’s inferior offering?

8. Read 1 John 3:12. Do you ever find yourself approaching your relationship with God like Cain: without the component of genuine faith? If so, could you share one example?

² Cole, Steven. <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-33-dead-man-speaks-hebrews-114>

Noah Became an Heir of Righteousness

Our text reveals the basis, the effects, and the consequences of Noah's faith. The author wants us to be imitators of this man, who through faith and patience inherited the promises (6:13). Of all the examples in Hebrews 11, this is the only one in which the unseen future involves judgment, rather than rewards. It shows us that faith regards both God's warnings and His promises. God only brings judgment after multiple warnings, but many will be surprised when judgment comes, because they ignored the warnings. But, people of faith heed the warnings.³

9. Noah feared the Lord. How should fearing God change someone's day to day life? How has it affected your day-to-day life?

10. Noah took a very visible, costly, and time-consuming step of faith. Is there a step of faith you've been resisting because of the cost?

³ Cole, Steven. <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-35-faith-escapes-coming-judgment-hebrews-117-genesis-65-14-22>

Sarah Received Power to Conceive

That Sarah laughed, apparently in unbelief (Gen. 18:9–15), is potentially problematic for her role as an example of faith; however: the author is happy to speak of the true faith of Sarah despite her failings, and Sarah apparently later had a change of heart, as her laughter became a genuine expression of joy at the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:6), whose name means “laughter.”⁴

11. If you were 90-year-old Sarah, how do you think you would have responded to God’s miraculous promise?

12. Sarah is a great example of someone who grew in faith as God worked in her life. How is this reassuring for you?

⁴ *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*. Crossway, 2011.

Joshua and the Israelites Saw Jericho Conquered

It must have been very difficult for the Israelites to keep silent during those first six days. Their enemies practiced no restraint—we can be sure of that. Moreover, not one stone in the walls had loosened, there were no cracks in the city wall up to Heaven, and the citizenry was far from saying uncle.

It must, then, have been a great relief on the seventh day when Joshua ordered them to rise early and circle Jericho seven times, finishing with a great shout at his cue.

Surely that was some shout there at Jericho! All their repressed human emotions came forth in a cry heard all the way to Gilgal, and the walls came tumbling down. Literally, “the wall fell in its place.”

- True faith obeys God and his Word, even when it seems absurd. It rejects the world’s armament and dons the ridiculous armor of God. It marches confidently in a fools’ army—to victory.
- True faith focuses upon God and sees the unseen. It cultivates a special sense of his presence—that he is with his people—and refuses to divert its focus.
- True faith declares itself to a fallen world.

How is our faith? These things happened as an example for us who still fight the battles of faith.⁵

13. As in the story of Joshua, it’s one thing to experience faith yourself, but another thing to lead others in faith. What are some areas of your life where you can lead others from a place of faith in God?

14. Read Matthew 21:32 and Luke 7:36-50. How does Rahab’s presence in this list foreshadow Jesus’ compassionate and redemptive ministry?

⁵ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word*. Crossway Books, 1989.

15. How can you extend genuine ministry like Jesus to those not always welcomed or accepted?

16. Take some time to pray and ask God to grow your faith in new ways this coming year. Pray along with the desperate father from Mark 9:24, “I believe; help my unbelief!”