



## The Definition and Illustration of Faith Hebrews 11

### Introduction

Chapter 11 begins the second and last section of Hebrews. An outline of the book could be:

- I. Chapters 1-10 - Looking at Jesus
- II. Chapters 11-13 - Living for Jesus

The first ten chapters present our Lord Jesus Christ as the best, and better than all before Him: the prophets, angels, great leaders such as Moses and Joshua, the Levitical priesthood, the Aaronic high priesthood, the law, the temple and the sacrifices. These constituted the Jewish way of life.

It is as important now as then to understand that Jesus Christ is the best, the highest, the noblest, and the most excellent. This is what keeps our love for Him pure, our loyalty undiluted, and our service wholehearted. It also guarantees that we will never return to former paths. We have gazed at our Lord for the longest passage in Scripture except for the gospels. Let us hope we are better than when we began. For when we truly look at the Lord Jesus we are changed, as was the dying thief, the centurion, the fiery young pharisee, Saul (who became Paul), and the Corinthians (Luke 23:39-43; Mark 15:39; Acts 22:6-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Will you pause just now, turn your thoughts to Jesus and let His Spirit fill you with His person and peace?

Also, thus far five dangers have been described as warnings:

- The danger of drifting - 2:1-3
- The danger of doubting - 4:1-2
- The danger of dullness - 5:11-13
- The danger of departing - 6:4-6
- The danger of despising - 10:26-31

These dangers, which plagued the early Jewish Christians, still plague the church today. Have you asked yourself if you are succumbing to any of them? If you think you are, turn to the passage listed and read until you find the solution and help.

Convinced of the incomparable worth of our Lord Jesus, we are ready to live for Him, Hebrews 11-13. Having ended Hebrews 10 with the challenge that *the just shall live by faith*, Hebrews 11 defines and illustrates faith.

### Outline of Hebrews Chapter 11

- I. Faith Analyzed - Hebrews 11:1-3
- II. Faith Activated - Hebrews 11:4-40

#### I. Faith Analyzed - Hebrews 11:1-3

- A. Definition of Faith - Hebrews 11:1-

How many people have asked, "What is faith," or "How do I get it?" Others have commented, "Everyone has faith in something," or "I wish I had your faith," or "Faith is just positive thinking."

Still others relegate faith to the scrapheap, giving it no place in our modern, advanced, technological, educated age. Marxist atheists called religion a crutch.

In crisis, most people turn in some way to God or some belief. Faith is inherent in personhood, it would seem. But is it a mystical "leap in the dark", unsubstantiated and irrational? In this case it would be only a crutch. Or is faith real, having substance? The Bible gives us both definition and illustrations of faith so that we are not left to our vague subjective - often weird - undefinable and uncommunicable experiences.

- B. Substance or Confidence - 11:1

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for. Faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed (Amplified Bible). Substance, in the Greek is "hupostasis", and is translated "the reality" in Zondervan's Parallel New Testament in Greek and English. According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, "hupostasis" appears in Hebrews 1:3 of Christ as the express image of God's "hupostasis" (substance), translated as Person.*

Faith is the confidence we have in the reality of certain hoped for spiritual things which are invisible, not yet manifest. Faith does not give them reality, for they would exist whether or not we believed in them, but faith makes them real to us as individuals. Our faith brings invisible things into our orbit where they can affect our lives as the moon affects the tides.

- C. Things Hoped For - 11:1

Preachers of a former age called these things "Spiritual verities". Abraham arrived in the Promised Land by faith

when he had never seen it and didn't know objectively that it existed. The land was there. Abraham had *hoped* for it. It became a reality to Abraham only by faith. He would not have attained it had he not believed God. In the same way, God's promises become real to us. The things hoped for are the things God has promised.

#### D. *Evidence of Things Not Seen* – 11:1

This is the only occurrence in the New Testament of the word translated *evidence*. It means "to test" and is close in form to a word meaning "reprove", hence "to prove". We prove or test invisible realities by our faith, our confidence, and assurance in them, for they are unavailable for testing by the usual methods. Thus our faith looks forward to being vindicated when faith becomes sight, as well as looking back to the cross.

#### E. Elders' Good Report - Hebrews 11:2

*By it (faith) the elders obtained a good testimony.* Old Testament saints have a good testimony with us because they proved their faith in deed, as the writer will show.

#### F. Understanding the Ages - Hebrews 11:3

*By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.* The most fundamental understanding is the understanding of what is, and the basic thing that is, is the place in which we live, the world and the universe. Not all people will even agree that there is a physical universe. Some will argue that it is all an illusion (at least until dinner time). What is behind the universe and the ages during which it has existed is a matter of faith since it cannot be recreated for our observation. Nevertheless, by faith we understand that God is behind the universe. Moreover, we who have faith know that the milieu, the setting of the frame for the universe, is the word of God.

