

Faith and Righteousness

Devotional Reading: Romans 5:12-21

Background Scripture: Hebrews 11

Today's Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-4a, 7a, 8, 17-18, 20-23, 32, 39-40

I. Faith Explained

Hebrews 11:1-4a

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.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4a By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

1. Ancient Greek words translated as *faith*, *faithful*, and *faithfulness* occur some 316 times in ancient New Testament manuscripts. The 37 occurrences of these words in the book of Hebrews comprise almost 12 percent of the 316. However, Hebrews constitutes only about 3.6 percent of the New Testament. Clearly, the subject of faith is vital to the author, thus his offer of the definition we see here.

The concept of faith is complex, not reducible to a single definition. A key to understanding what the writer of Hebrews intends is the word translated *substance*. This word is translated elsewhere as “confidence” or “confident” (2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17; Hebrews 3:14), and that is the sense here. The author does not say that faith creates reality. Instead,

the writer emphasizes faith as the answer to the eternal rewards God has promised.

2. *The elders* are the Old Testament faithful, and the word *it* refers to their faith. God is the one who gave them *a good report*.

3. *Faith* is necessary to understand things that are real but cannot be observed, such as God’s creating *the worlds*. This faith is not “blind faith,” which is a belief in something without evidence to support that belief. Instead, what we’re talking about is faith based on evidence. Since the evidence of God’s holy character and limitless power have been established many times over, we can trust that His account of the creation of the cosmos—unseen by humans—is true. That’s faith based on evidence, not blind faith.

4a. This account is found in Genesis 4. Abel *offered* the best of his flock, while Cain “brought of the fruit of the ground” (Genesis 4:3). God’s favor on Abel and not Cain was because Abel brought his best, not keeping it for himself. As a result, he is known as “righteous Abel” (Matthew 23:35), while Cain—who murdered his brother (Genesis 4:8)—is infamous as a negative example.

II. Faith Lived Out

Hebrews 11:7a, 8, 17-18, 20-23, 32

7a 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.

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.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

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

21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

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

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.

7a. Noah's account is found in Genesis 6-9. Building the *ark* was no small exercise in faith! The expression of *things not seen as yet* is connected with the beginning of Hebrews 11:1. Thus, Noah's *faith* was based on the word of God concerning the flood, which Noah was not yet able to see.

8. The call of *Abraham* is found in Genesis 12:1-3, with the man's walk of faith recorded from 12:4 through 25:11. Abraham had to trust the unseen, invisible God rather than the visible, fictitious gods (idols) of his culture. And he did so as he departed for an unknown land several hundred miles distant. Considering that Abraham was the man who "believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6), it is certainly fitting that he is included on this list.

But that doesn't mean Abraham never sinned (see Genesis 16:3-4; 12:12-13; 20:2). As we consider the faith-walk of several members of the Hall of Faith, we will remind ourselves that they were not without flaws.

17-18. This account of the near-sacrifice of *Isaac* by *Abraham* is detailed in Genesis 22; a much-abridged version is found in James 2:21. Both passages focus on how the man's faith was evidenced by action. When God commanded him to sacrifice his son, Abraham arose early in the morning in obedience—no delay. Abraham reasoned that God could raise Isaac from the dead. While there are certainly resurrections predicted and recorded in the Old Testament, none are noted as occurring as far back as in the time of Abraham, who lived about 2000 BC. Perhaps Abraham believed that God was willing and able to do something that Abraham had never seen or heard of.

20. *Isaac* grew up to become the father of *Jacob and Esau*. Isaac, like his father Abraham, was something of a mixed bag of character traits. Isaac obeyed God *by faith* (see Genesis 26:1-6), but Isaac also adopted his father's practice of deception (26:7). He was also guilty of the parental error of favoritism (25:28). God sometimes uses people in His service despite themselves.

21. This verse is a quotation from

Genesis 47:31. The quotation here may not fully match up with 47:31 in your Bible because the writer is quoting from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament. When *Jacob* blessed both of Joseph's *sons*, he essentially adopted them as his own. As a result, 2 of the 12 "landed" tribes of Israel descend from them: the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Joshua 14:4). Jacob's *faith* is evidenced by his worship of God, which he continued to his deathbed. His sins involved deception, manipulation, and favoritism—but the Lord used him in service nevertheless!

22. This verse reiterates Genesis 50:24-26. Joseph's brothers sold him to Ishmeelites when he was 17 years old; in turn, the Ishmeelites sold him into Egyptian slavery. At age 30, Joseph had been appointed second-in-command in Egypt, facing numerous challenges to his *faith* in the intervening years.

Joseph's directive *concerning his bones* was that they not be left in Egypt when the exodus occurred. This directive was rooted in God's promise made to his father Jacob, grandfather Isaac, and great-grandfather Abraham concerning possession of the land of Canaan.

23. This passage treats the lives of Abraham and *Moses* as journeys of faith. Thus they are the prominent figures presented in today's lesson. The extended version of the fact noted by the writer of Hebrews is found in Exodus 2. We note that the *faith* of Moses' *parents* is at issue here, not the faith of Moses himself. According to Exodus 6:20, the parents' names are Amram and Jochebed.

32. The Hall of Faith continues, as the writer ensures that readers don't think the importance of faith ended with Moses. Instead, exercises of faith continued through the centuries. The story of *Gedeon* (Gideon) is found in Judges 6–8. He served as

a judge and is most notable for his 300-man force defeating the Midianite army. *Barak*—a contemporary of Deborah—raised an army to defeat the Canaanites, according to Judges 4. *Samson* served as judge and his opposition to the Philistines is found in Judges 13–16. The leadership of *Jephthae* (Jephthah) against the Ammonites is recorded in Judges 11–12.

The extensive record of *David* runs from 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2. The ministry of *Samuel*—who is pivotal for being the last of the judges and the first of *the prophets*—is found in 1 Samuel 1–25. These individuals of faith were not faultless, however.

III. Promises Because of Faith Hebrews 11:39-40

39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

39. The writer repeats the thoughts of Hebrews 11:13 but in a condensed form. The word translated *having obtained a good report* is the same as that in Hebrews 11:2; it carries the idea of "having been witnessed" doing something *through faith*. Since the faith of those being considered looked ahead to the arrival of Jesus, which did not come about in their lifetimes, they *received not the promise*. But they had faith nonetheless.

40. The *better thing* is the promise fulfilled in the earthly mission of Christ. Both we and *they* are *made perfect* in His suffering (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9; 7:28). In combining such facts with the conjunction "wherefore" that begins the next verse, Hebrews 12:1, the author prepares the readers to relate the Old Testament Hall of Faith to themselves.

Involvement Learning

Faith and Righteousness

Into the Lesson

Recall a time in your life when you had to make a choice without knowing what the outcome would be. What happened?

Sometimes it is hard to do things before we have all the information or know how it will end. In today's lesson, notice how each person's actions were evidence of faith.

Into the Word

Write your own definition of *faith*.

Read Hebrews 11:1-4a, 7a. How does your definition line up with this text?

Key Verse

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

—Hebrews 11:1

Read Hebrews 11:8, 17-18. In the space below, create two to three responses to each heading. Refer to Genesis 12:1-9; 22:1-14 for more details.

He Knew

He Didn't Know

He Wanted to Know

He Learned

Read Hebrews 11:20-23. How was each person mentioned faithful to God, and what was the result of their faith?

Into Life

Reflect on the definition of faith from Hebrews 11:1 and write one way you can change something in your life to develop a life of deeper faith.

Thought to Remember

Faith overrides imperfections!