Scientists take us back as far as reason can go to a time when the universe was in an extremely hot and dense state and began expanding rapidly, a theory known as the Big Bang, which resulted in matter coming into being. But they will not, or cannot, take us back to where nothing existed: no gases, not even fumes, and from there develop a universe. Only faith can go that far. As Christians, we believe that God spoke the universe into existence. That is the only explanation that fits the facts. Scientists acknowledge that the physical universe, as we know it, was not always here, it had to come from something. Whether you say that something was God or the Big Bang depends on what you choose to believe is eternal. Neither one is visible.

#### G. Summary

To summarize, faith is not mysticism, but is actually the opposite, for mysticism has no hope of reality and no basis in fact. Faith has basis in fact, for the realities it affirms are the promises of God, all to be demonstrated in due time. An acrostic for FAITH is

**F**orsaking

**A**ll

**I**

**T**ake

**H**im

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding* (Proverbs 3:5).

Let us now look at the actions of faith of some heroes and heroines of the Old Testament in this chapter known as the The Faith Hall of Fame. George Williams, in The Student's Commentary of the Holy Scriptures, gives the following outline of Hebrews 11.

The Path of Faith (1-7)

The Patience of Faith (8-22)

The Power of Faith (23-40)

We have looked at the path of faith and will now consider the patience and power of faith in the lives of the faithful.

### II. Faith Activated - Hebrews 11:4-40

The writer lists activities of faith in the lives of a variety of personages found in the Old Testament. Their faith gave them fame. Without faith they would have been lost in the dust of antiquity, indistinguishable from the bones and artifacts of bygone eras. Faith in God puts one in God's "Who's Who". A glance through the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah reveals lists of names of otherwise obscure people who are distinguished by their activities for God in whom they had faith. Others are named because they lacked faith, such as Pharaoh, who opposed those who had faith. They are known only because of someone else's faith.

#### A. The First Faithful - Hebrews 11:4-22

##### 1. Abel – 11:4, Genesis 4

Abel is known for his obedience to God, his acceptable sacrifice, and his righteousness.

##### a. Abel's obedience

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. The first generation of children provides the first example of an outstanding action of faith. Cain

and Abel shared the same environment and parents, probably the best of parents, for they knew God as no others could. Abel responded to parental teaching with obedience. How else could he have known the requirement of animal sacrifice but from Adam and Eve, whose covering was given by God (Genesis 3:21)? Abel gave of his best, a lamb from his flock. Cain, on the other hand, chose whatever fruit was convenient, not seeking to please God. He probably gave the leftovers, for he gave *the fruit of the ground* (Genesis 4:3) and fruit grows on trees.

#### b. Abel's sacrifice

There was immediate acceptance of Abel's sacrifice and rejection of Cain's, for *his countenance fell* (Genesis 4:5). Probably in that first generation, sacrifices were consumed by fire from heaven so that acceptance was obvious and people were taught what was pleasing to God and what was not. Had Cain's heart been right, he would have repented and given the required offering.

#### c. Abel's righteousness

We remember that the phrase *the just shall live by faith* preceded this entire recounting. The *just* person is the one who has been counted righteous, having right standing with God. Abel was counted righteous by his faith in God's righteous requirement of a sacrifice for sin.

Are you like Abel, counted righteous by God because your faith is in God's sacrifice for your sin, Jesus Christ?

### 2. Enoch – 11:5 - Genesis 5

Genesis 5:22-24 tells us that Enoch *walked with God* for at least 300 years! And at the end of this time he never died because *God took him*. This was a testimony to a life which pleased God.

#### a. Translated

By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death. Enoch stepped from earth to heaven without dying. He is one of only two saints to have done so, Elijah being the other. They are prototypes of the saints who will be alive when Christ comes for His own, who will hear the sound of the trumpet and the voice of the archangel when the Lord descends from heaven with a shout and the dead in Christ rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Do you want to be in that company? *To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time apart from sin, for salvation* (Hebrews 9:28).

#### b. Testimony that he pleased God

J. Vernon Magee has said of Enoch, "One day he was

walking with God and God said, 'We are much closer to My home, come on home with Me.'" Enoch was father of Methuselah and great-grandfather of Noah. He made relationship with God his priority. He was a preacher of righteousness, prophesying the coming of the Lord to execute judgment on evildoers (Jude 14). This was an unpopular stance. Will you risk popularity in order to promote truth? Will you give priority time to the Bible and prayer in order to please God?

The key to Enoch's pleasing God was his faith, which had two components. Enoch believed that God existed, *that He is*. Valid faith must have an object. Enoch further believed that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Faith knows God is good and is not man's debtor. Every sincere effort to know Him and to obey Him will be rewarded.

### 3. Noah - 11:7

Noah believed God's word and courageously obeyed

#### a. Believed

Noah and his family spanned the great flood. He alone of his generation believed God's warning of divine judgment even though nothing like it had happened up to that time. How much more should we believe in a coming day of reckoning with the examples of the flood, the destruction of the Canaanites, Israel's exile and captivity, and the demise and dispersion of the Israelite nation following the crucifixion of Christ? Jesus said, *As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be* (Matthew 24:37).

#### b. Courage

Noah was not afraid to stand alone. Consequently, his family was saved. They did not perish with the rest of the world (2 Peter 3:6). What is determining values and standards for your family, God's word or the world?

### 4. Abraham and Sarah - 11:8-19

Abraham is presented in two parts with Sarah in the middle. This is appropriate since theirs is a model relationship. With their great contribution of faith, Issac was a joint production.

Abraham could be called the classic example of faith, not only for his outstanding victories of faith, but also for being so like us. He was full of faith one moment and lying to save his skin, while risking Sarah's the next. Sarah's faith wavered also. She laughed at the thought of bearing her first child as an old woman, but evidently not at the fact that God could do it. Are we not thankful that God knows our hearts and makes allowances for temporary reactions?

Stephen, Paul, and James all use Abraham as an example; he is called the father of the faithful. The three major religions of the world consider him their spiritual leader.

a. Abraham's obedience

*By faith Abraham....went out not knowing where he was going* (11:8). He was following God and did not need to know more. He knew he was going to his inheritance. Christ's followers need to see only the next step, knowing it leads to the imperishable inheritance (1 Peter 1:4).

Abraham gladly abandoned his moon-worshipping upbringing (Joshua 24:2) for God's promises even though he would not obtain them in his lifetime. Nevertheless, he taught his sons and grandsons to value the promises above all else.

b. Sarah's conception

*By faith Sarah received strength to conceive* (11:11-12). Sarah was the faithful wife whose *worth is far above rubies* (Proverbs 31:10-12). She was a strong woman while being unswervingly submissive and supportive of Abraham. After all the years of trying without success to have a child, she was willing to take a risk when human possibility was gone.

Abraham and Sarah's faith produced the miracle baby, Isaac, Sarah's only child. It was thirteen years after Ishmael's birth and after Abraham also was no longer capable of siring children (Romans 4:17-21). Afterwards he went on to sire several more and now his Christian, Jewish, and Muslim descendants are like the sand of the sea. That is how fully God responds to faith.

c. Belief in Resurrection

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead* (11:17-19). The ultimate test, for which the previous tests had prepared him, Abraham passed with excellence. God, whom he knew and trusted and who had given him Isaac from his dead body, could even raise him again from the dead. Abraham was not going to disobey or distrust God at this late date.

Jesus said, *He that loveth father or mother or son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me* (Matthew 10:37). God does not require child sacrifice. He abhors the shedding of innocent blood. Neither does he condone violence or neglect of children. Indeed, there is special judgment on those who mistreat children (Matthew 18:10). But to offer your cherished child to God for His will to be done in that precious life is a notable and reasonable sacrifice, since that child belongs to God anyway.

"How can I, Lord, withhold life's brightest hour  
From Thee; or gathered gold, or any power?  
Why should I keep one precious thing from Thee,  
When Thou has given Thine own dear Self for  
me?" C. E. Mudie

5. Isaac - 11:20

In quick succession the remaining patriarchs in Genesis are paraded. Abraham had planted the promises deep in their souls for their lifetimes. All three are credited with final acts of faith after long lives of wavering faith. Isaac's faith, which appears dim like his eyesight in Genesis, shines in Hebrews, *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come*. Having been tricked by Jacob into giving him the prime blessing, old Isaac quickly recognized God's overruling and cooperated with it.

6. Jacob - 11:21

Jacob, who valued the promises so much he would obtain them by hook or by crook, was still a step ahead of everybody in his old age. *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph*. He blessed the younger first, guided by God, we are not told why, and then the older. It was his final act of worship.

7. Joseph - 11:22

*By faith Joseph....gave instructions concerning his bones*. Joseph's last thoughts were prophetic and concerned the promises God had made to Abraham. Joseph's bones were to rest in the promised land he had left when seventeen years old but not until four centuries later, when the tribes expanded to a nation. (See Exodus 13:19 and Joshua 24:32.) Do you value God's promises enough to live and die by them?

8. Moses - 11:23-28

Moses had faithful parents. When he was born, *by faith* (11:23) they hid him for three months, putting his life ahead of their own. By faith, they saw God work for them.

a. Moses' choice

We may be the sum total of our choices. When Moses reached young adulthood he did three things. First, *By faith Moses....refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter* (11:24) and to enjoy the hedonistic, sensual pleasures of palace life. Second, he chose *to suffer affliction with the people of God*, a slave people, his people, the Jews. Third, he *esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt*. Why? We are told, *he looked to the reward* (11:6).



## b. Courage and Obedience

*By faith he forsook Egypt,...kept the Passover, and passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.* He kept on going with his eyes on the Invisible One. Do you need to look up and see Him who is invisible?

## B. The Further Faithful - Hebrews 11:30-40

## 1. Joshua - 11:30

Though not named, Joshua goes with *Jericho*, the first major battle in taking the promised land. His faith was tested to take Jericho by using an offense of obedience rather than an offense of combat. Joshua led the people of Israel to victory by circling the walls for seven days, and, *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.* Do you have a major obstacle which stands between you and possession of your "promised land"? Will you circle it with persistent prayer until God answers with the victory of either accomplishment or peace concerning it?

## 2. Rahab - 11:31

*By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe when she had received the spies with peace.*

James also mentions Rahab along with Abraham as an example of faith at work. She not only believed in the God of Israel, she also believed that she could seek Him by receiving the spies as His messengers (James 2:25). Rahab's faith is so extraordinary that she is found in Christ's ancestry (did she marry one of the spies?) as one of only four Old Testament women mentioned (Matthew 1:5). We would like to consider her a business woman only, an innkeeper, except that the Scripture keeps referring to her as *the harlot*. This is probably more to highlight her amazing response to God than to perpetuate her pre-conversion condition. She took a risk of faith. What risk of faith do you need to take?

## 3. Four Judges - 11:32

So far, we have gleaned from only the books of Genesis, Exodus and Joshua. Time and space have run out and the end is not in sight. The writer quickly mentions four of the judges: Gideon, Samson, Barak, and Jephthah. To us, the amazing thing about the judges is that we are slightly embarrassed by most of them. They have such glaring faults. Gideon was slow to respond to God and ended in idolatry. Samson's weakness is as memorable as his strength. Jephthah's erratic devotion confuses us more than does his illegitimacy. Yet here they are, heroes of faith. Could you and I possibly be potential heroes of faith? Is that the point the writer is making?

## 4. Samuel and David - 11:32-33

The last two named are very obvious and famous heroes. Samuel, the kingmaker with the godly mother, Hannah. He was the last of the judges and also a priest. His long life of faithfulness, his courage, and his stand for righteousness challenge us. Also, he created the role of prophet as advisor to the crown. No fault is recorded of Samuel unless one counts that his sons were less godly than he.

David, as the man after God's own heart, is the progenitor of the royal line as well as the Messianic line of Judah. Jesus would be called Son of David (Matthew 1:1, 20-30). David was a military man who never lost a battle, an incomparable poet, author of at least half the Psalms, and the most beloved king, by whom all the others would be measured. Some day Jesus, who was born in the city of David, will sit upon the throne of David.

## 5. Finale of Faith and Fortitude - 11:33-40

Like the grand finale of a symphony, the writer overwhelms us with fetes of fortitude through faith which stand unexcelled for all time. They may be matched down through the centuries, but not surpassed. Yet in the twentieth century (when these lessons were written) there are more martyrs than in all the years until now.

Only eternity will reveal the heroes behind the iron and bamboo curtains who have equaled some of these deeds, if not all. These, too, *look for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (11:10) and *were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection* (11:35). They were *strangers and pilgrims on the earth* (11:13). The first martyr for the Lord Jesus Christ, Stephen, was *stoned*, and it is thought the aged Isaiah is the one *sawn in two* (11:37). They may never make any of the world's lists, front pages or books of records, but the world is not worthy of them either. They are God's best - humanity at its highest. Despite their good testimony of faith, they did not receive all that is promised. They wait for our full development (Hebrews 11:39-20).

**Application**

All of those listed in chapter 11 were ordinary people of ordinary means. David became a king, but he was not born into royalty. All came from humble backgrounds. The thing that made them different from their peers and different from the world was their faith. How is your faith showing you to be different from the world and the worldly people all around you? What would the writer of Hebrews say about you in describing your faith?